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# A History of “Who Speaks for Islam?” in Bosnia-Herzegovina: An Official Versus Popular Islam Debate

Bosna Hersek'te 'İslam Adına Kim Konuşuyor?'un tarihi: Bir Resmi İslam, Halk İslamı Tartışması\*

Hüsrev TABAK\*\*

## Abstract

*This paper examines the organisation of popular and official Islam during and after communism in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Through studying the interaction between the popular and the official forms of Islam in the historical context, this paper unfolds the debate on who speaks for Islam? That took place between official representatives and popular Islamic groups and movements in the former Yugoslavian republic. Such an enquiry revealed firstly that a close contact with the existing regime (regardless of its ideology) is essential for becoming and remaining as the official Islamic authority, as seen in the Islamic Community's pro-Titoist stance throughout in the former Yugoslavia. The findings of the enquiry secondly suggest that popular Islam and official Islam represent transitive positions; meaning that a popular Islamic movement can become the official Islam, vice versa. Accordingly, a former popular Islam front, the Mladi Muslimani (Young Muslims), in Yugoslavia evolved into an official Islamic authority after the dissolution of the country and by the Bosnia-Herzegovina's establishment, in the scope of which new popular Islamic groups bred.*

**Key Words:** Official Islam, Popular Islam, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Young Muslims, The Islamic Community.

## Öz

*Bu makale Bosna Hersek'te komünist dönemde ve sonrasında halk İslamı ve resmi İslam'ın oluşumunu/şekillenmesini incelemektedir. Tarihsel bağlamda halk İslamı ve resmi İslam etkileşimini inceleyen makale eski Yugoslavya cumhuriyetinde resmi temsilciler ile halk İslamı grupları ve hareketleri arasında yaşanmış olan 'İslam adına kim konuşuyor?' tartışmasını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu sorgu ilk olarak eski Yugoslavya'da resmi otorite olan İslam Topluluğu'nun Titocu duruşunda da görüldüğü üzere resmi İslami otorite haline gelmek ya da öyle kalmak için (ideolojisinden bağımsız olarak) mevcut rejimle yakın bir ilişkinin önem arz ettiğini göstermektedir. Çalışmanın bulguları ikinci olarak, halk İslamı ve resmi İslam'ın geçişli durumlar olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Buna göre, bir halk İslamı grubu resmi İslam haline gelebilirken bir resmi İslam yorumu halk İslamı'na dönüşebilir. Bu minvalde Yugoslavya örneği incelemesinde görülmüştür ki, eski bir halk İslamı cephesi, Genç Müslümanlar, Yugoslavya dağıldıktan ve Bosna Hersek kurulduktan sonra resmi İslam otoritesi haline gelmiştir; bu süreçte ise yeni halk İslamı grupları ortaya çıkmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Resmi İslam, Halk İslamı, Bosna Hersek, Genç Müslümanlar, Müslüman Cemaat İslam Topluluğu.

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\*\* Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University in Rize, Turkey. Email: husrev.tabak@erdogan.edu.tr

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## Introduction

This paper elucidates the configuration of the organisation of popular and official Islam during and after communism in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Through studying the interaction between the popular and the official forms of Islam in the historical context, this paper unfolds the debate on *who speaks for Islam?* that took place between official representatives and popular Islamic groups and movements in the former Yugoslavian republic. During Yugoslav times, while the official Islam was represented by the Islamic Community, the popular Islam was, however, by the religio-political intellectuals (such as the members of *Mladi Muslimani/Young Muslims*), the local clerics, and Sufi orders<sup>1</sup>. The main debate between these two sides was regarding the representation of Islam; accordingly, *who speaks for Islam?* was the most contested enquiry. Such a debate was dominant because popular Islamic groups were in general unhappy from the official religious authority's cooperation with the Yugoslav governments, which often severely reacted against increasing religious presence in public space in the country and demonised the grassroots demands for religious rights. Carrying out an enquiry on *who speaks for Islam?* in the former Yugoslavian religious space is important for mainly two reasons which are also the conclusions this paper draws: Firstly, a close contact with the existing regime (regardless of its ideology) is essential for becoming and remaining as the official Islamic authority, as seen in the Islamic Community's pro-Titoist stance throughout in the former Yugoslavia. Secondly, a former popular Islam front, *Young Muslims*, evolved into an official Islamic authority after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, in the scope of which new popular Islamic groups bred. Therefore, popular Islam and official Islam represent transitive positions; a popular Islamic movement can become the official Islam, vice versa.

This paper consists of three sections. In the first section, we briefly introduce the popular versus official religion debate regarding Islam and clarify the conceptual framework of this paper. In the second section, we discuss the communist era debate on *who speaks for Islam?* which is followed by the final section where we examine the post-communist era developments regarding official and popular Islam debate.

### Popular versus Official Islam: Conceptual Clarification

In religious anthropology, traditionally speaking, the most classical explanations on *popular Islam* refer to the practices introduced as *bidah* (innovation in religious matters) in religion, which are considered to be misleading and caus-

<sup>1</sup> The Sufi orders have been relatively small in number in Bosnia-Herzegovina, so their participation to this debate has been relatively low in density. For this reason, in this paper, the Sufi orders' role is left out. With so doing, only the local clerics and intellectuals are considered as constituting the grassroots popular Islam.

ing misinterpretation of true Islam.<sup>2</sup> Mysticism, saint-worshipping, *mavluds* or putting mediators between believers and God are all the common practices or misconducts (as the critiques would argue) popular Islamic groups exercise, which are all considered as deviations and "borrowings from other religions".<sup>3</sup> These practices have historically been denounced and wanted to be banned by the mainstream school of thoughts. In this regard, while the Sufi orders have been considered as a traditional form popular Islam, the official form has been associated with the religious authority embodying offices which are in charge of performing "religiously binding specific actions".<sup>4</sup> This is, in particular, a juridical understanding and refers to the offices of *caliph*, *ulema*, *mufti*, and *qadi*. This traditional division between Sufi orders and official religious authority represents the initial phase of the official versus popular Islam debate.

When we look at the 20<sup>th</sup>-century forms of popular Islam, however, we see that along with the Sufi orders politico-cultural Islamist groups, intellectual movements or dissident clerics have been accepted as a form of popular Islam alike. This is because of the fact that they commonly represent an *underground* attempt alternating the official discourses and practices of Islam. Some contemporary forms of popular Islam have been conceived as also a challenge modernisation through champion nostalgia to a pure thus true form of Islam.<sup>5</sup> It is even argued that popular Islam today is an ideological, social, political, and economic challenge to the 'entire international system'.<sup>6</sup> In Yugoslavia case, the popular Islam front had been represented by Sufi orders, intellectuals, and clerical oppositions, while the official Islam by the Islamic Religious Community (*Islamska vjerska zajednica*).<sup>7</sup> In this paper, however, due to the Sufi orders' presence in relatively low numbers in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the focus is constrained to intellectual and clerical forms of popular Islam.

## Who did speak for Islam in the communist period?

### *The official Islam*

The communist Yugoslavia was formed by the triumph of the Partisans in the World War II (WWII). As a result of the collaboration of some Muslims with the

- 2 Patrick D. Gaffney, "Popular Islam", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 524, 1992, p. 39.
- 3 Jacques D. Waardenburg, "Official and Popular Religion as a Problem in Islamic Studies", in Vrijhof and Waardenburg (eds.) *Official and Popular Religion – Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies*, The Hague, Mouton Publishers, 1979, pp. 340-1.
- 4 Ibid, p. 349-53.
- 5 Ibid, p. 341-346.
- 6 Gaffney, *Popular Islam*, p. 39. Also see Michael Gilson, *Recognizing Islam: Religion and Society in the Modern Middle East*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2000.
- 7 For an account of official versus popular Islam debate in a wider context that scrutinises the debate between the Sufi orders of Kosovo and the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, see Ger Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, (Chapter 5).

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Partisans over the course of war, the communist ruling cadre allowed and recognised the reestablishment of the Islamic Religious Community (IC hereinafter) in Yugoslavia in 1947. The IC was the official representative of the religious unity of the Muslims in Yugoslavia and was in charge of organising the spiritual and material affairs of Muslims in the country.<sup>8</sup> Institutionally, the IC was consisting of two assemblies (*Ulema Medžlis* and *Vakuf Medžlis*) but headed by the *Reis-ul Ulema* (the Reis). The Reis was elected by the *Ulema Medžlis* (Supreme Islamic Assembly) the members of which were granted their posts with the state approval.<sup>9</sup> The *Vakuf Medžlis*, on the other hand, was in charge of running the estates and religious schools of the IC. In association with the decentralisation in intra-state affairs in the late 1950s (1957-8), the IC was reorganised as well and became compatible with the political decentralisation. In this respect, four regional Islamic Councils were established in Sarajevo, Pristine, Skopje, and Titograd.<sup>10</sup> As a continuation of the political reformation in the country, in 1969 Islamic Religious Community's name was changed to Islamic Community (*Islamska zajednica*) by the Supreme Islamic Assembly.<sup>11</sup> Thinking with that the *Muslim* became the name of a nation and the word "Religious" was omitted from the Community's name, the Islamic Community's (the IC hereinafter) role became more than representing the religious affairs thus its representation capability was expanded. With the 1957 constitution, the Supreme Islamic Assembly was reorganised and the member profile expanded to include members from regional councils like *muftis* and directors of the religious schools.<sup>12</sup> Regional councils were in charge of the religious affairs in their respective regions and the *mufti* (the main *imam*) was holding the leader post. According to the official hierarchy, below the *mufti* there were the local committee<sup>13</sup> and mosque committees<sup>14</sup> in charge.<sup>15</sup> Local committees called as *džemat* with the leadership of *imams* (and *bulla* or *muezzin*) in the mosques. To a certain share, the membership was subject to the possession of religious education; this was principally the case for the *muftis* and *imams*.<sup>16</sup>

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- 8 Stephen L. Burg, "The Political Integration of Yugoslavia's Muslims", *The Carl Beck Papers in REES - University of Pittsburgh*, Paper No. 203, 1983, p. 27.
- 9 Alexander Lopasic, "Bosnian Muslims: A Search for Identity", *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1981, p. 122.
- 10 Gezim Krasniqi, *The forbidden fruit: Islam and politics of identity in Kosovo and Macedonia*, European Studies Centre, University of Oxford, 2010, p. 8.
- 11 Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols – Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 77. Sarajlić argues it was in 1961; see Eldar Sarajlić, *The Return of the Consuls: Islamic networks and foreign policy perspectives in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, European Studies Centre, University of Oxford, 2010, p. 17.
- 12 Burg, *The Political Integration of Yugoslavia's Muslims*, p. 26.
- 13 They were organising the performance of religious services.
- 14 They were cooperating with local committees in the maintenance of mosques and cemeteries.
- 15 Ibid, p. 23-27.
- 16 Dragan Novakovic, "Process of the Internal Organizational Consolidation of the Islam Religious Commu-

The IC was in privileged position during the communist period thus had a considerable freedom in its actions. The level of freedom owned was, however, due to their cooperative stance towards the regime. The top post-holders like Reis or the head of the regional councils were, as argued, "patriotic and progressive ... and [were part of] secular intelligentsia".<sup>17</sup> The IC, accordingly, believed that it had to foster relations with the regime in order to be able to maintain a possible privileged position and to keep the religious service in operation. When we think that the "official pressures were eased [only] by 60s", it can be argued that the compromising posture of the IC was mostly pragmatic. As it was clear that "the Islamic Community was incapable of operating without a state supervision due to the financial dependency of Islamic Community to state"<sup>18</sup> and that the monthly payment, pension, and insurance costs of the employees/cadres of the IC were covered by the government.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that under the communist rule, the IC was directly run by those who were the members of Partisan during WWII and who were loyal to the communist regime. Moreover, in due course of time, the official Islamic religious authority became more integrated with the League of Communists thus both the leading cadre and the majority of the clergy soon became pro-Titoist.<sup>20</sup> This hand in hand relation with the communist regime, however, gave a rise to severe criticism against the Islamic leadership coming from some local *imams* and religious intellectuals (like the *Young Muslims*), including the *madrasa* students in Sarajevo.<sup>21</sup> In addition to this, the official authority's imposition of a *modernist* view of Islam was as well generating contention and rivalry.

### **The popular Islam**

The local clerics and intellectuals opposing the IC were also opposing the communist regime due to its suppressive approach towards religion in public life in general. It was considered that the IC was acting as a traitor to the religion as it was cooperating with the regime that directly attacks to the *reproduction capability of the Muslim identity* in Yugoslavia. The following actions of the regime were considered as part of such oppressive *attacks*. The regime abolished the Shari'a courts (1946), banned Muslim women to wear veil (1950), took over the

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nity in the Socialist Yugoslavia", in Dordevic et al. (eds) *Islam at the Balkans in the Past, Today, and in the Future*, YSSSR Annual-Year XIV, Nis, 2007.

- 17 Novakovic, *Process of the Internal Organizational Consolidation of the Islam Religious Community*, p. 24.
- 18 Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 75.
- 19 Francine Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims-Denial of a Nation*, Oxford, Westview Press, 1996, p. 189.
- 20 Munevera Hadzisehovic, *A Muslim Woman in Tito's Yugoslavia*, Texas, A&M University Press, 2003; Alexandre Popovic, *Balkanlarda Islam*, Translation: L'Islam Balkanique, İstanbul, İnsan Yayınları, 1995.
- 21 Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 74-77; Aydın Babuna, *National identity, Islam and Politics in Post-communist Bosnia-Herzegovina*, East European Quarterly, Vol. 39, No. 4, 2006, p. 411.

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religious education, closed down the religious institutions, made it a criminal offense to give religious education in mosques, closed down Muslims' printing houses and did not allow Islamic textbooks to be issued until 1964, closed down the *Tekkes*, banned dervish orders, abolished Muslim cultural and educational associations (such as *Gajret*, *Narodna*, *Uzdanica*), did not allow Muslim background Communist officials to have their sons circumcised, harshly suppressed Muslim opposition as happened in *Young Muslims* or *Yücelciler*<sup>22</sup> cases, imprisoned and even sentenced to death some of the members of these organizations, turned some of the *masjids* and mosques to official or public places, nationalized *vakuf* properties, turned "many Muslims graveyards... into parks, building sites etc"; and asked "the Muslims... to declare themselves Serbs or Croats"<sup>23, 24</sup> Such policies towards religion triggered a culture of resistance among the Muslim intellectuals and local clerics, and escalated local unrests towards both the regime and the IC.

### **Opposition of Intellectuals**

The roots of the diversion of intellectuals from the official Islamic authority can be traced back to the WWII times. As aforementioned, the cadre of the IC of Yugoslavia was on the Partisan's side during the war, while those whom we call as intellectual religious oppositions positioned themselves on the lines of the invaders (either Italian or German) during the war with an intention to secure the existence of Muslims on the Yugoslav territory. The *Young Muslims*<sup>25</sup> was on the front lines of this opposition. The leading cadre of the *Young Muslims* was neither the members of the Islamic Community of inter-war Yugoslavia nor was raised with *madrasa* education. They were coming from a grammar school and scientific education background.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the *Young Muslims* were diverted from the Islamic Council also by the religious education background. The organisation was established in March 1941 in basically three cities; Sarajevo, Mostar, and Zagreb. In due course of time, they spread their network to the rest of the Yugoslavia.

- 22 While the *Young Muslims* owned the legacy of Yugoslav Muslim Organization (JMO) of Bosnia, the *Yücelciler* seemed to be following the legacy of the Cemiyet (Džemiyet) of Kosovo and Macedonia. For *Yücelciler* movement and trial see Mehmet Ardıcı, *Makedonya'da Müslüman Direnişi – Yücelciler 1947*, İstanbul, İnsan Yayınları, 1991.
- 23 Lopasic, *Bosnian Muslims*, p. 122. The government gave up such a policy after recognising the phrase *Muslim* as a national identification.
- 24 Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia - A Short History*, London, Macmillan, 1996; Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims*.
- 25 It should be stated that *Young Muslims* were not a political movement because, while coming from some leading families "such as Cengica, Sacirbegovica, Behmena, Bicakcica, Serdarevica etc... (they) resembled an ideological *clientelistic network* rather than political movement." Babuna, *Post-communist Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 428, 444, fn. 138. [Emphasis added].
- 26 Xavier Bougarel, "From *Young Muslims* to Party of Democratic Action-The Emergence of Pan-Islamist Trend in Bosnia-Herzegovina", *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1997, p. 536.

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When the war was over and the communist regime started to reorganise the country from head to toe, the *Young Muslims* members kept their efforts for re-Islamisation of the Muslim people. As being accused of acting against the regime, in 1946 the official authorities started arresting the members of the *Young Muslims* and by 1949 the whole leading cadre had been arrested, some of them were even given a death penalty. During 1949 trials, the Islamic hierarchy denounced *Young Muslims* for being a terrorist organisation.<sup>27</sup> All these pushed the *Young Muslims* organisation underground whilst some of the members had to flee the country. However, this only initiated a new era for the debate between the intellectuals and the Islamic religious authority. While the IC kept silence or even declared opinion favouring some of the above-listed prohibitions on Islam's presence in public life, the intellectuals blamed the IC for being reformist and for reinterpreting the orthodox Islam for the regime's favour.<sup>28</sup> This opened up the ways to ignore the authority and representative position of the IC and Muslims started deviating from the sphere of influence of IC towards their "genuine religious leaders".<sup>29</sup> Through the late 1960s, for instance, the *Young Muslims'* influence was seen on the *madrasa* of Sarajevo in the form of student activism against both the IC and the school directory. Soon the Theology Faculty of Sarajevo students joined to the *Young Muslims'* intellectual front.<sup>30</sup> In the *madrasa*, for instance, the students were requesting courses including maths and science to be included to the curriculum, the theology faculty students were defending pan-Islamic concerns and involvements; so those participating in the *Young Muslims* were diverse yet highly educated. Among the members of the *Young Muslims* at the time Alija Izetbegovic, for example, in an influential and highly articulated publication known as the Islamic Declaration, was sophisticatedly challenging the IC's so-called *modernist* interpretations of Islam.<sup>31</sup>

27 Ibid, p. 540. Önder Çetin clearly shows how *Young Muslims* spent effort for post-conflict reconstruction and the peace building in Yugoslavia as opposed to the label of terrorist organization. See Önder Çetin, "1941 Resolutions of El-Hidaje in Bosnia-Herzegovina as a Case of Traditional Conflict Transformation", *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2010.

28 Bougarel, *From Young Muslims to Party of Democratic Action*, p. 541.

29 Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 75.

30 Bougarel, *From Young Muslims to Party of Democratic Action*, p. 543.

31 Indeed, the Islamic Declaration has been over-emphasized and attributed exaggerated political meanings by scholarly studies. The declaration, in reality, is nothing but an ordinary intellectual critique of modernism which can be seen in almost all intellectual accounts of the relationship between Islam and modernism. Equally important, unfortunately, the declaration has been commonly misinterpreted. It has been observed in our close reading of both the Declaration and the relevant scholarly literature that scholars try too much to see the marks of a possible radical Islamism and religious nationalism in it. For example, to explain the rivalry between the IC and the religious opposition, in her prominent book, Francine Friedman quotes a passage from the Declaration, which she presents as a *pseudo-proof* of the conflict between the religious opposition and the IC: "the class represented by hajjis and sheikhs who, in contrast to clear dictates on the non-existence of a clergy in Islam, have

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In the meantime, the recognition of Muslims' nationhood (1968) made the debate between the intellectuals and the IC gain a new character. When the Muslims retained a national name, while this opened more room for religious hierarchy in terms of the representation of the Muslims, they were not alone in this.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, the representation of the Muslim nation had three claimants at the time: the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, the IC, and the Muslim intellectuals. The communists argued that the capital 'M' in *Muslim* does not denote a religious affiliation but a national one which is expected to be secular in nature. On the other hand, the Muslim intellectuals were critical about the legitimacy of the IC's representation of the nation as well. It was believed that a secular and communist regime proponent Islamic authority and *ulema* was misrepresentative.<sup>33</sup> This was the position of all religiously opponent parties.

### **Opposition of the Local Imams**

According to the hierarchical structure of the IC, the religious services in the local areas were performed by *imams* under the supervision of *muftis*. Whilst the state was paying a monthly salary to the *imams*, the maintenance of mosques and accommodation places were provided by the *džemat* in rural areas.<sup>34</sup> Local *imams* were officially responsible towards the Communist regime but were also endeavouring to maintain the religiosity of the local population. The attitudes of the regime towards religion and the IC's close contact with this regime were too often irritating the local *imams* and they were thus often

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emerged as an organized class which has pre-empted the interpretation of Islam and set itself up as an intermediary between man and the Qur'an... [These theologians and priests are] narrow-minded and backward people, whose deathlike embrace has strangled the still living Islamic idea" Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims*, p. 195. (Quoted from the Islamic Declaration, see Alija Izetbegovic, *Islamic Declaration – A Programme for the Islamisation of Muslims and the Muslim Peoples*, Sarajevo, 1990, p. 9. When we look at the Declaration, it, however, is clear that with this passage Izetbegovic was not criticising the official Islamic authority because of the fact that the leadership was not conservative (as this passage addresses conservatives) and were explicitly not *sheikhs*. The IC of Yugoslavia was rather often blamed for being secular, modernist or progressive. They have, accordingly, been blamed for re-interpreting Islam to make it compatible with the secular and atheist communist system. See Burg, *The Political Integration of Yugoslavia's Muslims*, p. 24. The only common feature of the IC and the conservatives is, as it was mentioned in the Declaration, that "both see Islam as only a religion" (Izetbegovic, *Islamic Declaration*, p. 8). Therefore, Friedman's quotation lacks the capability of explaining the rivalry and shows how the Declaration has been over-emphasised and misinterpreted.

- 32 Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims*, p. 186; Francine Friedman, "The Muslim Slavs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (with reference to the Sandžak of Novi Pazar): Islam as a national identity", *Nationalities papers*, Vol. 28, No.1, 2000.
- 33 The debate between the IC and the *Young Muslims* was quite harsh despite the support the IC occasionally provided towards the *Young Muslims*. The IC, for instance, let some of the members of the *Young Muslims* to publish their works under aliases in its publishing organs. See Bougarel, *From Young Muslims to Party of Democratic Action*, p. 543-4.
- 34 William G. Lockwood, "Social Status and Cultural Change in Bosnian Moslem Village", *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1968. Also see Popovic, *Balkanlarda Islam*, p. 246-58.

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denouncing both of them. Moreover, within the IC, apart from the leading cadre, "not all clergy were pro-Titoist", many *imams* were against the regime from the beginning. This explains why "some local imams were involved in Young Muslim organization" (Perica, 2002:76). Consequently, the lower clergy versus higher clergy competition turned to a challenge to the Islamic hierarchy, particularly in terms of the representation of Islam and of the Muslim nationhood.

We can also talk about an intellectual transmission of religious opposition from centre to the periphery originated in the *schools* of Sarajevo and spread throughout the countryside by the teachers and/or *imams* who studied in those schools and took office in the countryside. Ger Duijzings points out a similar pattern occurred in terms of the transmission of nationalism. As he argues, the local history teachers who studied in the *centre* then moved to their hometowns and aimed to inspire local Muslims in favour of a Bosniak identity.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, some members of the *Young Muslims* were working as a lecturer in *madrasas* and the Theology Faculty. This gives us clues about why the religious opposition was a common attitude among the *madrasa* students in Sarajevo.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, there are not so many studies on the local clergy's position; this impedes the possibility of the comprehensive analysis of official versus popular Islam debate in Yugoslavia in this brief account. However, the protests lodged by *imams* in Tuzla of Bosnia-Herzegovina during late 1988 and early 1989 can be interpreted as the manifestation of the materialisation and open expression of the popular Islamist opposition. The protesters forced the head of the IC to resign. He was accused of being the "representative of the old [communist] regime".<sup>37</sup>

### Who does speak for Islam? The Post-Communist Period *The Official Islam*

By the breakup of Yugoslavia, the IC lost its authority among the former republics which formed their own nation states and the IC's (now the Riyaset of Bosnia-Herzegovina) sphere of influence decreased to the Slavic-speaking Muslim community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sandžak, Croatia and Slovenia.<sup>38</sup> This sphere of influence decreased by the decision made by the ruling party the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) of Bosnia-Herzegovina against the willingness of the *ulema* to maintain the authority over the former-Yugoslavia territory.<sup>39</sup> Bosnia-Herzegovina initiated to establish a national Islamic Communi-

35 Ger Duijzings, "Appendix IV: History and Reminders in East Bosnia", in Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, *Srebrenica: A 'Safe' Area*, Amsterdam, 2003, p. 60-61.

36 Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 77.

37 Ibid, p. 75; Babuna, *Post-communist Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 413.

38 Sarajlić, *The Return of the Consuls*, p. 7.

39 Xavier Bougarel, "Islam and Politics in the Post-Communist Balkans (1990-2000)", in Keridis and Perry (Eds.), *New Approaches to Balkan Studies*, Brassey's, 2003, pp. 345-360.

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ty (Riyaset) representing the Bosniak population of aforementioned territories in 1993. In line with this, the Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia, the Islamic Community of Serbia, and the Islamic Community of Montenegro were established in 1994 in Skopje, Niš, and Podgorica respectively. The supreme administrative body of the IC of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Riyaset) is located in Sarajevo, but local offices for *muftis* opened in Sarajevo, Travnik, Zenica, Bihaç, Mostar, Goražde, Tuzla, and Banja Luka. There are also autonomous offices (Mesihat) established in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Novi Pazar.<sup>40</sup>

The establishment of national Islamic Communities resulted in the nationalization of Islam. This was conceivably relevant to the war spread throughout the former Yugoslavian republics. Within their new borders, the new states had to form their own national religious authorities. These new authorities soon institutionally reorganised the delivery of religious services and established their own religious education institutions.<sup>41</sup> In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Riyaset soon became both a representative of national religion and a cement to unite the Bosniak Muslims. Accordingly, in association with the nationalisation of Islam and the born of ethnic religious hierarchies over the former Yugoslavia territory, the Riyaset “became one of the principal mobilization resources of Bosnian Muslim nationalism”.<sup>42</sup> Within this scope, the new government in Bosnia-Herzegovina intervened into the affairs of Riyaset and the leader cadre of the communist period IC was forced to leave their posts; the authority of the communist period Islamic hierarchy was taken and handed over to the pro-SDA Muslim intellectuals (*Young Muslims*) to administrate “the religious affairs ... in accordance with the regimes discern of religious activity”.<sup>43</sup> This is understandable and a change in the official representative of the IC was already expected; as “8 out of 40 members of the SDA were the members of *Young Muslims*”.<sup>44</sup> The hand-in-hand work of Riyaset and the SDA was explicit during

40 Srdan Barisic, “Muslims in the Balkans: Problems of (Re)Institutionalization and Transformation of Identity”, in Dordevic et al. (eds) *Islam at the Balkans in the Past, Today, and in the Future*, YSSSR Annual-Year XIV, Nis, 2007, p. 32-3.

41 In this respect, a theological faculty was opened in Kondovo (a village near Skopje) in Macedonia. The Riyaset opened three more *madrasas* in Bosnia-Herzegovina and one in Sandžak to extend its religious education to the periphery (Bougarel, *Islam and Politics in the Post-Communist Balkans*; Barisic, *Muslims in the Balkans*, p. 32. While the Riyaset was extending its institutional presence, the newly established Islamic Community of Serbia opposed the Bosnian religious involvements in Serbia. Due to this the representational position of Riyaset (religious representative of Bosniaks) became contested. Sarajlić, *The Return of the Consuls*, p. 7.

42 Babuna, *Post-communist Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 427.

43 Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 74; Dino Abazovic, “Bosnian Muslims and Country in Transition”, in Dordevic et al. (eds) *Islam at the Balkans in the Past, Today, and in the Future*, YSSSR Annual-Year XIV, Nis, 2007.

44 Babuna, *Post-communist Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 428; Xavier Bougarel, “Bosnian Islam since 1990: Cultural Identity or Political Ideology?”, *Convention annuelle de l'Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN)*, Apr 1999, New York, United States.

the war, particularly while organising a military resistance against the invading armies of the former republics (Serbia and Croatia).<sup>45</sup> Religious symbols and the Riyaset worked as a channel in military mobilisation and political support.

Nevertheless, despite a shift in the authority and representation, the Riyaset's role did not change. The IC was in close contact with the communist regime and was used for political goals, now with a new cadre the Riyaset is in close contact with the regime and is used for political goals. This shows that the Islamic Community (Riyaset) has been a highly politicised institution. In post-communist period, this politicisation even reached to an open support in the elections of Reis-ul Ulema in 2002; the SDA supported, one of its founders, Mustafa Cerić in the elections.<sup>46</sup>

### **Popular Islam**

From an anthropological point of view, the replacement of Islamic Community's leading cadre with the pro-Young Muslim intellectuals is a clear triumph of a popular religious movement against the official religious authority. By occupying new posts of the IC (now the Riyaset), the previous popular Islamic movement (*Young Muslims*) switched to the official Islam position. *Young Muslims* became the representative of Islam and the holder of the Islamic authority in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, not only an intellectual shift occurred, the local *imams* of the previous opposition front of popular Islam, now started supporting the SDA, the ruling party. As the SDA initially gained support from the rural population, the local clergy had an undeniable role in this, as "hundreds of clerics formed an association with the SDA and took part in the party rallies, elections, and later in its armed branch, the Muslim Patriotic League".<sup>47</sup> This was the reconstitution of religious elites both in the centre and in the periphery.<sup>48</sup>

The *imams'* movement of the late 1980s prepared the ground for a possible switch to the side of the new authority; as the *imams* had long protested the Islamic Community and blamed them of being the "representative of the old regime".<sup>49</sup> The former popular Islamic groups such as the Young Muslim easily became a representative voice for them. The side-changes of the local *imams* and intellectuals of the communist period was a clear triumph against the official Islam, however, it was not an end to the popular movements. Accordingly, new dissident religious functions emerged with questioning the autonomy and representative position of the new official Islam in both local

45 Bougarel, *Bosnian Islam since 1990*; Adil Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniak - Adil Zulfikarpasic in Dialogue with Milovan Djilas and Nadezda Gace*, London, Hurst, 1996.

46 Babuna, *Post-communist Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 426.

47 Ibid, p. 428.

48 Ibid, p. 413.

49 Ibid, p. 413.

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and national level. They challenged the SDA-controlled authority of the new official Islam (of *Young Muslims*). In the local level, “the *muftis* of Mostar (Seid Smajkic) and Zenica (Halil Mehtic)”, for instance, gained considerable support and challenged the authority of the Riyaset.<sup>50</sup> This was the reason why these two *muftis* were quickly dismissed by the Riyaset.

In the national level, a novel popular Islamic front came into existence, challenging the Riyaset regarding the debate on *who speaks for Islam?* During the war, as part of a global jihadist solidarity, foreign religious groups, including the mujahidin fighters, came to Bosnia from different Muslim countries. When the war ended some of these transnational religious networks (such as the so-called Salafi networks, Iranian networks, or Turkish networks) started involving in the social, economic, and religious reconstruction of the country.<sup>51</sup> These networks initiated the construction of new mosques, schools, and Islamic institutions. On the other hand, they started infusing their religious mentality/way of life into the Bosnian society. When their existence in the social life of the Bosnians became visible, there became a contestation between the Riyaset (official Islam) and these transnational religious organisations in terms of the representation of Islam.<sup>52</sup>

### In Lieu of Conclusion

In this paper, we examined the configuration of the grassroots organisation of popular Islam during and after communism in Bosnia-Herzegovina through studying the debate on *who speaks for Islam?* between the popular and the official Islamic groups. It is seen in our religious anthropological examination that a former popular Islamic front evolved into an official Islamic authority after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Based on this, there would be drawn at least two conclusions regarding the popular versus official Islam debate.

Firstly, a close contact with the existing regime (regardless of its ideology) is essential for becoming and remaining as the official Islamic authority. Accordingly, religious actors cooperate with the governments regardless of their ideological affiliation to form official Islamic authorities. They could do it either for the sake of maintaining the delivery of religious services or as a true believer of the governing ideology. In the former Yugoslavia, we saw that majority of the members of the IC were pro-Titoists and had a belief in a compromise between Islam and communism, while the popular Islamist position was a challenge to the building of such a compromise. Secondly, the discussion above suggests that popular and official Islam represent transitive positions,

50 Bougarel, *Islam and Politics in the Post-Communist Balkans*.

51 Kerem Öktem, *New Islamic actors after the Wahhabi intermezzo: Turkey's return to the Muslim Balkans*, European Studies Centre, University of Oxford, 2010, p. 18.

52 Sarajlić, *The Return of the Consuls*, p. 9.

meaning that a popular Islamic movement can become the official Islam, vice versa. In the former Yugoslavia case, while the popular Islamic fronts such as the *Young Muslims*, was a challenge to the official authority, they soon and readily replace it after the war thus become the official voice. This, however, was not an end of popular Islam, new forms of popular movements breed.

As a final remark, the conclusion offered by this paper has some weak points, especially, on the role of the local clerics (*imams*) in the popular Islamic front. This is because of the absence of anthropological studies on the related issue. There are some blurred points like whether there is a continuation on the level of cooperation between intellectuals and local clerics in the post-communist Bosnia? or how the official versus popular Islam debate took/have been taking place in the periphery? As in the periphery, there are other forms of popular Islam and the local clerics were/are still the representative of the official authority on the eyes of them.

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