There are no ready-made or shortcut solutions to the challenges faced by Muslim communities being in a dominant different culture. Any and every solution may have its benefits and sensitivities. However, the institutionalization of a parallel holistic education system is one viable and acceptable remedy. In the US within the Christian and Jewish communities parochial education system is a known phenomenon. But other socio-cultural and religious measures are equally needed for sustaining a pluralistic society.

Needless to say that Muslims, living in the west, admire freedom of speech, democracy and individual liberty as supposed to exist in the west. Public policy of certain western countries, however, when it runs against their own ideals does frustrate and disappoint Muslims. They notice, like their non-Muslim neighbours in the country of their choice, blatant violation of civil liberties and disregard of the cultural and religious rights of second and third generation Muslims living in the west. In this context, wearing of scarf by Muslim women is not a minor issue. It symbolizes the attitude of the predominant culture toward the sub-cultures. It exposes the hollowness of pluralism, cultural and religious liberty and equal opportunity claimed by the west.

A meaningful co-existence and a tolerant, peaceful and enlightened society can be created through mutual engagement and respect for differences in worldviews. Assimilation, alienation, integration or emigration alone can not solve the problem. Bridging the gap through an ongoing interaction, removal of misgivings, confidence building through change of attitude, significant modification in civil policies and respect for religious and cultural rights of the Muslims can, in due course, lead to a true pluralistic society in the west.

Anis Ahmad


*Popular Sufism in Eastern Europe* by H.T. Norris is one of those works of historiographic description, so common nowadays, that are remorselessly detailed and unendurably dull. The book has nine chapters and a conclusion,
two appendixes, a glossary of terms, notes, selected bibliography and an index of names and terms, taking up 155 pages of close-set type.

Although the book was intended, as the author notes at the outset, as essential reading for connoisseurs of Islam, it should be said that it is in fact an academic and premeditatedly forced theory on “heretical Islam” in Bosnia and the Balkans. It not only lacks stylistic appeal, interpretative depth and insight, but also historical accuracy and academic responsibility, which would require that a true account of concepts, events and facts should be the prime concern. Regrettably, this is not the case in this book, which is packed with so many names, events and concepts that it seems to be intended to convey the impression that the author is immensely erudite. All that these names, events and concepts ultimately provide, however, is a distorted picture of almost everything the book describes. The few minor details that more or less accord with the historical facts are simply not even worth mentioning.

The author opted to describe popular Sufism in eastern Europe—Bosnia, Bulgaria, Albania and Tataristan—not as a secondary feature resulting from the arrival of the original Sufi orders and their development in these regions, formerly conquered by the Ottomans. Instead, he portrays it as the principal spiritual trend and *locus* from which different versions of Islam that differ greatly from the original Islam brought by the Ottomans evolved in these countries. Let us take Bosnia and its Islamic religious tradition and culture, which evolved from the idea of Islam, as an example.

If I had not been born in Bosnia, and had not been professionally involved in Islamic dogmatics, the history of religion and comparative mystic traditions (Sufism, Kabbala and Christian mysticism), I would never have learned from Professor Norris’s book that he was describing my own homeland and the Islam that is a living presence there. This is true notwithstanding the array of evidence presented with much sophistication. For instance, Professor Norris has exactly the same view of the history of Islam in Bosnia and in Albania—that is dominated by the Bektashi order, an extremely disputable and unacceptable Sufi community in the eyes of orthodox Islam and the authentic Sufi tradition, and one of which there is not the faintest trace in Bosnia. Despite this, the author searches, as if through a microscope, for the minutest sign of popular, and preferably heretical, religiosity and spirituality. His purpose is not so much as to contrast it with the prevailing trend of Islamic religious tradition and culture in Bosnia, but rather to portray this alternative, heterodox trace, minute though it is, as a synonym for the development and foundations of the only spiritual heritage Bosnians of the Islamic faith possess.
Professor Norris echoes the western orientalists of the nineteenth century, who advanced the most fanciful of theories on the origins of Sufism simply to argue that it was not the product of an authentic, thinking Muslim genius. Like them, he too prefers to equate the Bosnian Muslims—the Bosniacs—with the pre-Islamic, so-called Bogomil or kristjan tradition and Sufi Islam or Islam in Bosnia. As he sees it; anything rather than having to admit that the Bosniacs have a more than five-hundred-year heritage of original Sunni Islam of the Ḥanafī madhhab, as an authentic, wholly orthodox and magnificent Sufi tradition which they evolved under the direct inspiration of orthodox Islam.

Regrettably, he has been aided and abetted in his efforts by some local ‘Muslim intellectuals’ in Bosnia, who are intellectually infatuated by Bosnian pre-Islamic, Bogomil and kristjan spirituality. These ‘intellectuals’ have never made a serious, direct study of the history of authentic Sufi literature in the Muslim world, the Balkans and Bosnia. Therefore, they did not flinch from suggesting to Professor Norris an entirely erroneous approach to the historical genealogy of the idea of Islam and its spirituality in Bosnia and the Balkans. The best evidence of this is the works by these intellectuals listed by Professor Norris in his bibliography. Also significant is the fact that in his entire book, including the bibliography, there is no place for works by serious Bosnian authorities writing on the Sufi literature of the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, many of whom, writing in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, wrote in three oriental languages (Turkish, Arabic and Persian).

I have in mind authors and their works such as Professor Džemal Čehajić and his Derviški redovi u Jugoslaviji (Sufi Orders in Yugoslavia), Sarajevo, 1986; Professor Hazim Šabanović and his Književnost muslimana BiH na orientalnim jezicima (Literature of the Muslims of BiH in Oriental Languages), Sarajevo, 1973; Professor Safvet-beg Bašagić and his Bošnjaci i Hercegovci u islamskoj književnosti (Bosnians and Herzegovinians in Islamic Literature), Sarajevo, 1912 and Kratka uputa u prošlost Bosne i Hercegovine (Brief Introduction to the Past of Bosnia and Herzegovina), Sarajevo, 1900; Professor Mehmed Handžić, Književni rad bosanskohercegovačkih muslimana (Literary Works of the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina), Sarajevo, 1933; and Professor Muhamed Hadžijahić and his study Udio žene u islamizaciji Bosne i Hercegovine (The Participation of Women in the Islamization of Bosnia and Herzegovina), Narodna uzdanička, X/71–79, Sarajevo, 1941.

Professor H.T. Norris has not merely disregarded relevant twentieth-century Bosnian authorities writing on the history of Islamic culture and spirituality in Bosnia and the Balkans. He also failed to mention many Bosnian
Sufi writers, poets and belles-lettristes who wrote entirely original works on Islam and Sufism well before the last century. Many of their works are still dispersed in manuscript form around the libraries of the Muslim world and the West. Along with Hasan Qa’imija, Husein Lamakani, Shaikh Hamza Bali, it is true that he did make a passing reference to Abdullah-efendi Bošnjak. However he has done so only to fit him into the contextual framework he has concocted, without the least desire to make it plain that this was an author who wrote, in Turkish and Arabic, the most comprehensive and perfectly orthodox commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* by the famous Ibn ‘Arabī—a commentary that is indubitably the finest of all those written over the more than eight centuries since the Shaykh’s time. What is more, Professor Norris had access to the English translation of the Turkish version of Abdullah-efendi Bošnjak’s commentary, which is wrongly ascribed to Ismail Haqqi Bursevi.

What is one to say about the use of such significant technical Sufi terms as *Dhikr* (Prayer of the Heart), *Samā’* (Spiritual Concert), *Silsilah* (Sufi Genealogy), *Wahdat al-Wujūd* (Transcendent Unity of Being—Theomonism) and others, which Professor Norris interprets to his heart’s content in the light of the Bogomil tradition. It is a tradition that has nothing whatsoever to do with Islam and Sufism from the perspective of the history of religion, the history of dogma, or the history of *Sophia Perennis*—weaving into the same spiritual and interpretative fabric both Bogomilism, *Sophia Perennis*, Shamanism and Sufism (see pp. 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 69–77...). Anything associated with Islam and Sufism that Professor Norris is unable to derive from Bogomilism, he derives instead from the Christian and, in particular, the Byzantine tradition. This inevitably leads to the impression that in Professor Norris’s view most of the Sufis and original founders of dervish orders or Sufi brotherhoods in Bosnia, the Balkans, and eastern Europe have their roots solely in Christianity or paganism, and certainly not in the authentic Islamic tradition (see pp. 29, 30).

In his efforts to maintain his self-imposed standards whatever the cost, Professor Norris drapes many names, concepts and events—events at least of unquestionable historical reality—in myth and legends. Thereby he frees himself of any responsibility and from the need to investigate more deeply and adduce further evidence (see ch. 6). The extent to which Professor Norris blurs the historical facts in this book can clearly be seen by imagining what would emerge if he had decided, say, to write a book on popular Christianity in Europe, and then focused all his energies on a description of Mithraism, ancient Egyptian mythology, the Black Madonna cult, Celtic spirituality, the Cathars and the Albigensians, in his effort to convince his readers that this, and this alone, is the Christian tradition of Europe.
Any Muslim reading this book of Professor Norris’s would therefore inevitably wonder what his motive might be in treating such a serious topic in such an academically irresponsible way. I leave it to each reader to seek the answer in his or her encounter with the contents of Professor Norris’s book.

Rešid Hafizović


The 9/11 incident has spotlighted the nature of relations between the United States and the Islamic world. The US invasion and occupation of two Muslim states, namely, Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), purportedly for noble intentions, has further strained the relationship like nothing before. Enough has been said and written about it in the past decade, yet the volume under review is an incisive valuable addition to available knowledge on the subject.

The basic thesis of the author is that there were “two tragedies of September 11, 2001: the deaths of more than 3,000 innocent human beings on the day itself and the squandering of a unique opportunity in the months and years that followed, which contributed to the loss of countless additional lives” (p. ix). He goes on to say that the US began “marching down a path that would systematically alienate sympathetic Muslims and play into the hands of the extremists by setting up precisely the ‘clash of civilizations’ that the bin Ladens of the world had long sought” (p. x).

The Al-Jazeera effect, if one may call it, enabled the Arabs to see the world through Arab lens, which not only gave a new perspective to the news but also an aggressive new sense of Muslim solidarity. Arab television channels were simply not available to those who did not speak Arabic. So the American audiences remained “largely oblivious to [the] shift in Arab and Muslim perspective” (p. xiii). The Americans could, however, go to English language websites but few bothered; after all, life was “much simpler in black and white.” The result was a set of “information ghettos whose inhabitants- in the United States and the Muslim world- saw dramatically different versions of the same reality: ‘Surgical strikes’ versus dead babies; the ‘oppressed’ being