**Book Reviews**

**Review Article**

Inhabitants of the Proud Bosnia: the Identity of the European Native Muslims

ANTO KNEŽEVIĆ


During the late 1920s, the Finnish ethnographer and archeologist Sakari Pälsi travelled through Bosnia-Herzegovina. At that time he noted with great amazement that “these Slavs have nothing Asian in themselves, unless one considers their Islamic faith [as Asian]”. Pälsi was so impressed by the land and its people that he would soon publish in Helsinki a book in Finnish under its Bosnian title, *Bosna ponosna* [The Proud Bosnia].

During the late 1930s, other Western travellers shared Pälsi’s fascination with Bosnian Muslims who were seen as an almost completely Europeanized

---

1 Sakari Pälsi, *Bosna ponosna: Zapisi sa puta po Bosni, Hercegovini i Dalmaciji* [The Proud Bosnia: Records from the Journey through Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Dalmatia]. Translated from Finnish into Bosnian by Osman Djikić (Sarajevo: Zid [Wall], 1996), 112. [The original Finnish title of Pälsi’s book reads: *Bosna ponosna: Matkakuvia, Bosniasta, Hercegovinasta ja Dalmacijasta* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 1930)]. Pälsi’s attitude towards Islam was ambiguous. On the one hand, he perceived the faith as something strange. On the other hand, he looked down upon those Westerners who had scorned Islam. Having met in Sarajevo some West European tourists who were dissatisfied with the city’s “oriental” hotel service and foods, Pälsi would write: “Thank you God and Allah the Almighty, for I am not similar to these selfish travellers, and for not being a hypocrite. I promise you, o God, that I shall always remain a humble researcher who with his best wishes takes pains to get to know this world and all of its variety. Allahu akbar! Lâ ilâha illa allâh!” (76–77).
ethnic group. Rebecca West, a famous European traveller, described Sarajevo’s Muslim men as “bronze-haired, with eyes crackling with sheer blueness: Danish sea captains, perhaps, had not been wearing the fez”, and Muslim women as “completely un-oriental, as luminously fair as any Scandinavian”. 2

International interest in Bosnia’s Sunni Muslims increased after Serbia’s 1992 aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina. The world has asked the basic question: Who are these “completely un-oriental”, indigenous European Muslims? 3

In many cases answers offered depended on the political agenda of those who have been writing about Bosnia-Herzegovina. The answers revealed a whole range of perspectives, including contradictory viewpoints. For example, according to a 1992 British-based publication’s assessment, “Bosnians were among the most militant in the Muslim world”. 4 However, a scholar sympathetic to Bosnian victims of genocide saw them as “probably the most

---

2 Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 297. Rebecca West’s real name was Cicily Isabel Fairfield (1892–1983). The first edition of her 1100-page-long book appeared in the United States in 1941 and became a bestseller. Unfortunately, the volume is full of various prejudices, myths, and errors in fact. Accompanied by a Serb during most of her travel, Rebecca West sees the region’s history through the Serbian eyes. For example, West uses racist terminology while describing the Turks as a people whose intellect “has been removed” (302) and “who had no word in their language to express the idea of being interested in anything” (309). In the 1970s, Rebecca West became an honorary member of the Association of the Serbian Writers in Exile. See Radovan Kalabić, *Srpska emigracija: Prilozi za istoriju srpskog iseljeništva (1830–1992)* [The Serbian Emigration: Contributions to a History of the Serbian Emigration (1830–1992)] (Belgrade: Author’s edition, 1993), 140.

3 Smail Balić gives excellent overviews of Bosniak history and culture in his *Das unbekannte Bosnien: Europas Brücke zur islamischen Welt* [The Unknown Bosnia: Europe’s Bridge to the Islamic World] (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1992) and *Kultura Bošnjaka: muslimanska komponenta* [The Culture of the Bosniaks: The Muslim Component] (Tuzla, Bosnia and Zagreb, Croatia: R & R, 1994).

4 See “Muslim fundamentalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina”, *Islamic Affairs Analyst*, edited by J. de Courcy. *Islamic Affairs Analyst* is “an independent publication, produced by Intelligence International Ltd”. Its address is 17 Rodney Road, Cheltenham, United Kingdom. The publication appears 45 times a year and is available by “private subscription only”.

secularized Muslim population in the world". But neither source offered factual and scientific support for its respective claim.

Fortunately, some sixty years after Pälsi’s exploration in Bosnia-Herzegovina, another Scandinavian scholar did offer an answer based on field research, hard facts, scientific data, and relevant original literature. Norwegian anthropologist Tone Bringa in her book Being Muslim the Bosnian Way gives the reader a complex but coherent picture of everyday life of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Despite a few small inconsistencies, Bringa’s volume may be described as a masterpiece of anthropological research.

The Identity of Bosnian Muslims: Preliminary Remarks

Bosnia-Herzegovina is located in south-central Europe. The country is often called simply Bosnia (even though its small southern part has a distinct provincial name of Herzegovina). The province of Sandžak was also part of historical Bosnia (after World War II the territory of Sandžak was partitioned between Serbia and Montenegro). Bosnia borders with Croatia and the new Yugoslavia (i.e., Serbia and Montenegro). A small, 20-kilometer-long outlet to the Adriatic Sea connects Bosnia — at least in theory — with the rest of the world. Concerning the country’s contested frontiers, “Bosnia has had more durable and widely recognized borders through centuries than either Serbia or Croatia”.

Bosnia has inherited its current borders from its centuries-old frontiers. Those borders were recognized by all post-World War II constitutions of the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–

---

5 Bogdan Denitch, Ethnic Nationalism: The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 211, n. 5.
6 Being Muslim the Bosnian Way contains a few misleading statements but they are related to historical and geographic rather than anthropological issues. For instance, the predominantly Muslim province of Sandžak is located in southwestern Serbia and northern Montenegro, not “in southeastern Serbia” as claimed (p. 11). The statement that the river Bosna marks Bosnia’s border (p. 247) may be a typographical error; it is the Una river that makes Bosnia’s western border. It is not accurate that “Serbia received its independence in 1830” (p. 13); at that time Serbia was a half-autonomous principality within the Ottoman Empire. Serbia would become independent as late as 1878, after the Berlin Congress. It is true that during World War II (1941–1945) there were “a Serb-Croat war and a Serbian civil war” (p. 23) but similar wars were also waged among other Yugoslavia’s nationalities (a Croatian civil war, a Muslim civil war, etc.).

The assertion that Yugoslavia’s 1974 federal constitution failed to create “a Yugoslav national identity” (p. 27) is misleading. Any attempt at creating an integralist “Yugoslav national identity” has been doomed ever since 1929, when Serbian King Aleksandar Karadjordjević imposed his brutal dictatorship and changed the country’s name of the “Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes” to “Yugoslavia”. For most of Yugoslavia’s nationalities, the concept of “Yugoslavism” has been perceived as a violent process of Serbianization.

1991) as well as the former Socialist Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a constituent part of the Yugoslav federation.

Three main Slavic ethno-national groups live in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Sunnī Muslims (about 44%, according to the 1991 official census), Roman Catholic Croats (17%), and Orthodox Christian Serbs (31%). All of 4.4 million citizens of Bosnia are called Bosnians (Bosanci), previously Bosniaks (Bošnjaci). Today, however, the term “Bosniak” refers to one Bosnian group only: the Sunnī Muslims. Today’s Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs are Bosnians, not Bosniaks.

During the medieval period “there was no question of Bosnians being Serbs or Croats” since the Ottoman authorities categorized the populations according to their officially recognized religious communities (Turkish millets, Arabic millats), as Muslims, Christians (Catholic and Orthodox), and Jews. All of them were Bosniaks (Bošnjaci). In the nineteenth century, Bosnian Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics—under the influence of nationalist ideologies coming from Serbia and Croatia—“adopted” their national identification as (Bosnian) Serbs and (Bosnian) Croats, respectively. For political reasons, the national question of Bosnian Muslims had remained practically unsolved until the 1992 war.

Numerous books have been written both by Catholic and Muslim authors who support the thesis that Bosnian Muslims are descendants of Bosnian Catholics or the persecuted (presumably Roman Catholic) sect of Bogomils. An American historian of Bosnia writes that “By the tenth century most Bosnians were probably nominally Catholic”, but that fact does not necessarily imply that all Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina are part of modern Croatian nationality.9

Traditionally, mutual respect between Bosnian Catholics and Bosnian Muslims has been cultivated for centuries. Traditionally, Bosnian Catholics have called their Muslim neighbours “our brothers in Allah”. 10 A pro-Croatian

---

10 Tomislav Ladan, “Jugoslavenstvo u malome” [Yugoslavianism in the Small] in Bosna i bošnjastvo [Bosnia and Bosniakism] (Sarajevo and Ljubljana, Slovenia: Karantanija, 1990), 131. However, the tradition of religious tolerance was weaker among some Herzegovinian Catholics who had for centuries lived in barren mountainous areas isolated from other religious communities.
sentiment was present among many Bosnian Muslims, especially intellectuals, until World War II. However, the Muslims had a generally negative experience with Croats during World War II. From 1941 to 1945, the puppet Independent State of Croatia incorporated the entire territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. At that time the Bosnian Muslims were officially declared to be “Croats of Islamic faith” [sic!] and courted by the Zagreb authorities as “the flower of the Croatian nation”. However, when Muslims were attacked and massacred by Serbian Chetnik guerilla bands in eastern Bosnia, they were not offered necessary military protection by the Zagreb government. During the four years of war (1941—1945), between 80,000 and 103,000 Muslims died. Most of the victims were killed by Serbian Chetniks, who openly collaborated with both German Nazis and Italian Fascists. Chetnik criminal practice resembled the Nazi policy. Some authors argue that “There is no doubt that his [Hitler’s] methods, publicly proclaimed in Mein Kampf, did influence the concept of genocide in the [Serbian Chetnik] movement of Draža Mihailović”. However, there is no evidence for that overstretched claim. Serbian genocidal ideology directed against the neighbouring non-Serbian nationalities had been codified a quarter century before Mein Kampf was

---

11 A survey of Bosnian Muslims’ political and military activities during World War II — written from a Jewish perspective — is given in Yeshayahu A. Jelinek’s “Bosnia-Herzegovina at War: Relations Between Moslems and non-Moslems” in Holocaust and Genocide Studies, vol. 5, no. 3 (1990), 275–292. Jelinek writes: “The controversy between Croatian and Serbian nationalists over who started the massacres [in 1941] has not been resolved to this day. The Serbian nationalists charge that the [Croatian] Ustasha aimed at ridding the country of the Serbs. The Croatian nationalists allege that the Serbians were out to take revenge on the Croats for the [1941] partition of Yugoslavia and the establishment of the Croatian state. It is interesting to note that the Moslems suffered from both sides, but particularly at the hands of the Serbs... Moslems allege that the Ustasha would dress up in Moslem robes when they went out to ‘purify the air’ of Serbs. There is ample testimony to substantiate this charge” (pp. 278–279). In Fall 1941, Bosnian Muslims protested publicly “against the pillaging of Serbian and Jewish property by Ustasha members” (p. 285). Jelinek emphasizes: “In the strongest possible terms, the Moslems demanded an end to the bloodshed, the punishment of the perpetrators, security for all citizens without distinction, respect for private property, and heavy penalties for any manifestation of religious intolerance” while “stress[ing] traditional Islamic tolerance towards other religions” (p. 284).


14 Ibid., xxii.
released. In 1902, Serbian lawyer Nikola Stojanović published an anti-Croatian paper under the telling title “Until Your or Our Extermination”. 15

The Muslims’ negative experience during World War II has changed their pro-Croatian feelings forever. 16 Nevertheless, some Croatian authors still believe that the present-day Muslims really feel themselves to be Croatian. 17

Certainly, some Muslims have declared themselves to be Croatian but even they, as declared Croats, have not been accepted by other (Catholic) Croats. The problem is that modern Croatian nationality is narrowly identified with Roman Catholicism. Contemporary Croatian publications emphasize that “[t]he Croats were the first of all the Slav people to accept Christianity (in the 7th century)”. 18 Virtually every Croatian history textbook emphasizes the fact that the Croats were named by Pope Leon X as Europe’s antemurale christianitatis, “bulwark of Christianity”, during the Ottoman conquest. 19

Similarly — but with less success and support in facts — many Serbian nationalists claim that the Bosnian Muslims are “really Serbian” who, despite their treacherous conversion to Islam, remain part of one, Serbian national body. But there are two problems here. First, unlike Bosnia’s Muslims who are ethnically Slavs, many of the present-day Bosnian Orthodox people are descendants of medieval Vlachs, a non-Slavic (non-Serbian) ethnic

15 See Nikola Stojanović, “Do istrage vaše ili naše” [Until Your or Our Extermination], in Bože Čović ed., Roots of Serbian Aggression (Zagreb: Centar za strane jezike [Foreign Languages Center], 1993), 105–113.
17 In Canada, there is a Croatian Islamic organization which deals with the historical and political issues of the Muslims of South Eastern Europe. See, for instance, Massacre of Croatians in Bosnia-Hercegovina and Sandžak (Toronto: Croatian Islamic Centre, 1978). Professor Vatro Murvar, a Catholic, is one of those believers in the “Muslims-are-Croats” thesis. See his pro-Croatian but otherwise very informative and Muslim-sympathetic book Nation and Religion in Central Europe and the Western Balkans — The Muslims in Bosnia, Hercegovina and Sandžak: A Sociological Analysis (Brookfield, Wisconsin: FSSSN Colloquia and Symposia, University of Wisconsin, 1989), vol. 1. The Catholic authors of Croatia and the Croatians (Zagreb, Toronto, New York and Sydney: Northern Publishing Tribune, 1991) also describe Bosnia’s Muslims as Croats. Among Croatia’s Catholics, perhaps the strongest voice in favour of Muslims in general, and Bosnian Muslims in particular, is that of Zlatko Posavac, Professor at Zagreb University.
18 Our Lovely Croatia (Zagreb: ITP Marin Držić, 1992), 327.
19 Dubravko Horvatić, The Contribution of Croatians to Western Culture (Zagreb: The Croatian PEN Center, 1992), 7: “In 1242, Croatian military force (officially exercitus croaticus) defended Western Europe from Mongolian raids, and between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries the state of Croatia, although reduced to reliquiae reliquiierum olim magni et inclyti regni Croatiae (the relic of the relics of the formerly great and glorious Kingdom of Croatia), nevertheless stood as the antemurale christianitatis, the shield of Christianity, i.e. Western civilization”.
Second, Serbian nationality has been narrowly identified with the Serbian Orthodox Church. To be more absurd, even the Serbs — who, unlike many Croats, lived under the Ottoman Muslim rule for centuries — claim that somehow they also were Europe’s *antemurale christianitatis*. (Other Christian nations, like the Poles or Hungarians, could and indeed do claim — with better arguments — the title of Europe’s *antemurale christianitatis*. In an open pan-European contest for the flattering title, medieval Catholic Spain — with its remarkable results in exterminating and expelling both Muslims and Jews — would probably be the favourite.)

Obviously no Muslim can feel comfortable as part of any “bulwark of Christianity”, either Croatian or Serbian.

Serbian and Croatian proclamations about Bosnian Muslims as being “really Serbian” or “really Croatian” are, however, necessary premises for the respective political claims about Bosnia as a “really Serbian” or “really Croatian” territory.

If the Muslims declare themselves to be Serbian, then Bosnia-Herzegovina would become a Serb-dominated land. According to this hypothesis, two religious groups of Bosnian Serbs, Muslims and Orthodox Christians, would make up an absolute majority in the country.

If the Muslims declare themselves to be Croatian, however, Bosnia-Herzegovina would become a Croat-dominated country. According to this interpretation, two religious groups of Bosnian Croats (Muslims and Roman Catholics) would make up an absolute majority in the country. In one sentence: “One who has the Muslims he has Bosnia”. 21

In order to keep political autonomy of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the overwhelming majority of Bosnian Muslims (about ninety percent, but the statistics vary) have refused to declare themselves as Serbian or Croatian. 22 Those who did declare themselves as Serbs or Croats were mostly Muslim intellectuals and members of the ruling socialist elite. 23

The Muslim masses have chosen another path. In the 1948 Yugoslav census they were listed as “undeclared (undecided, undetermined) Muslims” (*muslimani neopredijeljeni*). In 1953, they were described as “undeclared Yugoslavs” (*Jugoslaveni neopredijeljeni*). In 1953, they were described as “undeclared Yugoslavs” (*Jugoslaveni neopredijeljeni*). In 1953, they were described as “undeclared Yugoslavs” (*Jugoslaveni neopredijeljeni*). Later they were registered as “Muslims

---

20 See the chapter “Serbs and Vlachs” in Noel Malcolm’s *Bosnia: A Short History*, 70–81.
23 Bakir Tanović, “Hiljadugodišnje ime” [A Thousand-Year-Old Name], in *Bosna i bošnjaštvo*, 127.
in the ethnic sense. Finally, in 1971, Bosnia’s Muslims were officially recognized as a separate national group equal with other Bosnia’s and Yugoslavia’s nationalities. A Western expert in the area summarizes the issue as follows:

Today in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there are Muslims who consider themselves primarily “Muslim Croats”, those who consider themselves “Muslim Serbs”, those who consider themselves “Bosnian Muslims” (i.e., “Muslims in the ethnic sense”), and those who, in the spirit of the [Alija Izetbegović’s] “Islamic Declaration”, see themselves simply as “Muslims”.

In the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia’s Muslims were both a religious community and an officially recognized nationality. Thus two opposing spheres — Islam and ruling communist ideology — offered two different definitions of Muslimness (or Muslimhood, muslimanstvo).

From the political perspective, Bosnian Muslims were one of three constitutive nations (narodi) in Bosnia-Herzegovina (along with Bosnia’s Serbs and Bosnia’s Croats) and one of six officially recognized nations of the federal Yugoslavia (along with Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Montenegrins). From this political viewpoint, it was possible, “normal”, and even desirable to describe the Muslims in secular, non-religious terms. The socialist establishment supported and promoted those persons who had Muslim names but were indeed atheists.

From the religious viewpoint, Bosnia’s Muslims were simultaneously believers in the five pillars of Islam and Bosnia’s non-Christians (non-atheists and non-Jews). Bringa observes that, during her 1980s research, Bosnia’s Muslims were defined primarily in negative terms (as those Bosnians who were neither Catholic-nor-Orthodox Christians-nor-atheists). During the 1990s’ genocide the positive definition prevailed (Bosnian Muslims as members of the world ummah).

The difference between the political and religious definitions of the Muslims was reflected in Bosnian orthography. Thus Musliman (with a capital “M”) denoted a “member of the Muslim nationality” while musliman (with a

---


small “m”) referred to a “Muslim believer”. (Similarly, the term for a “Christian” was written with a small letter: kršćanin, in Croatian, or hrrišćanin, in Serbian.)

Bringa’s book attempts to “convey, not what everybody else claimed what or who they [Muslims] were, but how they themselves lived their identity and claimed who they were by being Muslim the Bosnian way” (p. 36). Her conclusions parallel a prominent Bosnian Muslim scholar’s description of his own community: “According to their language, color of their skin, their Slavic origin, and the soil they inhabit — Bosniaks are Europeans. According to the destiny they have been exposed to in Europe, their faith and the sense of cultural belonging, Bosniaks are in this or that way, and in spite of everything, Muslims”. 26

A Western Researcher in the Muslim Environment

In the late 1980s, the authorities of the former socialist Yugoslavia granted — with some reluctance — their official permission for Bringa’s long-term field research. The focus of her study was a village located two hours north of Sarajevo. The village was ethnically mixed: two third Muslim and one third Catholic (Croatian). During her research (in 1987 and 1988), she lived in a Muslim house. The facts that Bringa was an outsider, woman, and unmarried determined not only her position in the Muslim environment but also the limitations of her field findings:

As a stranger, woman, and new member of the household, I was initially seen as a threat to the reputation of the household. My hostess therefore strictly supervised all interactions between me and members of other households, at least until my loyalty to “my household” had been understood and firmly established. I had to work within these restrictions, but I benefited from having the loyalty of fellow household members in return. In any disagreement between villagers concerning the character of my stay or my whereabouts, members of my household would always defend me in order to protect my good reputation which, of course, was ultimately also the reputation of the household of which I was a member (p. 242).

In the beginning, Bringa was treated as a newly arrived bride. For example, she wore a local headscarf “with the knot under her chin”, indicating her status (p. 249). Bringa admits that her position delineated her scholarly observations of the events in the village: “I discuss all this from the point of view of the

bride, since this is the perspective which was accessible to me as a female, unmarried anthropologist” (p. 120). Even though she writes that her status restricted her “to the world of women and excluded [her] from the world of men” (p. 5), it is a fact that Bringa offers also a surprisingly complete and correct description of men’s activities in central Bosnia.

Gradually, as the anthropologist was being accepted by the local community, both the Muslims and she herself were aware of a boundary separating them. When she expressed a wish to fast during Ramađan, she was advised that it was “not obligatory” for her but that such a voluntary act would be seen as good by God. Bringa concludes: “Thus, to a limited extent a non-Muslim can also partake in the Muslim moral community, without converting, by earning sevap” [Bosnian word of Turkish origin denoting a good deed; Arabic hasanah] (p. 161).

Bringa describes life of central Bosnia’s Muslims in the household, neighbourhood, village, and state. The household in rural Bosnia was seen as the basic moral cell and “the only safe sphere for the expression of an exclusive, unaccommodated ethno-religious identity” (p. 80). She focuses on three types of relationships in the household: old couples vs. young couples, fathers vs. sons, and mothers vs. their daughters-in-law. She then describes life-cycle rituals of the Muslims (from childbirth through wedding ceremonies to death).

The people and events she saw revealed not only some Christians’ prejudices against Islam but also challenged her own preconceptions about the religion. For example, Bringa writes that she “never heard or overheard Muslims pass a value judgment on how Catholics did things as Catholics” but she did notice many Christians’ comments on Islam. She concludes: “This has inevitably led me to speculate (after also having considered my own [Protestant] Christian background might have had) about the greater level of tolerance of Muslims toward other ethnoreligious communities than vice versa” (pp. 241–42).

Local Muslim Traditions

As Bringa emphasizes at the end of her book, the aim of her study was not universal Islamic customs (as officially prescribed and performed) but rather specific, local Muslim traditions. Being Muslim the Bosnian Way contains a goldmine of information concerning the local practices and customs of central Bosnian Muslims.

In Bosnia, the influence of the atheism-promoting state authorities reached even small villages. True, Muslim children had the opportunity to go to local religious schools (mektebs; Arabic kuttāb, katātib) but they were compelled to go to state-sponsored primary school (for eight years). All fit
Muslim men served in the multi-ethnic Yugoslav People’s Army and many of them subsequently worked in socialist factories. Thus men were more socialized and integrated in the secularized, non-Muslim state organizations. After their retirement, however, many Muslim men became active in the religious life of their local community and the mosque.

Grown up Muslim men openly expressed their emotional support and care of children: “Teenage boys, men, and fathers usually show great affection toward children; they cuddle and play with babies and small children around them, their own as well as other family members’ and neighbours’” (p. 108). This reviewer’s field research confirms Bringa’s observation that Muslim “teenage boys, men, and fathers usually show great affection toward children”. This fact stands in a stark contrast with the expression of positive emotions among other ethnic groups in the area. For example, the prominent psychohistorian Alenka Puhar notes that violence, not affection, prevails among Serbs and Montenegrins. “To show affection and gentleness”, writes Puhar, “was to be soft—something no man could afford to be”. 27

Bosnian Muslim women had less contact with state institutions. They, however, practiced Islamic customs more vigorously than men. Indeed, the bearers of Bosnian Muslim identity were women.

Occasionally, both Muslim men and women gathered in evening visits (sijelo). Muslim women also enjoyed their coffee-visits (at least twice a day). An ideal Muslim woman would be a hardworking (vrijedna), good (fina), clean (čista), honourable (poštena), and silent (šutljiva) person who does not “go about a lot” (puno hoda). Women themselves encouraged and supported the personal qualities that were appreciated by the entire Muslim community.

The word for girl, cura, emphasized her unmarried status and implied her virginity. After the marriage, the woman changed her behaviour, dress, way of joking, and conversation with men. Some girls entered marriage not after a traditionally preferred large public wedding feast but by elopement. The latter custom was called cura se ukrala, “girl stole away” (she actively and willingly participated in it). Marriage by elopement was practiced among Bosnian Christians as well.

Among the Muslims there was a taboo of marrying any relative within “the ninth generation”, a taboo that had been well-known among some local Christians as well. It was also prohibited for Muslims to marry any person related po mlijeku, “through milk” or, more correctly, those who shared the same breast.

---

27 See Alenka Puhar’s excellent analysis of “Yugoslav Childhood” in her article “Childhood Nightmares and Dreams of Revenge” in The Journal of Psychohistory, Vol. 22, Number 2 (Fall 1994), 137.
Married village-women were often addressed after their husband’s first name. For example, Salim’s bride or wife was referred to as Salimovica. This man-originated female name consists of three grammatical elements: (1) the stem of husband’s first name (Salim); (2) a suffix of possession (-ov, -ev, or -in); (3) a suffix for feminine nouns (-ica] giving the name of husband’s wife: Salim + ov + ica = Salimovica “Salim’s wife”. The same form of addressing married women can be found among Bosnian Catholics.

Bringa gives a comprehensive description of Muslim practices that were not approved by the official Islamic authorities. They include local folk customs, faith healing, traditional folk medicine, activities of the Naqshbandi Şüfi order, and some practices perceived as Christian-influenced.

Bringa’s descriptions are surprisingly correct, even in cases when she was faced with terms unrecorded in other sources and whose exact meaning was unclear to experts. For example, in central Bosnia she recorded the verb ograjisati, a “word which does not exist in any dictionary, and my Sarajevan informants did not understand it. They suggested it was supposed to be nagaziti (na urok), which means to be bewitched, or alternatively nagrajisati, which means to get into trouble or to fare badly” (p. 179).

The interpretation cited above is mainly correct. However, urok is connected with “evil eyes” (urokljive oči) and with supposedly powerful (magic) words. This reviewer who has for years conducted his field research in northern Bosnia also recorded the verb ograjisati (nagrajisati). The reviewer would suggest a possible etymology of those expressions. The initial verbal prefixes (o-, na-) are originally prepositions denoting “on, onto” and “in, into”, respectively. The ending -isati is a Serbian verbal suffix. The root of the term, -gra(j), is the dialectal word for “bean” (grah, in standard language). Traditionally, Gypsy women have used beans for foretelling one’s future by “throwing beans” (bacanje graha).

This reviewer’s additional explanation of ograjisati may be connected with Bringa’s observation that rural Bosnian Muslims were afraid of “evil eye” and sibir (Arabic sihr, magic) “caused mainly by Serbian, especially female, sorcerers” (p. 182). Bringa writes:

One logical explanation as to why Serb sorcerers in particular (rather than Muslim or Catholic ones) are believed to cast evil spells could be that Muslims were more ambivalent about Orthodox Serbs than about Catholic Croats. This in turn is mainly due to historical factors: first, the Serbian Orthodox Church’s close identification with the Serbian nationalist cause and its fervent anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim content and, second, Serbian nationalists’ atrocities toward Bosnian Muslims during World War II, which had left the Muslims fearful of the Serbs’ capacity for evil (p. 182).
There is a third possible reason: most female Gypsy (Roma) sorcerers who travelled through Bosnia had come from Serbia. Unlike most of Bosnian Gypsies who were Muslim, many of the Gypsy newcomers had Serbian Orthodox Christian personal names. (During the 1990s, the president of a worldwide association of Roma, was a Gypsy man with a distinct Serbian Orthodox name.)

Some rural Muslims had two personal names: a real one (known only among close relatives and friends) and public name (for all other peoples). The supposed reason for this duality was the belief that, in some cases, the original meaning (or *sila*, “strength, power”) of Arab-originated Muslim names did not correspond to the personal character of their bearers. In other words, some Muslim names were considered as inadequate (“too heavy”) and had to be changed accordingly (p. 184).

Concerning the status of women, Bringa concludes that “Muslim women in Bosnia have access to the mosque to an extent which would be unusual in most of the Islamic world” (p. 201). To be true, some activities in the mosque (e.g., the Friday prayers) were not attended by women. However, during Ramađan some women could recite the Qur’an in the mosque. In the house, women gathered and arranged the prayer for the dead (*tevhid*, in Bosnian; *tawḥīd*, in Arabic). “In most traditional mosques in rural Bosnia both men and women enter through the same door” while in the main city mosques as well as those recently built and paid for by Middle Eastern countries there are two separate entries (p. 201).

Even though the official Islamic authorities banned the Ṣūfī dervish order in Bosnia after World War II, the traditionally strong influence of the order was felt in the region. Some Muslim *bodžas* (from Turkish *boca*, an equivalent of Arabic *imām*) were involved in faith, healing and other activities officially proscribed as superstitious. It is interesting that not only Muslims but also Bosnian Catholic and Orthodox Christians visited *bodžas* asking for the latter’s spiritual advice. The influence of the Ṣūfī order manifested itself in *zikir* (Arabic *dhikr*), or chanting the names of God while drumming, and following state of trance by its performers. According to a female informant, there were also some Bosnian women dervishes, but the information has not been confirmed by other sources.

Officially discouraged practices were performed even by female Islamic instructors, *bulas*. This reviewer recorded the word *bula* among Bosnian Christians as well. In the Christian usage, *bula* denotes any Muslim woman dressed in her traditional *dimije*, or “wide, baggy trousers”. For example, *bulas* performed the ritual called *salijevati stravu*, “to pour horrors”. It was performed at the request of women who had been bereaved by the death of their dear ones, or horrified by an unknown cause. The “ritual could only be
performed by devout women who could recite Qur’an verses” (p. 216). (This reviewer recorded the same ritual, with a slightly different name, saljevati stravine, among northern Bosnian Catholic women as well.)

It is noteworthy that Bringa challenges dominant interpretations of customs shared by both Muslims and Christians. According to many scholars, the shared practices represent either “Christian” elements taken over by the Muslims or are “pre-Christian” customs. Bringa writes: “I have yet to come across a scholar who argues for the equally plausible explanation that Christians in this area have picked up an Islamic practice. After all Islamic philosophy, religion, and practices dominated this region for more than five hundred years” (p. 149).

Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims

The local Muslims and their Catholic neighbours were involved in a whole range of dynamic interrelations. On the one hand, there was a clear separation and at times even tensions between the two ethno-religious communities. On the other hand, these differences and oppositions did not prevent mutual cooperation and even friendship between members of the two groups.

Local Muslims and Catholics worked for each other and formed bonds of friendship between themselves. Good relations between neighbours were considered as important as good relations among members of one’s own family or religious community. Muslims contributed money for a new Catholic Church, and Catholics contributed money for a mosque. This traditional practice was considered both a general pattern of reciprocity, and sevap (p. 75). Hospitality as a “form of social exchange” was characteristic of both groups (p. 68). Members of the two groups greeted each other with secular greetings while using religious greetings only within their respective religious communities. As a rule, Muslim men made friendship with Catholic men, and Catholic women with Muslim women. Bringa exemplifies this practice in everyday life:

When I was living in the village, the [Muslim] women in my neighbourhood and a Catholic friend would sometimes meet in the evenings and sing in the traditional style (with one woman leading the tune and the others following) for entertainment. Both Catholics and Muslims take off their shoes before entering someone’s house. Except for their religious symbols they decorated their houses in the same way and both Muslim and Catholic women pride themselves on

---

28 For more information about the importance of good neighbourly relations for preservation of Bosnia, see Mustafa Spahić’s brochure Komšije [Neighbors] [Sarajevo: Press Centar AR BiH [The Press Center of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina], April 1994], 24, 28–32.
keeping a clean and tidy house (although cleanliness is often seen as a particular Muslim virtue). Expressions that (Christian) western Europeans often associate with Muslims and their “Islamic” attitude toward life, were used as frequently by Catholics, as by Muslims in “If God wills” (ako bog da, “If god gives”. Muslims may add inshallah, using both the “Serbo-Croat” and Arabic versions in the same sentence)... (p. 68)

Differences between the two communities appeared in such fields as specific customs, personal names, and diet. Food in Catholic houses, prepared possibly with lard, was a problem for Muslims who used vegetable oil instead. (This reviewer is aware that some Bosnian Christians — both Catholic and Orthodox — neither used lard nor kept pigs near Muslim houses — out of respect for their Muslim neighbours.) It is noteworthy that “Muslims and Catholics were not involved in each others’ neighbourhood quarrels” (p. 69).

Bringa also touches one of the myths of multiethnic Bosnia — mixed marriages. A supposedly disproportionately high number of mixed marriages (about one third of all marriages) in the country has been interpreted as an indicator of Bosnian Muslims’ secular, Europeanized lifestyle. Bringa refers to a British scholar’s data demonstrating that allegedly 27 percent of all marriages in pre-war Bosnia were ethnically mixed (p. 151). However, research data should correct this misperception: 92 percent of Bosnian Muslims — who lived in a religiously very mixed area — married within their own community. The Slavic Muslims had the second highest percentage of intra-community marriages of all nationalities in the former Yugoslavia; the first were the predominantly Muslim Albanians (non-Slavs), with 96 percent marriages with their co-nationals.\footnote{See Ivan Šimonović, “Socialism, Federalism, and Ethnic Identity” in Dennison Rusinow, ed., \textit{Yugoslavia: A Fractured Federation} (Washington: The Wilson Center Press, 1988), 51.}

Unlike Bosnia’s urban and more secularized population, all three rural Bosnian groups (Muslims, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians) strongly disapproved of mixed marriages. A Muslim woman explained: “We respect their holidays, their churches, their prayers and we see it as a sin to blaspheme against their sacred symbols, but we do not marry them” (p. 79). Mixed marriages were perceived as a threat to the basic religious and moral cell — the household. In the village Bringa studied, “there were three such [religiously mixed] marriages in the late eighties. In all three cases a Muslim man married non-Muslim woman, who was in all three instances an Orthodox Serb. This is worth noting, since the village is in an area which is mainly mixed Muslim and Catholic Croat. In other words, the bride was from the only ethno-religious category not part of this village community” (p. 151). An explanation for
those Muslim-Orthodox Christian couples is that any possible marriage disagreements or divorces would not affect the good relations between the Muslims and Catholics in the village.

**Bringa’s 1980s Findings and the 1990s War**

Bringa rightly criticizes “the disastrous effect” of numerous “peace initiatives” sponsored by international negotiators and mediators. For instance, according to the Vance-Owen plan, the Muslim-Catholic village as well as its administrative centre and market town (with a 51.7 percent Catholic Croat majority) had been designated as a “Croatian canton”. The final consequence of such political “designs” was that all the Muslims were either expelled from the village or were detained by Bosnian Croats.

Bringa admits that her book offers “ethnographic data that are now history” (p. 198). For that reason, she wondered even about the proper grammatical tense used in her study: “The original manuscript had been written in the ethnographic present, but it became impossible to write in the present when such dramatic changes had taken place, particularly since the Muslims did not live in the village any more” (p. xvii).

Bringa gives her unequivocally negative answer to the question whether the material she gathered during the late 1980s could explain the 1990s bloodshed in Bosnia:

> Neither my material nor this book can or intends to explain the war for the simple reason that the war was not created by those villagers who are the focus of this account. This war has been orchestrated from places where the people I lived and worked among were not represented, and where their voices were not heard. In the end, after resisting for almost a year, these villagers too became part of the war, initially becoming involved in defending their own homes and families (p. 5).

Bringa notes that both local Muslims and Catholics agree that this war was caused by forces organized beyond Bosnia’s borders. This shared Muslim-Catholic belief is in accord with the fact that Bosnia had a strong “tradition of tolerance and coexistence that goes back for many centuries”, as two American historians of Bosnia emphasize.30

As distinct from a flood of recently published “experts’ analyses” and ideologically saturated volumes about Bosniaks, Bringa’s work stands out as a well-documented study of these native European Muslims. Her anthropological masterpiece — along with Noel Malcolm’s excellent historical

---

book *Bosnia: A Short History* — may well be the best Bosnia-related scholarly product made by Western researchers. *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way* should be on the shelf of any scholar interested in culture of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

* * *


An essential element of this pathbreaking work by M. Umer Chapra is the broad multidisciplinary and historically grounded approach to the subject of Islamic Economics. The book rises above many limitations of the existing works on the subject and provides an excellent basis on which a dialogue, oriented towards founding a new discipline, can be started. In particular, the book avoids presenting Islamic economics as an interesting/curious appendage to neoclassical economics, a trap which is difficult to escape since the dominant economic discourse is neoclassical.

Before discussing specific aspects of the book, it is important to raise a fundamental point: what is Islamic Economics? On page 50, Chapra writes that “Islamic economics would give ... humanitarian goals ... a prominent place” and this is taken as the key and defining feature of Islamic Economics. Such a definition begs the question: “why introduce the prefix ‘Islamic’ before economics”? Chapra answers this question by saying that this is an effective strategy for creating consensus among Muslims. He also says that if conventional economics moves towards introducing moral values and justice into its analysis, the two modes of analysis might converge and the prefix “Islamic” may lose its significance. I believe that we need to consider the ‘strategic’ use of the Islamic prefix further, and also compare it with other possible strategies.

There is no doubt that in the West, economics was divorced from morality in the course of a long process which cannot be sketched here. It is also clear that this divorce has been the source of many policies and principles which have directly led to an increase in human suffering – deliberately naïve applications of the “invisible hand” principle have been used to formulate policies which have led to greater poverty and suffering throughout the world. Indeed, any human being would find morally abhorrent a situation in which there is more than enough capacity to produce sufficient food for everyone,
yet that fact remains that there are starving children, malnutrition, hunger, and disease. Similarly, it is abhorrent that the amount of money spent on luxury items in advanced countries is more than what is enough to eliminate hunger in the entire world. It seems clear that Chapra’s goal of reintroducing morality and justice into economic analysis is laudable and eminently worthwhile. There are three potential strategies for achieving such a goal.

Strategy 1: There is sufficient consensus about moral values so that one need not appeal to Islam for this purpose. Large social security programmes in Europe reflect the general secular consensus on the need to help the poor. Thus one could initiate a movement to reintroduce moral values into economics on purely secular grounds, without necessarily referring to “Islam”. Indeed, Marxism and Socialism appealed to large numbers of people precisely because they invoked concepts of justice and urged people to fight against oppression. Chapra cites several non-Muslim authors who have urged the inclusion of moral values into economic analysis, showing that a purely secular approach is possible as a strategy for moving towards “Humanitarian Economics”. Strategy 1 is a perfectly viable strategy towards achieving a “humanistic economics”, but it cannot serve the needs of the Muslim countries as the current consensus on morality, which includes a laissez-faire attitude towards sex and other moral improprieties, could never command a consensus in Muslim countries.

Strategy 2: Instead of using the human values on which there is general agreement, we could use Islamic values as the basis for morality, and attempt to introduce these into the neoclassical economic framework. If we tread carefully, justifying Islamic values on universally acceptable moral grounds, we can hope to make the arguments palatable to non-Muslims and thereby produce an analysis which might appeal to both Muslims and morally-inclined secular economists. This is the strategy implemented by Chapra.

Strategy 3: We could explicitly address a purely Muslim audience. Principles of economics would be derived from the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and the practice of early Muslims. We would not need to refer much to the writings of atheist philosophers to justify Islamic policy measures; indeed, we can not safely do so. Chapra mentions, with approval, the Islamic precedents of borrowing useful innovations from other civilizations. However, it is one thing to borrow the technology for cannon-making, and to keep systems for taxation and irrigation in place without change, and quite another to borrow alien moral philosophies. To the extent that neoclassical economics is built on a secular and positivist worldview, as recognized clearly by Chapra, Muslims cannot adopt it without essential modifications.

Strategy 3 appears the most effective way of building consensus in Muslim societies. In this case, a lot of tortuous formulation required to justify and
explain Islam to the potential secular audience can be done away with. For example, almost at the bottom of page 60, Chapra justifies the use of moral motivation as a way of reducing the “burden on the government for safeguarding social interest”. Zakāt is described as a “social self-help measure”. Substantial effort can be saved since we no longer need to take the time to justify Islam to non-Muslims in our discussion of Islamic economics. Also our discourse will be more authentically Islamic if it is anchored in Islamic history and tradition and follows the Muslim intellectual tradition.

Strategy 2, the one adopted by Chapra, is superficially attractive, as it offers the option of combining the best of both worlds. However, I believe this strategy falls between two chairs. The use of the term “Islam” effectively excludes the vast majority of secular scholars. All except a tiny minority will never regard Islamic Economics as more than a curiosity. Also they are effectively excluded from participating in the dialogue because they do not accept our fundamental assumptions and are typically ignorant of Islam. At the same time, the vast majority of the Muslims will identify the Western style discourse and will intellectual heritage of Islamic economics with their colonial heritage of oppression and distrust it instinctively. Western-trained intellectuals like ourselves (with rare exceptions, anyone who can read and write English falls into this category) are fond of building bridges between the East and the West. This seems necessary for our survival with the resent that we are forced to harmonize two intellectual traditions even though they are fundamentally contradictory. We do not have a sufficiently clear awareness that the vast masses of Muslims are perfectly content with their own tradition and, with good reason, distrust Western ideologies.

To summarize, I believe that as a strategy for appealing to secular but morally oriented economists, Chapra has provided many secular style arguments and has referred to many secularly oriented writers to provide justification and support for essentially Islamic positions. However, I do not consider this a good strategy in view of the danger of alienating large numbers of ordinary Muslims. This consideration does not reduce the value of the arguments presented in the book. It only emphasises that they should be packaged differently. We now proceed to a chapter-by-chapter description.

Chapter I: “Conventional Economics”. The book opens with this chapter which consists of a sugar-coated, albeit trenchant critique of conventional economics. Although Chapra acknowledges the “towering accomplishments” of conventional economics, he also lists its failings on several counts. At the most fundamental level, the goals of economics policy are normative (reduction of poverty, just and/or equitable income distributions, etc.), while the positive and materialistic worldview on which modern economics is built does not provide any support for moral considerations. The approach is
conciliatory and is designed to provide a platform for secularly oriented economists to participate in the dialogue on the subject. The critique is sufficiently sharp so that one would be justified in saying that conventional economics fails on critical grounds of according essential importance to human well-being and hence should be abandoned. The new framework suggested, a framework which incorporates moral values and justice, can be considered a radical shift of paradigm, which indeed it is. This is a strategic decision. As I have suggested earlier, this radical approach does alienate secular economists but is much more likely to succeed and create consensus among the Muslim majority.

Chapter II: “The Islamic Paradigm Through History”. This chapter described the ideals of the Islamic economic system, and the difficulties faced in achieving these ideals throughout Islamic history. The chapter describes how Islamically accepted economic goals conflict with the fundamentals of neoclassical theory such as Pareto Optimal or the quest for positive, morally neutral knowledge. The chapter raises the issue that Islamic ideals, while extremely desirable, have rarely been realized in Islamic societies, but defers the discussion for this to a later chapter.

Chapter III: “Can Science be Built on a Religious Paradigm?” In Europe, widespread corruption in the Church led to a revolt against Catholic Christianity. One of the forces which emerged in the aftermath was Science, as a replacement for sacred knowledge. In his book Does God Exist? Catholic historian Hans Küng has examined the conflict between Science and Religion that arose, and explained it as a result of bad decisions on part of the Church leaders (for example, the decision to persecute Galileo). Chapra also starts this chapter with the premise that there is no necessary conflict between science and religion. Just as historical circumstances in the West led to such a conflict, so quite different historical circumstances in the East also led to such a conflict.

Chapra casts the Mu'tazilites in the role of rationalists in Islam, and suggests that by grabbing power and dictating their views to others, they alienated the common Muslims. This was supposedly a great loss to the Muslims, since it led to an abandonment of the rationalist tradition. This view has been espoused by other writers as well, but it appears fundamentally wrong for several reasons. Historically, the movement arose at a time when works of Greek philosophers (Socrates, Aristotle, etc.) had been translated into Arabic, and had caused a great deal of intellectual excitement. A group of thinkers wanted to elevate these works to the status of the Qur’an and Hadith, maintaining that “reason” was on par with Revelation. However, to these thinkers, later termed Mu'tazilites, “reason” was equivalent with Greek philosophy. Scientific progress took place in the West following the rejection
of the idealistic Greek philosophy. Nearly all of the core concepts of Greek natural philosophy were subsequently proven wrong. Had the Mu'tazilites succeeded, it would have been a tragedy for Islam – we would have been saddled with a whole set of erroneous ideas about nature which would be regarded as being on par with Revelation. Indeed, much of the opposition of the Church to the new science in Europe took place because of the Church’s implicit acceptance of Greek ideas and the harmonization of Greek philosophy with Christian ideas espoused by a number of leading Catholic scholars.

Many inventions, discoveries, intellectual accomplishments (such as in Islamic Spain) testify to the fact that the loss of the Mu'tazilites in no way closed the door on reason in Islam. It is no doubt true that with the passage of centuries, there has been a certain amount of rigidity, ossification, and resistance to new ideas among the 'ulamā‘. This has been one of the contributing causes of the Muslim decline. However, it appears entirely incorrect to relate this in any way to the Mu'tazilah.

Chapter IV: “Islamic Economics: What Should It be?” Here Chapra spells out an ambitious set of goals for Islamic Economics and for Islamic economists. The chapter is extremely awkward because of Chapra’s adherence to Strategy 2 discussed above. Whole sections are devoted to why it is permissible to use divinely ordained goals and values and to take these from the Qur’an. This is unnecessary for Muslims, and cannot succeed with non-Muslims. A section on “Faith” and its importance attempts the impossible: it tries to justify faith on secular grounds to the faithless. In Europe, the advance of a triumphant Science in face of a retreating Christianity led to a literature known as “apologetics” which attempted to find new justifications for Christian belief using scientific tools. This chapter is a valiant apology, extremely well done, but ultimately fruitless.

Chapters V and VI: “Socio-Economic Dynamics of Classical Islamic Economics” and “The Causes of Muslim Decline”. These are the strongest chapters of the book. Chapter 6 spells out a theoretical framework developed by Ibn Khaldūn to analyse the rise and fall of societies. In an interesting and original analysis, chapter 7 applies this framework to the current Muslim decline. The global and integrated perspective provided by Ibn Khaldūn is a refreshing change from overly materialistic monocausal theories for historical decline common in the West (the latest being Kennedy’s The Decline and Fall of Great Powers).

Chapter VII: “The Recent Revival: A Survey”. This is a knowledgeable and informed survey of recent development in the Islamic world, with a focus on issues related to banking, finance and economics. It looks at the current practice, and compares it with Islamic objectives and ideals. The contrast is
glaringly obvious. Nonetheless, there are clear-cut achievements and some progress has indeed been made. The key issue is: “Why does the Islamic vision fail to be realized in the present-day Muslim world?”

Chapter VIII: “The Future Course of Action”. This chapter makes a well rounded set of suggestions for action which most Muslims would agree with. One of the principal suggestions is the need to make a peaceful struggle for political reform. Here Chapra uses the buzzword “democracy” as a desirable goal, and has indicated elsewhere in the book that one of the reasons for Muslim decline was a lack of democracy. I believe that decentralized-decision making which is responsive to the needs of the people is essential for progress. Currently “democracy” is often taken to mean free elections, and we have considerable historical experience that freely elected rulers can be extremely exploitative and unresponsive to the needs of the masses. The use of the word democracy tends to highlight the wrong set of issues and should be avoided. Developing quality institutions in response to the genuine public needs and avoiding those ‘foreign experts’ who have quick magic fixes will be essential to ensure the success of the Muslim ummah.

Asad Zaman

*   *   *


The Fortress of Faith: The Attitude Towards Muslims in Fifteenth Century Spain by Ana Echevarria is the twelfth volume in Brill’s Medieval Iberian Peninsula (MIP) Texts and Studies series. The author is an independent historian who has written a number of articles on Christian-Muslim cross-cultural relations in medieval Iberia, and the present work is a revision of her doctoral thesis.

The book focuses on the critical decades leading up to the conquest of the Muslim kingdom of Granada in 1492, with particular emphasis on the period 1430-1470. A basic premise of the work is that a large number of studies have been conducted on the fall of Granada itself, yet few scholars have looked at the approach towards Muslims articulated by Christian intellectuals in the final stages of the Reconquista, in anticipation of the event. Echevarria maintains that most of the research in the area of medieval Christian views on