

ISLAM OF THE GLOBAL WEST

**ISLAM AND  
NATIONHOOD IN  
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA**

Surviving Empires

Xavier Bougarel

B L O O M S B U R Y



# Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina

## Islam of the Global West

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# Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Xavier Bougarel

Translated by Christopher Mobley

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*In memoriam, Esad Hećimović (1963–2017)*





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# Acronyms

AFŽ	Women's Antifascist Front
AIO	Active Islamic Youth
APZB	Autonomous Province of Western Bosnia
ARBiH	Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina
A-SDA	Party of Democratic Activity
AVNOJ	Anti-Fascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia
BPS	Bosnian Patriotic Party
DFJ	Democratic Federal Yugoslavia
DOMDO	Home Guard Volunteer Regiment
EUFOR	European Force
FNRJ	Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia
HDZ	Croat Democratic Union
HKU	Croat Catholic Association
HNZ	Croat People's Union
HR	Croat Revolutionary Movement
HRSS	Croat Republican Peasant Party
HSS	Croat Peasant Party
HVO	Croat Defense Council
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IFOR	Implementation Force
IHH	Humanitarian Relief Foundation
JMNO	Yugoslav Muslim People's Organization
JMO	Yugoslav Muslim Organization
JNA	Yugoslav People's Army
JNS	Yugoslav People's Party
JRZ	Yugoslav Radical Union

KPJ	Communist Party of Yugoslavia
MBO	Muslim Bosniak Organization
MNO	Muslim People's Organization
MNS	Muslim Progressive Party
MNVS	Muslim National Council of Sandžak
MO HSS	Muslim Organization of the Croat Peasant Party
MSS	Muslim Independent Party
NDH	Independent State of Croatia
NOF	People's Liberation Front
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PL	Patriotic League
SBiH	Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina
SDA	Party of Democratic Action
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SDS	Serb Democratic Party
SFOR	Stabilization Force
SFRJ	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SKBiH	League of Communists of Bosnia-Herzegovina
SKJ	League of Communists of Yugoslavia
SKOJ	League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia
SLS	Slovenian People's Party
SNO	Serb People's Renewal
SNSD	Alliance of Independent Social Democrats
SPS	Socialist Party of Serbia
SRJ	Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SRNAO	Serb National Youth
SRSJ	Alliance of the Reformist Forces of Yugoslavia
SSRN	Socialist Alliance of Working People
TIKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
TO	Territorial Defense

TWRA	Third World Relief Agency
UÇK	Kosovo Liberation Army
UMO	United Muslim Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force
USAO	Unified League of Antifascist Youth
VRS	Army of Republika Srpska
ZAVNOBiH	Provincial Anti-Fascist Council for the People's Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina

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## Note on Terminology

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, three main communities have traditionally lived side by side: the Muslim/Bosniak community, the Orthodox/Serb community, and the Catholic/Croat community, as well as a small Jewish community. Until the 1960s, the term “Muslim” was written in Serbo-Croatian indifferently with a capital or lower-case “m,” and depending on the context, referred only to the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina or to all members of the Umma (the community of believers). In 1968, the League of Communists officially recognized the existence of a Muslim nation and established a strict distinction between the national name *Musliman* (with a capital “M”), applying only to Muslim Slavs speaking Serbo-Croatian, and the religious name *musliman* (with a lower-case “m”), which designated all followers of Islam. In this book, for the period before 1993, I use the term “Muslim” with a capital “M,” both for its religious and its national meaning. In 1993, the national name “Muslim” was given up in favor of “Bosniak,” and I adhere to this new usage. However, when discussing periods that extend before and after 1993, I use the term “Muslim/Bosniak.” Moreover, a distinction must be made between the term “Bosniak” (noun *Bošnjak*, adjective *bošnjački*), which applies only to members of the Bosniak nation (i.e. people of Muslim cultural tradition) and the term “Bosnian” (noun *Bosanac*, adjective *bosanski*), which refers to all inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina regardless of their nationality or religion. While these rules may seem complex, they are necessary in order to grasp the political and religious history of the Muslims/Bosniaks.

X.B.

# Introduction

On December 21, 2002, the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina held an event in Sarajevo to celebrate the 120th anniversary of the office of the *Reis-ul-ulema* (the head of the '*ulama*'), a religious institution created in 1882 following a decision by the authorities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which occupied the country at that time. Mustafa Cerić, the *Reis-ul-ulema* in office in 2002, reminded his audience how his distant predecessor, Džemaludin Čaušević, had written a prayer for the Emperor of Austria-Hungary Franz Josef, to be read in mosques on the Emperor's birthday. In this prayer, Čaušević praised this Christian emperor who was favorably disposed to the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Cerić went on to say that since then, many emperors and kings had come and gone, more or less favorably disposed to Bosnian Muslims, yet this community had survived and defended its Islamic identity. Then he turned to Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative of the International Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and he said:

I do not believe that Lord Paddy Ashdown expects the current *Reis-ul-ulema* to write a prayer or for the imams to read it for his birthday, because we no longer live in the era of emperors, this is no longer the age of subjects and masters, but rather the age of democracy and human rights in Europe, and so I hope, in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Today we pray to God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, asking Him to protect Europe and Bosnia-Herzegovina from war, misery and poverty, and so that each individual, each people and each faith can find its place in a European Community of nations and religions with equal rights.<sup>1</sup>

Cerić then turned the floor over to Paddy Ashdown, who held considerable powers to enforce the peace agreement signed in 1995. Lord Ashdown reminded the audience that the creation of the office of *Reis-ul-ulema* in 1882 had initially sparked strong opposition within the Bosnian Muslim elites, adding wittily that "it's good to know that even so long ago, impositions were not universally welcomed!"<sup>2</sup> Then he described how Bosnian Muslims gradually came to accept the existence of a *Reis-ul-ulema*, who was eventually chosen on a more democratic basis, and who contributed to the coexistence of religious communities. Ashdown then praised the return of religious freedoms after a half-century of communism, and pleaded for separation between religion and politics.

This exchange between the *Reis-ul-ulema* and the High Representative illustrates why we must take account of the *longue durée* if we are to understand the current

situation of the Muslims/Bosniaks.<sup>3</sup> It also casts light on certain historical continuities. Admittedly, the High Representative is neither Emperor Franz Josef, nor an avatar of the British Raj,<sup>4</sup> and the European Union may not be an empire. Nevertheless, the positioning of the Bosniak political and religious elites vis-à-vis the international players currently present in Bosnia-Herzegovina can also be explained by certain expectations and political strategies that appeared in the Austro-Hungarian context and were used throughout the twentieth century, with greater or lesser degrees of success. As for the *Reis-ul-ulema*, this office continues to the present day, even though the Islamic religious institutions and religious life in general underwent profound, sometimes brutal, transformations over the twentieth century.

In the present book, I intend to return to the issue of the political and religious transformations affecting the Bosnian Muslim community in the post-Ottoman period—i.e. from 1878 to the present day—with particular emphasis on the 1990–5 war period, which saw particularly rapid and dramatic transformations. The first four chapters of this book deal respectively with the Austro-Hungarian occupation (1878–1918), the first Yugoslavia (1918–41), the Second World War (1941–5) and communist Yugoslavia (1945–90). The following three chapters focus on the 1990–5 period from three standpoints: the attitude of the Muslim/Bosniak elites during the breakup of Yugoslavia; the reshaping of Muslim/Bosniak national identity during the war years; and the international context underlying these two processes. Chapter 8 resumes the standard chronology by focusing on the political and religious transformations of the post-war period (1995–2013).

Throughout these various chapters, I aim to reconsider the commonly accepted idea of a linear shift from an imperial order to a nation-state order, by showing that in the case of the Muslims/Bosniaks, the transition from a non-sovereign religious minority to a sovereign political nation was a particularly belated and paradoxical process that remains uncertain even today. Against this backdrop, I endeavor to better understand the causes and actual forms of the “national indetermination” that characterized the Muslim community until the 1960s, which can be attributed not only to a certain nostalgia for the Ottoman imperial order, but also to the enduring allegiance of the traditional Muslim elites to the central power, until these elites were sidelined by the communist regime. In this approach, I have been inspired by the research of Nathalie Clayer, Mary Neuburger, and Burcu Akan-Ellis on other Balkan Muslim populations,<sup>5</sup> by approaches to imperial and nation-state building in the Balkans in terms of loyalty or political allegiance,<sup>6</sup> and by the notion of “national indifference” put forth by Tara Zahra, a historian of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>7</sup>

I am also interested in the actual forms of Muslim/Bosniak nationalization, given that, until the mid-twentieth century, Muslim intellectuals tended to identify with the Serb or Croat nations. Then, beginning in the 1960s, the promotion of a new Muslim nation went hand in hand with cultural and political paradoxes that Muslim intellectuals and politicians attempted to resolve by reasserting their allegiance to communist Yugoslavia. The breakup of the Yugoslav federation in the 1990s placed the Muslim political and intellectual elites in an almost inextricable situation, given the impossibility of building a Muslim nation-state in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Thus, the past half-century should be regarded as the period when Muslim/Bosniak elites attempted alternately to



find their place in a political order dominated by the nation-state principle, or to escape its most dreadful consequences. To date, these attempts have not been successful. While I consider my approach to be similar to the interpretations of nationalism elaborated by Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Rogers Brubaker,<sup>8</sup> I attempt to cast light on the haphazard, uncertain nature of the Muslim/Bosniak nation building.

Against this backdrop, I return to the main cultural markers of Muslim/Bosniak national identity. Indeed, while there is some degree of continuity between the cultural markers produced in the late nineteenth century, the 1960s, and the 1990s, there are also many points of divergence. In particular, the intellectuals of the 1960s sought to minimize the importance of Islam to Muslim national identity. Thirty years later, as the national name “Bosniak” was adopted, Islam’s place in the new Bosniak identity was, paradoxically, gaining greater importance. Unless this reversal is taken into account, we cannot grasp the political and religious transformations affecting the Muslim/Bosniak nation over the past few decades. This observation is similar to Vjekoslav Perica and Klaus Buchenau’s analyses of the place of religion in the Serb and Croat national identity,<sup>9</sup> and echoes Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Patrick Michel and Antonela Capelle-Pogacean’s investigations of the ties between religious identity and national identity in Europe as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

Islam’s place in the Muslim/Bosniak national identity explains the enduring centrality of Islamic religious institutions for the Muslim/Bosniak community. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, this community withdrew into its status as a religious minority, structuring itself around its traditional religious institutions: *madrasas* (religious schools), *waqfs* (religious endowments) and Shari’a courts. The communist regime dismantled all these institutions in the 1940s, contributing to the Muslim population’s rapid secularization. However, this did not prevent the Islamic Community from becoming a proxy national institution two decades later—a position that it still holds today, albeit in a different context. Thus, the political and religious changes within the Muslim/Bosniak community are closely connected, despite the secularization process that began in the interwar period, gathered pace as part of communist modernization, and has not been fundamentally challenged by the religious revival of the last two decades. So we find in Bosnia-Herzegovina the same religious trends that Patrick Michel and Detlef Pollack have already analyzed in other Eastern European countries,<sup>11</sup> and that Danièle Hervieu-Léger and Grace Davie have already described at the level of Europe as a whole.<sup>12</sup>

Lastly, these political and religious changes cannot be understood unless we take account of the pan-Islamist current, which first appeared during the dramatic events of the Second World War, was repressed by communist Yugoslavia, but successfully positioned itself at the heart of the Muslim/Bosniak nationalist mobilization in the 1990s. Between 1990 and 1995, the establishment of a new one-party state and the use of Islam as a new discriminating political ideology shaped the political and religious realities of the territories controlled by the Bosnian army, even though the post-war period has seen the pan-Islamist current return to the same marginal position it held before 1990. The ties binding Islam and politics have grown looser and more complex given the growing pluralization of both political life and religious life. My thinking on political Islam has been enriched by Olivier Roy and Gilles Kepel’s research on the

“failure of political Islam,” the “decline of Islamism,” and “post-Islamism,”<sup>13</sup> and Bosnia-Herzegovina may be one of the places where these concepts remain the most relevant. This is all the more true since most research published about Bosnia-Herzegovina has failed to take account of political Islam. This failure is attributable sometimes to simple ignorance, and sometimes to a well-intentioned form of self-censorship that is no longer necessary today, as the war ended two decades ago and the pan-Islamist current has been considerably weakened by the death of its main representative, Alija Izetbegović, in 2003.

While the present book intends to contribute to the debates about the political and religious history of the Muslims/Bosniaks, it makes no claim to answer all the questions raised by this particular case. It adopts a “top-down” perspective, focused on the political, intellectual and religious elites of the Muslim/Bosniak community. This approach grew out of my initial interest in the Bosnian pan-Islamist current, a small minority that a largely secularized Muslim population brought to power in 1990. Even regarding these elites, a more detailed analysis would be possible, for example with a prosopography of Muslim members of parliament from the Austro-Hungarian and interwar periods, or of Party of Democratic Action (SDA) cadres in the 1990s. Likewise, this book is based mainly on existing academic literature, press archives, and less directly, fieldwork carried out in the 1990s and 2000s. My focus on written sources can be attributed to the unique conditions of the war period, when studying the local press was the best means to grasp the debates unfolding within the Muslim/Bosniak community.<sup>14</sup> This approach has its limitations, however; it cannot replace an anthropological analysis of the forms that national identities and interethnic relations take on a daily basis, the clientelistic and corporatist practices underlying Bosnian political life, or the transformations of everyday religious practice. Nevertheless, this approach enables me to illustrate certain political and religious realities with examples that cannot simply be dismissed as “imaginary” or “marginal.”

Before presenting the findings of my research, I must clarify the usage of a few terms. Firstly, I use Frederick Cooper and Jane Burbank’s definition of “empire” to refer to a political entity that is generally (but not always!) large, characterized by the religious and ethnic diversity of its populations that it aims to leverage rather than suppress; it thus prefers to exercise power in indirect, decentralized ways.<sup>15</sup> By “search for empire”—a term I borrow from Ghassan Salamé<sup>16</sup>—I mean the process whereby a political group aspires to place itself under the protection of an imperial power (or any power perceived to be an empire). Partly (and only partly) inspired by Rogers Brubaker’s research on nationalism and ethnicity, I distinguish between national identity, i.e. the whole set of myths, symbols, and other cultural markers that delineate the variable contours of a nation, and national identification, namely the equally fluid way in which individuals recognize themselves in a particular national construction. In this context, nationalization is the always reversible process whereby one national identification becomes predominant in a given population, whereas “national indetermination”—a term I prefer to “national indifference”—refers to the situations in which a given population remains far removed from national categories, whether or not this distance is deliberate. In present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina, these terms bear a negative connotation: “nationalization” (*nacionaliziranje*) refers to Serb and Croat attempts to assimilate Bosnian Muslims, and the latter’s “national indetermination”

(*nacionalna neopredeljenost*) is presented as the result of an authoritarian negation of their “true” national identity. I use both terms in a more neutral, less specific way. In my view, the “national indetermination” shown by Bosnian Muslims until the 1960s was admittedly a reflection of a certain balance of powers, but was in no way merely the result of constraint. Moreover, the recognition of the Muslim nation in 1968 and its renaming as the Bosniak nation in 1993 are eminent forms of nationalization.

Regarding the ties between Islam and politics, I favor the concepts generally used in contemporary Islamic studies, such as Islamic reformism, Islamic revivalism and neo-Salafism. The concept of “pan-Islamism” is more problematic. Why use this term to refer to a political and religious movement present in Bosnia-Herzegovina since the 1940s, whereas all the specialists of the Muslim world agree that pan-Islamism disappeared as an organized movement in the late 1930s? First and foremost, because “pan-Islamism” was the name used by the Young Muslims in the 1940s and by Alija Izetbegović in the 1970s for their political ideology. Moreover, the concept of “Islamism” is not very relevant in the Bosnian context. Islamists aspire to an Islamic state governed by Shari’a (Islamic law), whereas this was only marginally present in the thinking of the Young Muslims and their heirs. These groups aspired mainly to having a large Muslim state connecting Bosnian Muslims with the rest of the Umma. In this regard, they were indeed pan-Islamists. However, this gives no indication of how (or even if) this political ideology influenced the choices of these Bosnian pan-Islamist activists once they came to power. It also offers no justification for the way that communists and Serb and Croat nationalist propaganda used the term “pan-Islamism” to stir up fears. Yet the mysterious persistence of pan-Islamism in Bosnia-Herzegovina until the end of the twentieth century must be taken seriously, because it reveals the specificities of the Muslim/Bosniak case and has a logical explanation in this context, which I intend to demonstrate in this book.

To close this introduction, I would like to thank a few people who have supported me throughout my research. First of all, I would like to honor and remember the late Rémy Leveau, who was the first to encourage me to work on Islam in Yugoslavia. I would also like to thank Gilles Kepel, who was my thesis director and who has shown constant interest in the progress of my research. I extend thanks to the late Alexandre Popovic and Nathalie Clayer, my colleagues at the Centre d’Etudes Turques, Ottomanes, Balkaniques et Centrasiatiques; they have shared their extensive knowledge, advice, and friendship with me. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, I would particularly like to thank Esad Hećimović, Ahmet Alibašić, Husnija Kamberović, Dino Abazović, and Fikret Karčić for their thought-provoking ideas and practical assistance, even if we do not always share the same opinions. Thanks also go out to Armina Omerika in Germany, to Iva Lučić in Sweden, and to Zlatko Hasanbegović in Croatia. I am grateful to Emmanuel Szurek and Benoit Fliche for carefully reading my manuscript and suggesting changes both minor and major, and to Christopher Mobley for the English translation of this book. Any factual errors or stylistic mistakes still found in these pages are entirely my own responsibility. My warmest thanks go to Ariane, Aurore, and Anouk. In 2005, I drove Aurore and Anouk to Bosnia-Herzegovina for the first time, to convince myself that the war was indeed over. We ate pistachios in Sarajevo, fed a horde of cats in Mostar, and went pedal-boating in Jajce. Suffice it to say that none of my other fieldwork was as fruitful.

Paris, April 2017



# The Origins of National Indetermination (1878–1914)

## The beginnings of national ideas among South Slavs

Nationalist ideologies like to anchor themselves in the distant past. In the area inhabited by South Slavs—which we will call the “Yugoslav space” for the sake of convenience—such ideologies frequently refer to the medieval kingdoms of Croatia, Serbia, or Bosnia. However, these kingdoms were less important than empires in shaping the human realities of the Yugoslav space: first the Byzantine Empire and the Venetian Empire, later the Ottoman and the Austrian empires, which became the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867 (see Map I). These empires all made use of the existing confessional divisions in the Yugoslav space, while modifying them on a lasting basis. The rivalry between Constantinople and Venice mirrored the rivalry between Eastern Christianity (Orthodoxy) and Western Christianity (Catholicism). Ottoman expansion led sizable autochthonous populations to convert to Islam. And the Austrian Empire, a Catholic entity, encouraged Orthodox peasant soldiers to settle at its borders. Thus, centuries of migrations and religious conversions explain the religious diversity of the Yugoslav space. This is especially obvious in Bosnia-Herzegovina, home to large Muslim, Orthodox, and Catholic communities, as well as a smaller Jewish community.

The confessional lines of demarcation in the Yugoslav space were more or less stabilized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, their persistent importance is attributable to the ties that developed between religious belonging and national belonging. Indeed, nationalist ideologies began to appear in the Yugoslav space in the early nineteenth century. In the Ottoman Empire, the Serb insurrections of 1803 and 1815, followed by the formation of the autonomous principality of Serbia in 1830 (see Map I), established the material conditions for the development of a Serb national project. In the Austrian Empire, the Illyrian Movement led by Ljudevit Gaj in the 1830s was a forerunner of the Yugoslav idea: the project of uniting all South Slavic people (“Yugo-Slavs”). Yet in the first half of the nineteenth century, the nascent nationalist ideologies held sway only in limited circles of the cultural and political elites. National identification was a foreign idea to the general population, which defined itself mainly in confessional, provincial, and local terms.

Faced with the emergence of modern nation-states in Western Europe and growing social and political tensions internally, the Ottoman and Austrian Empires attempted



**Map I** The Yugoslav space, circa 1870.

to reform their military and administrative systems, while reorganizing their linguistic and religious diversity. In the Ottoman Empire, these modernizing reforms were symbolized by the Edict (*Hatt-ı Şerif*) of Gülhane of 1839 and the Imperial Reform Edict (*Hatt-ı Hümayun*) of 1856, which granted legal equality for Muslims and non-Muslims in the Empire, and strengthened the organization of non-Muslim populations into *millet*s, i.e. non-sovereign religious communities that enjoyed broad autonomy in legal and educational matters. In 1867, the Austrian Empire became the Austro-Hungarian Empire, after a compromise (*Ausgleich*) divided it into two entities with equal rights: the Austrian Empire and the kingdom of Hungary. A year later, an agreement (*nagodba*) gave Croatia-Slavonia limited autonomy within the kingdom of

Hungary. The rivalries between South Slavic nationalisms are partly attributable to the fact that they arose from two different imperial frameworks. Over the nineteenth century, Serbia asserted its autonomy and extended its territory to the detriment of the Ottoman Empire, while also showing strong interest in the South Slavic provinces of the Austrian Empire. Alongside the principality of Serbia under Ottoman tutelage, the Vojvodina under Hungarian domination was another important hotbed of the Serb national idea. Vuk Karadžić, the main intellectual figure of Serb nationalism, considered all speakers of the Štokavian dialects to be Serbs,<sup>1</sup> whether they were Orthodox Christian, Catholic, or Muslim. In the Austrian Empire, Bishop Josip Strossmayer and his People's Party (*Narodna stranka*, founded in 1860) defended the idea of a union of South Slavic peoples, whereas Ante Starčević and his Party of Rights (*Stranka prava*, founded in 1861) called for the restoration of Croatia with its historical rights and were in favor of pan-Croat nationalism, claiming that the Muslims of Ottoman Bosnia were also Croats.

The main nationalist ideologies of the Yugoslav space—Serb, Croat, and Yugoslav—thus developed in an area spanning two empires, and crystallized on the basis of linguistic and confessional criteria. On a linguistic level, the main nationalist actors worked for a convergence between the various Štokavian dialects. Ljudevit Gaj and Vuk Karadžić both chose the Herzegovinan dialect as the reference, and the Vienna Literary Agreement signed by Serb and Croat writers in 1850 laid the foundations for a common language. However, the former called the language “Serbian,” whereas the latter called it “Croatian” or “Illyrian.”

On a confessional level, Vuk Karadžić's pan-Serb views and Ante Starčević's pan-Croat ideas denied that confessional belonging held any national relevance. In reality, though, Karadžić and Starčević had to recognize the strength of religion in the national identification processes. In the nineteenth century, in the regions where nationalist ideologies spread beyond the small circles they were initially confined to, Orthodoxy and the Serb national identity largely overlapped, as did Catholicism and the Croat national identity. Moreover, certain currents of Serb nationalism were characterized by strong hostility to Islam; they instrumentalized the legend of the Battle of Kosovo waged against the Ottomans in 1389, regarding local Muslims as apostates who should leave their homeland for Asia Minor as the Ottoman Empire receded. Already in this era, the linguistic criterion thus proved to be a potential unifying factor, while the religious criterion was a factor of division; this made the forming of national identities in the Yugoslav space a particularly complex, conflictual process.

Located in the heart of the Yugoslav space (see Map I), the Ottoman *vilayet* of Bosnia held an important place in the nascent nationalist ideologies of the nineteenth century, with Serb and Croat authors both aspiring to incorporate this province into the state that they hoped would be formed. In their eyes, Bosnian Muslims were Serbs or Croats who had converted to Islam. As Bosnian Muslims represented 42.5 percent of the Bosnian population in 1870, and Orthodox and Catholic Christians 41.7 percent, and 14.5 percent respectively, Bosnia could be presented as a majority Serb or majority Croat province, depending on whether its Muslim population was considered to be Islamicized Serbs or Croats. However, although Bosnia was the target of conflicting nationalist aspirations as early as the mid-nineteenth century, Bosnian

society of the time ignored national categories. Religious intellectuals or urban notables claiming a Serb or Croat national identity were few and far between, whereas the Bosnian population continued to identify in ethno-confessional terms: “Turks” (*Turci*) for Muslims, “Christians” (*Hrišćani*), or “Greeks” (*Grci*) for the Orthodox, “Christians” (*Kršćani*) or “Latins” (*Latinci*) for Catholics. Furthermore, as a peripheral province of the Ottoman Empire, Bosnia was resistant to Ottoman reforms. The modernization of the army faced strong resistance from the *ayans* (local notables), as illustrated by the revolt led by Husein-kapetan Gradašević in 1831, and the Ottoman reforms did not begin to take effect until Ömer-paşa Latas harshly took control of the province in 1850. Among other effects, these reforms resulted in a loss of influence for the *‘ulama*’ (religious scholars): Shari’a (Islamic law) no longer applied outside family law matters, and state-managed schools were created alongside Muslim religious schools, the *mektebs* (elementary schools) and *madrasas* (advanced schools). At the same time, the first newspapers began to appear in the province, and the first modern political institutions were established, with the creation of a provincial assembly in 1865, including Muslim and non-Muslim notables.

The revolt of Bosnian *ayans* in the 1830s and the first attempts at formulating a provincial identity in the 1860s are often presented as early signs of a Bosnian national identity. Yet forms of affirmation of a Bosnian identity that surpassed confessional boundaries were rare, and the strong Bosnian feeling among Muslim *ayans* or certain Franciscan priests hardly expressed more than a feeling of regional belonging, while retaining an obvious confessional aspect. For Christians, this feeling was compatible with a Serb or Croat national identification. For Muslims, it was connected with the defense of local privileges, but did not put into question their allegiance to the Ottoman Empire. Against this backdrop, their use of the term “Bosniak” (*Bošnjak*) to describe their regional origin had no national meaning, and when the Ottoman period in Bosnia-Herzegovina ended in 1878, any national identification was still foreign to Bosnian Muslims.

### The Muslim elites show allegiance to the new central power and turn inward

In 1875, a revolt by Orthodox peasants in western Herzegovina triggered one of the most important geopolitical shifts in the Balkans. Indeed, in 1876, Serbia and Montenegro used this revolt as a pretense for declaring war on the Ottoman Empire, and the Russian Empire followed their lead a year later. The Ottoman defeat led to the Congress of Berlin in 1878, when the map of the region was redrawn. Serbia and Montenegro officially became independent and enlarged their territories, while Bulgaria gained *de facto* independence, marking an essential step in the emergence of Balkan nation-states. Bosnia, for its part, moved from one imperial order to another: apart from the *sanjak* of Novi Pazar, the Bosnian *vilayet* was placed under Austro-Hungarian military occupation, while formally remaining under Ottoman sovereignty (see Map II). In April 1879, the Novi Pazar Agreement signed by the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires reaffirmed the latter’s formal sovereignty, specifying the





**Map II** The Yugoslav space from the Congress of Berlin (1878) to the Balkan Wars (1912–13).

framework for the Austro-Hungarian occupation to occur. In particular, this agreement granted the Muslims of the Bosnian *vilayet*—renamed the Province of Bosnia-Herzegovina—free exercise of their religion and, more concretely, the right to maintain ties with Ottoman religious authorities, to fly Ottoman flags at mosques during religious holidays, and to hold *khutbas* (Friday sermons) in the Sultan's name.

Austro-Hungarian troops in the province initially came against armed resistance from a portion of the Muslim population. Austro-Hungarians took Sarajevo in just a few days, but they needed three months to take control of the entire province. This armed resistance reflected Muslim hostility to the idea of being subjects of a

non-Muslim power. Generally speaking, however, the secular and religious Muslim elites saw the Austro-Hungarian occupation as a lesser evil, and sought to protect their own material interests. They were therefore opposed to any armed resistance, and quickly gave allegiance to the new imperial power. This did not prevent them from harboring a deep nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire, or even secretly hoping to return to it.

More than armed revolt, emigration expressed the refusal of some Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina to submit to a non-Muslim power. This Muslim emigration continued throughout the Austro-Hungarian period, with peaks during moments of political tension, such as when Bosnia-Herzegovina was annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1908), ending the fictitious Ottoman sovereignty over this province. Austro-Hungarian records indicate around 65,000 departures for the Ottoman Empire between 1878 and 1914, and the estimates of 100,000 or 150,000 emigrants are therefore probably too high. This question of emigration was at the heart of the first doctrinal debate of the post-Ottoman period. Indeed, some of the *'ulama'* presented emigration as *hijra* (religious emigration), and therefore a religious obligation. The *Şeyh-ül-islam* of Istanbul—the highest religious authority in the Ottoman Empire—even issued a fatwa (religious decree) stating this in 1887. However, several Bosnian *'ulama'* were opposed to this interpretation, believing that it was permitted to submit to a non-Muslim power. In 1884, in particular, the mufti of Tuzla Teufik Azapagić affirmed that Bosnia-Herzegovina had not become part of *dar al-kufr* (the realm of the infidel), but continued to belong to *dar al-islam* (the realm of Islam), since Muslims could freely carry out their religious obligations. For Azapagić, Muslims therefore did not have an obligation to emigrate to Ottoman territory.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, a large majority of Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina and their secular and religious elites stayed where they were, and the emigration of a minority did not threaten the Muslim community's continued existence. However, Muslim emigration helped the Orthodox community achieve a relative majority. In 1879, according to the official census, Bosnia-Herzegovina had 1,158,164 inhabitants, of which 496,485 Eastern Orthodox (42.9 percent of the population), 448,613 Muslims (38.7 percent), 209,391 Roman Catholics (18.1 percent), and 3,426 Jews (0.3 percent). Thirty-one years later, in 1910, Bosnia-Herzegovina had 1,898,044 inhabitants, of which 825,418 were Serbo-Orthodox (43.5 percent), 612,137 Muslim (32.3 percent), 434,061 Roman Catholic (22.9 percent), 11,868 Jewish (0.6 percent), and 14,560 belonged to other confessions (0.7 percent). Thus, the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina were the first sizable Muslim community to survive the Ottoman Empire's decline in the Balkans, as the Austro-Hungarian imperial order offered them protection that their fellow Muslims did not enjoy in the rising Balkan nation-states. As the newspaper *Vatan* ("Fatherland," close to the Austro-Hungarian authorities) wrote in 1884:

If we look at the destiny of Mahometans in the various new states created in the Balkan peninsula, we must be grateful to Providence for having entrusted us to the just and wise administration of his Majesty the Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, and that we can keep our faith, our customs and our goods, and at the same time gain access to everything that the creativity of these new times offers to our social life.<sup>3</sup>

Yet it was still up to the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina and their elites—both secular and religious—to define their place in the Province of Bosnia-Herzegovina, now separate from the Ottoman Empire.

Before addressing the political aspects of this new challenge, we must take a closer look at the social and cultural transformations triggered by the Austro-Hungarian occupation. Beginning in the 1850s, the Ottoman reforms had started to open Bosnia up to Western-inspired modernization. The Austro-Hungarian period magnified and accelerated this trend. In the span of four decades, Bosnia-Herzegovina saw major changes. Economically, the Austro-Hungarian authorities encouraged the growth of industry and banking, developed the road and railway networks, set up a modern postal service, and other public services. The civil service also experienced spectacular growth, with the number of civil servants rising from around 1,000 at the end of the Ottoman period to 14,330 in 1914. This increased state presence was also visible in the school system. Alongside religious schools that dated back to the Ottoman period, the Austro-Hungarian administration opened elementary schools (the total number of such schools rose from thirty-eight in 1880 to 401 in 1914), secondary schools for vocational training, and six high schools (*gimnazije*), two of which were in Sarajevo. Lastly, on a broader scale, the Austro-Hungarian period was marked by the introduction of new cultural norms from the West, ranging from town planning rules to forms of civility, and including architectural styles and dress codes.

However, this Austro-Hungarian modernization had its limitations. In many respects, the Austro-Hungarian Empire administered Bosnia-Herzegovina in a way that some have described as “quasi-colonial.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the proportion of civil servants native to Bosnia-Herzegovina was only 27.6 percent in 1905 and 42.2 percent in 1914. Given this composition of the civil service, until the early 1910s, German and Hungarian had official language status, alongside the vernacular. In many fields, the Austro-Hungarian administration simply standardized norms that had been established under the Ottoman Empire. This policy had important implications for land ownership. In 1910 around 87 percent of the Bosnian population earned their living from farming. However, this population was still divided into *begs* and *agas* (landowners) on the one hand, free peasants and *kmets* (sharecroppers) on the other. These social divisions largely corresponded to and reinforced the confessional divides in Bosnian society, as shown in Table 1. By preserving structures of landownership from the Ottoman period, the Austro-Hungarian authorities sought mainly to avoid losing support from the Muslim landowning elites. However, this approach weighed on the relations between communities and created divergences between urban centers that saw rapid modernization and rural areas that held onto old social structures.

This urban/rural divide was also visible on a cultural level. Despite the opening of elementary schools in rural areas, 87.8 percent of the Bosnian population was still illiterate in 1910, including 94.6 percent of Muslims. While the Austro-Hungarian period was undoubtedly one of modernization, this process was skewed by the way in which the Austro-Hungarian authorities based their own domination on social structures inherited from the Ottoman system. These specificities of the modernization of Bosnia-Herzegovina partially explain the behavior of the traditional Muslim elites. On the one hand, these elites sought to defend their landowning privileges, and avoided

**Table 1** Confessional belonging of landowners, free peasants and *kmets* in Bosnia-Herzegovina according to the 1910 census.

	Orthodox	Muslim	Catholic	Total
Landowners with <i>kmet</i>	633 (6.0%)	9,537 (91.1%)	267 (2.6%)	10,463
Landowners without <i>kmet</i>	760 (17.8%)	3,023 (70.6%)	458 (10.7%)	4,281
Free peasants (mainly)	35,414 (25.9%)	77,518 (56.6%)	22,916 (16.7%)	136,854
<i>Kmets</i> (mainly)	9,322 (55.0%)	1,223 (7.2%)	6,418 (37.8%)	16,963
<i>Kmets</i>	58,895 (73.9%)	3,653 (4.6%)	17,116 (21.5%)	79,677

Source: Srećko Džaja, *Bosnien-Herzegowina in der österreichisch-ungarischen Epoche (1878–1918)*, Munich: Oldenbourg (1994), pp. 40–1.

the new sectors of economic activity. In the civil services, Muslims were substantially underrepresented: in 1914, only 1,644 civil servants were Muslim, out of a total of 14,330. On the other hand, the Muslim elites were still attached to the former Ottoman imperial order, and most of them were reluctant to send their children to the new Austro-Hungarian schools. This reluctance was even greater with regard to girls, and when primary school became compulsory in 1911, the representatives of the Muslim community were granted an exemption so that this rule would not apply to Muslim girls. Hence the Muslim community showed allegiance to the new central power, while at the same time turning inward—a trend that influenced how the Muslim elites would respond to political and religious challenges during the Austro-Hungarian period.

### Bosnism: a political failure with a cultural legacy

In the South Slavic provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, 1878–1918 saw the creation of newspapers, cultural associations, and political parties that represented the various currents of Croat, Serb, and Yugoslav nationalisms. However, this situation did not yet indicate that national identities were predominant within the broader population. Even the nationalist elites showed a strong provincial bent and were divided in their strategies for allegiance with Budapest or Vienna. Moreover, as Croat and Serb national identities took shape, tensions arose that the imperial authorities used to their own advantage. However, these tensions did not put an end to the idea of a political union among the South Slavs, either through the creation of a third South Slavic entity within the Empire or—the approach favored by the most radical parties and youth movements—through a union with neighboring Serbia. In 1905, a Croat-Serb coalition was formed in Dalmatia and Croatia-Slavonia, giving renewed impetus to the idea that Croats and Serbs were in fact a single people under two different names. Thus, Bosnia-Herzegovina was part of an Austro-Hungarian Empire in which national boundaries were uncertain and shifting.