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Edina Bećirević

# Salafism vs. Moderate Islam

A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds  
of Bosnian Muslims







SALAFISM VS. MODERATE ISLAM  
A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims

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Edina Bećirević

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Sarajevo, 2016



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## KEY TERMS

**bid'ah** – innovation (newly invented, without precedence) or novelty in religious matters, in this context used in the meaning of heretical practice or heresy.

**bula** – educated female leader in Bosnian Islam; they offer religious services (eg. preparing female bodies for burial) and lead prayers for women during commemorative and festive occasions.

**da'i** – a missionary or preacher, one who engages in *da'wah*. Not an exclusively Salafi term, but used in this research only in reference to Salafi preachers.

**da'wah** – the act of inviting people into Islam, proselytization, missionary work.

**fiqh** – Islamic jurisprudence.

**hijab** – a scarf that covers the head, neck, and chest but not the face.

**jamaat** – Arabic for “assembly,” denotes a congregation of or gathering place for Muslims.

**jihad** – the religious duty to excel as a Muslim and to strive in the service of God.

**madhab** – a doctrine or school of thought within Islamic *fiqh*; traditional Bosnian Islam is rooted in the Hanafi madhab.

**madrasa** – Arabic for “school,” Islamic religious school.

**maktab** – Arabic for “school,” Muslim elementary school.

**mujahideen** – plural of *mujahid*, meaning one who is engaged in a struggle for Islam (*jihad*).

**Namaz** – the obligatory prayer in Islam.

**niqab** – a face-covering for the mouth and nose, leaving only the eyes exposed.

**rububiyya (tawhid)** – the oneness of God's Lordship; meaning, God alone possesses divine qualities.

**Salafi/ism** – The *Salaf* were the first three generations of Muslims and the term is Arabic for “predecessors.” The *Salafi* movement and the doctrine of *Salafism* promote Islam that emulates the *Salaf* as an eternal model for Muslims and rejects later innovations to the religion (*bid’ah*). *Salafis* put great emphasis on *sunnah* and little on *fiqh*.

**Salafi-jihadist/ism** – a religious-political ideology that advocates violent *jihad*.

**shirk** – the sin of practicing polytheism, or ascribing divine characteristics to anyone but God.

**sifat** – divine names denoting attributes of God.

**sunnah** – Arabic for “habitual practice,” the exemplary deeds and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

**takfir** – the act of declaring another Muslim a non-believer (*kafir*) or apostate based on belief or practice.

**tajsim** – anthropomorphic representation of God.

**taqlid** – unquestioning adherence to the teachings of *madhabs* and other religious authorities.

**ta’til** – divestment or denial of God’s attributes.

**tawhid** – the defining doctrine in indivisible oneness of God.

**ta’wil** – allegorical interpretation of God’s speech, the quest for the hidden meaning of the Qur’an, commonly associated with Shia and Sufi interpretations of Islam.

**uluhiyya** – the doctrine that God alone must be worshipped.

**Ummah** – the global Muslim community.

**Wahhabi/ism** – *Wahhabism* is a conservative religious branch of Sunni Islam, named after 18th century reformist scholar Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who advocated restoration of the earliest Islamic beliefs and practices. An alliance with the House of Saud insured the spread and consolidation of *Wahhabi* teachings and made *Wahhabism* the official doctrine of Saudi Arabia.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overarching goal of this research is to deepen understandings of underlying structural causes of radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also to discern the individual social and psychological factors that drive radicalization. Since September 11th, and especially with the rise of ISIL, this has been a growing field of research; however, international scholars and practitioners still grapple to properly define some basic terms. Radicalization, extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism are often used interchangeably. This conceptual confusion leads to stereotyping in media and among the general public, and sometimes even among government officials. Thus, it is important to stress that this study takes into account the differences between radicalization of belief, radicalization of behavior that does not lead to violence, and radicalization of behavior that does lead to violence.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, most of the individuals interviewed for this research do not present a security threat to the country. However, in a vulnerable Bosnian society with a recent history of genocide and mass violence, even nonviolent radical behavior deepens fears of “others” and contributes to general social distrust and insecurity.

Research and data collection for this study were carried out from November 2015 to May 2016, using a qualitative methodology employing interviews and focus groups. These took place with 165 individuals, around half of

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1 On a discussion of the meaning of radicalisation, see: Peter R. Neumann, “The Truble with Radicalisation,” *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (2013): 873-893.

whom were adherents of Salafism. Researchers examined the strategies used by Salafis to spread their ideology and explored why an increasing number of individuals are abandoning the centuries-long tradition of inclusive Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina for more radical interpretations.

Bosnian Muslims have long been known for their tolerance and acceptance of religious diversity, and their practice of Islam could be seen as a model for an Islamic tradition that meshes well with the secular notion of separation between religion and state. A stricter interpretation of Islamic doctrine came to Bosnia in the form of Salafism and Salafi proselytization in the summer of 1992, when foreign mujahideen began arriving. For almost twenty years, the number of Bosnian Muslims ‘converting’ to this narrow interpretation of Islam has grown slowly but steadily, and while precise figures have not been established, the most conservative estimates are that Bosnia now has 20,000 Salafi adherents while others claim there are to up to 50,000.

The exposure of the Muslim population in BiH to these two competing narratives, of traditional Bosnian Islam and Salafism, presents a fascinating case for the study of radicalization in a local context. And, the expansion of Salafism in BiH is a social/political policy problem with several dimensions:

- a) The Salafi way of life in Bosnia strongly challenges the BiH Constitution and Bosnian laws, including those related to family, gender equality, and the right to education. Even though most Salafis do not present a security threat and are not violently extreme, they have been radicalized in a broader sense through their adoption of an ideology that requires they make major changes in the way they practice Islam and live their everyday lives. This interpretation of Islam does not accept the secular notion of the state, and while most Salafis will not engage in violence to impose “pure Islamic law” they are striving in the long term for slow but steady shifts in society.

- b) Even though most Salafis do not present a security threat, it has been shown that foreign fighters for the conflict in Syria and Iraq are recruited from the Salafi community. This may represent a larger security threat, if not a local one. Further, some of those fighters have returned and will yet return to BiH; the degree to which these returnees may pose a threat, if at all, has not been established.
- c) The spread of Salafism introduces yet another division into an already fractured Bosnian society that is struggling to come to terms with the legacy of the war. It also represents another factor that is eroding the secularity of the state, which undermines Bosnia's prospects of joining NATO and the European Union. What's more, the Salafi lifestyle and way of dress reinforces stereotypes about the dangers of Islam among Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs.

This study presents some of the factors contributing to tensions between the two competing Islamic discourses in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Analysis is based on empirical research that contextualizes these factors in terms of their impact on the security of society at large. Our findings indicate that Salafi indoctrination impacts the personal and group identity formation of all adherents, and among a small percentage, inspires violence.

In order to define what is “radical,” what is “moderate” must also be defined. In this study, the official narrative of the Islamic Community in BiH is rated as moderate, most Salafis are rated as radical in belief and behavior but non-violent, while the teaching in some *para-jamaats* represents extreme radical views that can and have inspired violence. However, even the official Islamic Community in Bosnia – while generally maintaining its moderate discourse – is struggling to resist radical influences, mainly from Saudi Arabia. The Islamic Community has chosen a policy of inclusion of Salafi groups; their hope is that one of the chief goals of Salafism, the “purification” of Islam in Bosnia, will be tempered along with other Salafi beliefs in a compromise that favors traditional Bosnian Islam. Indeed, both Salafis and anti-Salafis are calling for purification of two totally different kinds, and the

clash of these ideals seems irreconcilable to the outside observer and appears to portend that the real problems with inclusion efforts are yet to come.

The Atlantic Initiative team recommends the following:

1. The role of Saudi Arabia in organized Salafi proselytizing, which includes the financing of *da'is* (missionaries), the provision of scholarships for students of Islamic Studies, and support to Salafi NGOs, is well known. Yet, this remains an “elephant in the room” that is never officially addressed by BiH officials or international community representatives. Diplomatic pressure on Saudi Arabia to stop inspiring and financing Salafi rhetoric that stipulates the “purification” of Bosnian Islam is the most important step that can be taken to stop organized Salafi proselytization in Bosnia.
2. The question of Salafi influence on Islamic Community imams and scholars in some parts of Bosnia has not yet been fully addressed. Given the Islamic Community’s new policy of inclusion, it is expected that this problem will become more acute in the future. Thus, it is of utmost importance that the Islamic Community develops a systematic plan and a set of policies addressing Salafi influence among its own ranks.
3. To address the phenomenon of radicalism in the ranks of other religious congregations, civil society organizations should demand more accountability from the Inter-Religious Council in battling radicalism among their officials and religious leaders.
4. International community representatives in Bosnia should also be more resolute when it comes to confronting the radical rhetoric of political elites. Genocide denial, calls for the secession of the Republika Srpska, and nationalistic rhetoric in general, have gone uncensored for years, creating a climate in which radical is a norm. It is difficult to make a case against Salafi proselytism in this atmosphere of political radicalism.
5. Established Bosnian NGOs, especially those concerned with issues of human rights, security, gender, and education, should identify civil society groups in municipalities affected by radicalization to develop programs fostering effective counter-narratives that appeal to young people. This includes countering radical narratives on the Internet.

6. Training for journalists is necessary. While some media treat the issue of radicalization responsibly, most do not. Responsible reporting and a true understanding of the processes surrounding radicalization by journalists could go a long way in helping to prevent it.
7. A significant portion of online Salafi content does not specifically advocate physical violence, but it challenges existing laws and promotes hatred, especially with respect to gender rights. For example, Salafis *da'is* advocate polygamy, which is forbidden by Article 214 of the Criminal Code of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Salafi messaging also promotes limitations on the freedom of movement of women, which is guaranteed by Bosnia's Family Violence Protection Law. While law enforcement agencies may not be activated by radical messaging unless it calls for explicit violence, NGOs that address gender rights should educate the public that messaging by Salafi *da'is* that advocates restricting family or women's rights is forbidden by law.





## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, almost half the population identifies themselves as Muslim. The rich cultural tradition of Islam has been reflected in different practices around the world, and in Bosnia, it is practiced in accordance with the Hanafi School and has been shaped further by Ottoman influences and by a multi-ethnic and multilinguistic environment. This has led to a Bosnian Islam known for centuries for its inclusivity, tolerance, and acceptance of religious diversity, and generally recognized as an Islamic tradition that meshes well with the secular notion of separation between religion and state. The Austro-Hungarian Empire allowed Bosnian Muslims to apply Sharia Law, especially in matters of family and inheritance, and a tradition of combining Islamic and non-Islamic regulations continued until Sharia courts were abolished with the establishment of communist Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup> Under communism, Islam was not forbidden, but was practiced in strict privacy. Indeed, strong expressions of any religion were confined to private

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2 The Islamic Community in Bosnia was established in 1882 under Austro-Hungarian rule. During Ottoman times, the religious administration of Muslims had not been separate from the state structure; and since Austro-Hungary wanted to distance Bosnian Muslims from Istanbul's influence, they allowed them to establish the Islamic Community – which developed into a complex religious administrative structure headed by the Grand Mufti. For more on the history and structure of the Islamic Community, see: Fikret Karčić, "Služba Reisul-Uleme kod Bošnjaka," in *Studije o šerijatskom pravu* (Zenica: Bemust, 1997). In present-day Bosnia, the Law on Religious Freedoms and Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities makes the Islamic Community the only institution in BiH permitted to interpret Islam. The text of the law (in B/C/S) is available as a pdf at: <http://www.mpr.gov.ba/biblioteka/zakoni/bs/ZAKON%20o%20slobodi%20vjere.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2016).

space; and though never officially banned, public religiosity was strongly discouraged. After the collapse of Yugoslavia, religion regained prominence. Yet, while the number of Muslims who began practicing increased, they practiced a moderate Islam. In the same period, Islamic rulings regarding ethics and family law were revived and promoted by the official Islamic Community; but clerics have largely adjusted Sharia to secular norms, so that the two do not clash. This approach reflects the tradition of moderation in Bosnian Islam – the result of historical legacy and political circumstances – and respects the secular perspective of most Bosnian Muslims.

A number of Western authors have employed stereotypes to assess the attitude of Bosnian Muslims toward their faith, for instance, observing the perceived contradiction that it is tacitly acceptable for one to attend Friday prayers at the mosque but also drink alcohol socially.<sup>3</sup> A study by Cornelia Sorabji of the relationship Bosnian Muslims have with religion goes beyond this level of analysis, and according to her, Bosnian Islam is based on a principle of non-judgment regarding who is more, less, or not at all religious and an acceptance that there are some for whom religion is only a cultural concept.<sup>4</sup> Sorabji describes Islam in Bosnia as “primarily a matter of heart and of everyday life values rather than of meticulous religious detail.”<sup>5</sup> She remarks on the secularity and religious tolerance of Bosnian Muslims, saying that “whether personally observant or not, Bosnia’s Muslims are notable for their view that everyone’s faith or lack of it is their own business and not to be questioned or interfered by the state, the priest, the *hodja* [teacher, imam], the neighbors, or anyone else.”<sup>6</sup>

But this relationship of Bosnian Muslims to their faith, and to each other, has been challenged by a stricter interpretation of Islamic doctrine that came

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3 Daria Sito-Sucic, “War Brought Bosnian Muslim Women Back to Islam” Reuters, May 5, 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-muslimwomen-europe-bosnia-idUSL0465833220070505> (accessed May 16, 2016).

4 Cornelia Sorabji, *Bosnia’s Muslims: Challenging Past and Present Misconceptions* (London: Action for Bosnia, 1993).

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid, 10.

to Bosnia in the form of Salafism and Salafi proselytization in the summer of 1992, when foreign mujahideen began arriving. Those who remained after the end of the 1992-1995 war became the seeds of Salafism throughout the country. Until then, this reductionist ideology was unfamiliar to Bosnian Muslims; and given the tradition of tolerance in Bosnian Islam, few expected that the Salafism imported during the war would take root, much less spread among the local population even after the departure of many original mujahideen. Yet, over almost twenty years, the number of Bosnian Muslims ‘converting’ to this narrow interpretation of Islam has grown slowly but steadily. And although precise figures have not been established, the rise is known to have been rather dramatic by any count.<sup>7</sup>

One of the reasons some Bosnian Muslims were open to accepting the religious ideology promoted by these mujahideen was linked to their sense of disillusionment with Western liberal values. Before the war, Bosnians believed the West appreciated the multicultural character of their country, and when the war began, they were sure Bosnia wouldn’t be allowed to be destroyed and that genocide would never be permitted to be perpetrated. But the Western countries that Bosnians thought would come to their rescue betrayed them.<sup>8</sup> The only true and seemingly uncompromising solidarity came instead from Muslim countries, which sent not only financial aid but also significant shipments of weapons, breaking the arms embargo imposed by the West. In fact, the US – which had unsuccessfully lobbied for a temporary lifting of the embargo because it made the Bosnian Muslims effectively defenseless – turned a blind eye to this practice.<sup>9</sup>

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7 It is difficult to precisely estimate the number of Salafi adherents in Bosnia. The most conservative estimate by officials from security agencies with which the Atlantic Initiative consulted is 20,000; other security officials claim that the number has risen faster in recent years, and they believe there might be as many as 40,000; and officials from security agencies in the Republika Srpska claim the number is closer to 50,000. Considering that estimates from 10 years ago were around 3,000, any of these estimates represent a significant increase over a short period.

8 For more on the disillusionment Bosnian Muslims felt toward the West, see: Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: W.W. Basic Books, 2002); and Ed Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell: Understanding Bosnia’s War* (St. Martin’s Press, 1994)

9 Tim Weiner, “Permitting Iran to Arm Bosnia was Vital, US Envoys Testify,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/05/31/world/permitting-iran-to-arm-bosnia->

Though the Bosnian public was told that financial aid flowing in from countries such as Saudi Arabia came with no strings attached, the conditions of that support soon became obvious as Saudi-funded mosques were built in the Salafi style and Salafi proselytism intensified after the war. The chaotic post-war environment, rich with competing narratives of victimization and marked by more questions than answers, not surprisingly left some attracted to the straightforwardness of Salafism. Plus, for many Bosnians, the disillusionment they felt toward the West was deepened by the Dayton Peace Agreement, which they understood as yet another betrayal. And dangerously, as Julian Borger has pointed out, “the constitution established under Dayton also froze in place the ethnic politics that fueled the war.”<sup>10</sup>

In this context, and under the influence of global circumstances, a new problem has arisen in Bosnia – with some 250 Bosnians believed to have joined the fight in Syria, either on the side of ISIL or the Al-Nusra Front, since the advent of the Islamic State. Still, the problem of Islamic radicalism existed in Bosnia before the first fighters departed for the war in Syria. The ten terrorist attacks that have been carried out in Bosnia since 1997 were, in most cases, linked to adherents of Salafism. However, even without these connections to terrorism, tensions between traditional Bosnian Muslims and new Salafi adherents have resulted in local conflicts over different religious practices in mosques and over dramatically different lifestyle choices and ethics.

This study will address some of the complex social transformations that have occurred over the last decades as well as other factors that have helped create a climate in which Salafism has gained popularity among certain populations in Bosnia. The overarching aim of this research was to understand the motivation of Bosnian Muslims, and especially younger people, to abandon

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was-vital-us-envoys-testify.html (accessed May 15, 2016).

10 Julian Borger, “Bosnia’s bitter, flawed peace deal, 20 years on,” *The Guardian*, November 10, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/global/2015/nov/10/bosnia-bitter-flawed-peace-deal-dayton-agreement-20-years-on> (accessed May 16, 2016)

the rich Bosnian Islamic tradition in favor of rigid Salafi teachings, and to examine whether this phenomenon poses a security threat to the country. And, while the focus is on Salafi radicalization, an attempt is made to place it within the context of radicalization in Bosnia more generally.

This topic deserves special attention because Bosnia and Herzegovina has not recovered well from its recent history of war and genocide. Transitional justice processes are constantly being challenged by deep ethnic divisions. Now, in this already radicalized political and social milieu, and amidst a struggling economy and low standards of living, the spread of Salafism poses a new social problem.

This study is based on research that was conducted using qualitative methodology employing interviews and focus groups. These took place with 165 individuals, around half of whom were adherents of Salafism. Researchers examined the strategies used by Salafis to spread their ideology and explored whether and how the increasing number of individuals who live according to this radical interpretation of Islam present a long-term security threat even if they do not openly advocate violence.

This report begins by presenting the complex policy problems surrounding the spread of Salafism in BiH. Then, the research methodology is detailed, along with the complications encountered in accessing and interviewing Salafis. Findings are divided into two sections: first, the history and origins of Salafism in Bosnia and key elements of Salafi teachings; second, different recruitment strategies and why Salafism is so attractive, especially to younger Bosnians.

## **1.1. Policy Problems in Context**

Presently, the Muslim population in BiH is exposed to two competing narratives: traditional Bosnian Islam and Salafism. As such, it presents a fascinating case for the study of radicalization mechanisms in a local context. The expansion of Salafism in BiH represents a social/political policy problem

with several dimensions:

- a) The Salafi way of life strongly challenges the BiH Constitution and Bosnian laws, including those related to family, gender equality, and the right to an education. Even though most Salafis do not present a security threat and are not violently extreme, they have been radicalized in a broader sense through their adoption of an ideology that requires they make major changes in the way they practice Islam and live their everyday lives. This interpretation of Islam does not accept the secular notion of the state, and while most Salafis will not engage in violence to impose “pure Islamic law” they are striving in the long term for slow but steady shifts in society.
- b) Even though most Salafis do not present a security threat, it has been shown that foreign fighters for the conflict in Syria and Iraq are recruited from the Salafi community. This may represent a larger security threat, if not a local one. Further, some of those fighters have returned and will yet return to BiH; the degree to which these returnees may pose a threat, if at all, has not been established.
- c) The spread of Salafism introduces yet another division into an already fractured Bosnian society that is struggling to come to terms with the legacy of the war. It also represents another factor that is eroding the secularity of the state, which undermines Bosnia’s prospects of joining NATO and the European Union. What’s more, the Salafi lifestyle and way of dress reinforces stereotypes about the dangers of Islam among Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs.

While the question of “homegrown terrorism” has become highly emotional and highly politicized in many countries, in Bosnia, it has become yet another instrument of ethnic politics. For years, Bosnian Muslim (Bosniak) political and religious elites have denied that any threats of terrorism and radicalization exist in the country, insisting that the practice and interpretation of Islam in Bosnia is moderate and tolerant. Still, in their attempt to emphasize the tolerant nature of “Bosnian Islam,” many Bosniak leaders have intentionally

minimized the danger posed by the proliferation of Salafi/Wahhabi ideology.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, politicians from the Republika Srpska have intentionally blown this danger far out of proportion and have identified Serbs as particularly threatened by Islamic radicalization.<sup>12</sup>

For different reasons, Bosniak and Serb leaders have both failed to make a distinction between traditional Bosnian Muslims and “new” Salafis/Wahhabis. The motivation for officials from the Republika Srpska is not so hard to understand – a “Salafi threat” not made distinct from Bosnian Islam generally, provides them a platform from which to present *all* Bosnian Muslims as potentially dangerous radicals; and a broad Salafi threat supports claims that Serbs are jeopardized in Bosnia, an argument often used by politicians to justify calls for the secession of the Republika Srpska.<sup>13</sup> However, the reasons that Bosniak political and religious elites have failed to make this distinction is more layered.

For almost twenty years, mainstream Bosniak leaders have worked to maintain an inclusive discourse, claiming that differences between Salafis and traditional Bosnian Muslims should not be highlighted.<sup>14</sup> A benevolent reading of this discourse may place it wholly within the context of the Bosnian Muslim tradition of tolerance. Yet, through the lens of the recent war, some more conservative political and religious elites in fact viewed this tolerance as the cause of a naïveté among Bosniaks that made them the primary victim

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11 Most of the individuals interviewed for this research preferred to be called “Salafis,” but some rejected even that term, saying they should be called “true Muslims.” Wahhabism is named after 18th century scholar Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), who advocated purging Islam of idolatry (*shirk*), and of impurities and innovation (*bid'ah*). In mainstream Bosnian society, the terms “Wahhabi” and “Salafi” are used interchangeably; but Salafi adherents find the term Wahhabism offensive. In this study, we mainly use the term Salafi, except when quoting interviewees outside of this community who used the term Wahhabi during interviews.

12 For example, see: “Po Bosni vršlja 100.000 vehabija,” *Vesti online*, April 3, 2010, <http://www.vesti-online.com/Vesti/Ex-YU/41986/Po-Bosni-vrslja--100000-vehabija> (accessed April 29, 2016).

13 “Špirić, Dodik: Vehabije i u institucijama BiH,” *Vijesti.ba*, July 6, 2015, <http://vijesti.ba/clanak/15822/spiric-dodik-vehabije-i-u-institucijama-bih> (accessed April 29, 2016).

14 “Reis Cerić opravdava pristustvo vehabija,” *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, February 7, 2009, <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/article/1380862.html> (accessed April 25, 2016).

group. Further, the political leadership of the SDA – the leading Bosniak party – and the former Grand Mufti of Bosnia, Mustafa Cerić, were financially incentivized by generous donations from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. It appears that they tacitly agreed to the expansion of Salafism in exchange for these gifts; though they may not have foreseen the serious consequences of so drastically changing the matrix of Bosnian Islam.

After September 11, 2001, under pressure from the international community and with the crackdown on Saudi charities and funding streams, Salafi proselytism was significantly reduced. Then, in 2006, domestic state-building reforms stalled before moving in reverse, the Iraq war was at its worst, and the international community in Bosnia remained without US leadership. According to close observers of the Salafi movement in BiH, this was when intensive Salafi proselytizing began again, but with a new strategy; instead of receiving funding through Saudi charities, Salafi leaders established local NGOs.

In October 2011, an attack on the US Embassy in Sarajevo by lone gunman Mevlid Jašarević, an adherent of Salafism, fully exposed the vulnerabilities of the country's security apparatus and finally drew real attention to the network of Salafis in Bosnia.<sup>15</sup> When Husein Kavazović was elected as the new Grand Mufti on September 24, 2012 – replacing Cerić, who held the position for 19 years – many hoped it was the end of an era of undisturbed Salafi proselytism. This shift in leadership corresponded with increased pressure from security agencies and media regarding the role of the Salafi

15 Mevlid Jašarević was sentenced to 18 years on charges of terrorism in a first-instance verdict, but the appellate chamber reduced that sentence to 15 years on November 20, 2013. See: "Mevlid Jašarević osuđen na 15 godina zatvora," *Vijesti.ba*, November 20, 2013, <http://vijesti.ba/clanak/179581/mevlid-jasarevic-osuden-na-15-godina-zatvora> (accessed May 3, 2016). It has been confirmed that he was indoctrinated at the Salafi settlement in Gornja Maoča, one of the most radical in Bosnia. The *da'i* of that village was Nusret Imamović, who left Bosnia on December 28, 2013 to fight in the Syrian war. Media reported that he fought with the Al-Nusra Front, against the trend of Bosnian fighters in Syria fighting on the side of ISIL. See: "Nusret Imamović u Siriji protiv dojučerašnjih istomišljenika," *Federalna.ba*, June 3, 2014, <http://www.federalna.ba/bhs/vijest/99712/video-prikljucio-se-dzebhetul-nusri-bliskoj-al-kaidi> (accessed May 3, 2016). Imamović now ranks highly in the command structure of Al-Nusra and has been added to the list of most wanted terrorists in the world.



movement in the recruitment of fighters for the Syrian war. Still, beyond raising awareness of the dangers of radicalism and extremism through public statements, no concrete measures were taken by the new leader of the Islamic Community.

In 2015 alone, Bosnia saw two terrorist attacks – one on the police station in Zvornik and the other on Bosnian Army soldiers in Rajlovac, a suburb of Sarajevo. Both attackers were killed and investigation into their motivations were inconclusive.<sup>16</sup> What is known is that both attackers were psychologically troubled, and both had links to Salafism. Enis Omeragić, the attacker in Rajlovac, was not a full member of the Salafi movement, but he had family in and social relations with a number of Salafis. Neridin Ibrić, the attacker in Zvornik, showed signs of conversion to Salafism in the few months prior to the attack. Ibrić also visited a *para-jamaat* known to advocate violent extremism. However, there has been speculation that he may also have been motivated by a desire for personal revenge because his father was killed by Serbian forces during the war.

Still, even with loose links to Salafism, these acts of terror were an awakening not only for the Islamic Community and Bosniak political elites, but for the whole population. Along with the problem of Bosniaks departing to fight in the Syrian war on the side of ISIL, these latest terrorist attacks inspired a new narrative that openly recognizes the potential security threat posed by the radical Islam promoted by some groups in Bosnia.<sup>17</sup> In recent interviews, the Grand Mufti has called for the mobilization of all of society to develop programs that will prevent the spread of radicalism.<sup>18</sup> And, on

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16 On April 27, 2015, Neridin Ibrić's attack on the police station in Zvornik killed one officer and wounded two others. On November 18, 2015, Enes Omeragić killed two Bosnian soldiers in the Sarajevo suburb of Rajlovac, wounding another soldier and a female employee of the shop where the shooting took place. He also fired a gun on a bus, injuring the driver and two passengers.

17 For more on departures of Bosnian citizens to foreign war theaters, see: Vlado Azinović and Muhamed Jusić, *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent* (Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 2016).

18 "Reis Husein ef. Kavazović: Ekstremni pokreti su ideologije, oni nisu vjera," interview, TV1, May 6, 2015.

December 4, 2015, a meeting of 37 prominent Bosniaks resulted in a signed statement that not only condemned terrorism and violent extremism of any kind, but also warned of the danger of exclusivity and radicalization. The statement emphasized that radicalism threatens the values of traditional Bosnian Islam.<sup>19</sup>

An additional cause for concern shared by security agencies and the Islamic Community is the existence of unofficial congregations, known as “para-*jamaats*,” which preach Salafism.<sup>20</sup> These para-*jamaats* have actually existed for years, but the Islamic Community failed to respond to the phenomenon until just recently, and even then seemed to need the endorsement of representatives from all sides of the Bosniak political, religious, and intellectual ideological spectrums in order to act; and so a joint meeting was held. While not all relevant actors accepted the invitation (it was largely an SDA gathering),<sup>21</sup> the meeting was representative enough for the Islamic Community to initiate some concrete measures. Indeed, only ten days later, on December 14, 2015, Grand Mufti Kavazović called for the closure of para-*jamaats*, which Bosnian security officials assert are used to recruit fighters for the Syrian battlefield and are associated with ISIL as well as with smaller formations aligned with the Al-Nusra Front. Regardless of their political

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19 Joint Statement on Terrorism and Violent Extremism, Sarajevo, December 4, 2015.

20 The term “para-*jamaat*” was coined by the Islamic Community. A *jamaat* is the smallest congregation in Bosnia, referring to believers at one mosque. Because these para-*jamaats* are not within the jurisdiction of the Islamic Community, the use of the word mosque is avoided. In Bosnia, the prefix “para” is most commonly used to refer to illegal institutions that emerged prior to and during the war in opposition to the legal Bosnian state. By using this syntagm, the Islamic Community associates a pejorative meaning with these places of worship, and defines them as problem that needs the urgent attention of the state and society as a whole.

21 The Islamic Community sent invitations to Bosniak leaders from various political parties, but not all accepted. Nermin Nikšić, leader of the Social Democrats, refused the invitation on the argument that the SDP is a party of all citizens, not just Bosniaks, saying he could not participate in an exclusive ethnic gathering. And so, though the leaders of some other parties were present, the meeting was really an SDA event, with Bakir Izetbegović the most prominent figure. The Grand Mufti, it seems, needed the green light from Izetbegović and those in his circle to take steps toward reinstating the authority of the Islamic Community across all of Bosnia. After all, it was from these circles that the freedom was given to Salafis to proselytize during and after the war. For an excellent commentary on this meeting, see: Vildana Selimbegović, “Došli tobe,” *Oslobodjenje*, December 7, 2015, <http://www.oslobodjenje.ba/kolumne/dosli-tobe> (accessed March 20, 2016).

orientation in terms of the Syrian conflict, though, the ideology propagated through para-*jamaats* is the same – their loyalties are first to the *Ummah*, the imagined universal Muslim community, whereas loyalty to the Bosnian Muslim community is secondary and conditionalized on “the clearance of ideas [within that community] that do not belong to pure Islam.”<sup>22</sup>

However, Salafism is also propagated through a network of more mainstream Salafis, via *da'is*, some of whom have been inclined of late toward inclusion in the Islamic Community of BiH. These *da'is* have been educated mostly in Saudi Arabia and, according to our sources, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Islamic Affairs pays their salaries. The version of Islam they advocate requires traditional Bosnian Muslims to undergo a significant identity transformation that encompasses changes to almost all their religious and cultural practices. The essence of their teaching is a focus on individual purification through control of impulses and passions. Salafi *da'is* advise their followers to avoid anything that can provoke desire and lead to sinful deeds, including listening to music and reading anything except the Qur'an, hadiths, or other approved religious literature. Women are advised to wear the *niqab* and the worlds of women and men are strictly divided.

## 1.2. Statement of Intent

The purpose of this research is to present some of the factors contributing to tensions between the two competing Islamic discourses in Bosnia and Herzegovina – of traditional Bosnian Islam and Salafism. Analysis is based on qualitative empirical research that contextualizes these factors in terms of their impact on the security of society at large.

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22 This notion was often repeated in interviews conducted with Salafis by the Atlantic Initiative research team.



## 2. METHODOLOGY<sup>23</sup>

The overarching goal of this research was to deepen understandings of radicalization and radicalization processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to identify the drivers or motivating factors of radicalization. Research and data collection were carried out from November 2015 to May 2016.

Literature on radicalization is dominated by theoretical, rather than empirical, approaches. Accessing radicalized individuals for the sake of research is seen as a challenge in academic and policy-making circles. Further, the literature generally focuses on militants and the end point of the radicalization process, while the process of radicalization itself is rarely examined.<sup>24</sup> According to Christmann, this leaves the question of how religion impacts radicalization “far from settled” because available theories are based too little on empirical work.<sup>25</sup>

With this research, we sought to overcome this challenge and fill the gap in the literature by accessing and documenting the views of Salafis in BiH. The aim of the research was to explore links between faith, identity, and

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23 This section focuses primarily on the trials of conducting research with Salafis, as this was a cornerstone of the study and yet presented, at times, a considerable challenge to researchers.

24 For a detailed examination of why empirical studies on radicalization and violent extremism are so lacking, see: Kris Christmann, *Preventing Religious Radicalisation and Violent Extremism: A Systematic Review of the Research Evidence*, Youth Justice Board of England and Wales, 2012. Available online at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/396030/preventing-violent-extremism-systematic-review.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/396030/preventing-violent-extremism-systematic-review.pdf) (accessed April 17, 2016)

25 Ibid, 30.

attitude among individuals who have converted to Salafism, and how and why others have remained within the tradition of Bosnian Islam. However, it was also important to analyze the views of Bosnian citizens of other religions and those who see themselves as secular, in order to understand how Salafis are viewed by mainstream society and whether they are perceived as a threat.

Data collection was conducted using focus groups, semi-structured individual interviews, consultations with relevant stakeholders, and content analysis of written and recorded Salafi materials. Our research goal meant that the most crucial interviewees were people who belong to Salafi communities and are identified by society as Islamic radicals. From the beginning, the team was aware that identifying and accessing members of radical groups would be difficult and so significant time and effort was dedicated to securing access to Salafis.

## 2.1. Accessing and Selecting Participants

The team interviewed 165 individuals, in one-on-one interviews or in focus groups. About half (85) were members of the Bosnian Salafi/Wahhabi community (including men and women of different ages, generally between 20 and 50 years old); 5 were former members of the Salafi/Wahhabi community; 15 were Islamic Community leaders (imams and officials); 40 were Bosnian citizens of different nationalities and political and religious orientations; and 20 were security agency officials, psychologists, social workers, and other relevant experts and professionals. To access these individuals, various sampling strategies were employed. Purposeful sampling was used to access about half of the Salafi participants, through the Islamic Community in response to a written request by the Atlantic Initiative. Other participants were accessed through snowball sampling, which can help researchers understand the social networks of “concealed populations” and make “inferences about... individuals who have been difficult to enumerate.”<sup>26</sup> Snowball sampling relied on the

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26 Rowland Atkinson and John Flint, “Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-Reach Populations: Snowball Research Strategies,” *Social Research Update*, no. 33 (Summer 2001), <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU33.html> (accessed May 2, 2106).

use of researchers' informal networks or on interviewees directing researchers to other potential participants for the study.

The combination of these two sampling strategies not only increased representativeness, but also enabled our research team to gather diverse views and include people from different geographical locations with different characteristics relevant for the study.<sup>27</sup> We were able to access a highly varied sample of Bosnian Salafis, with the aim to gain as much insight as possible into the process of radicalization, which we agree is “best viewed as a process of change, a personal and political transformation from one condition to another.”<sup>28</sup> Notably, accessing Salafi women proved more difficult than accessing men; and of the 85 Salafis who were interviewed, only 9 were women. This is mostly because, in Salafi communities, men are generally responsible for communicating with outsiders, and therefore control contact with Salafi women. Nevertheless, the team did establish some important contacts with women that may be further explored in the future.

## 2.2. Interviews and Focus Groups

Once Salafis agreed to talk, in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used as the primary methods of data collection. In-depth interviews are a proven method for capturing different views and sensitive information, and for understanding personal motivations.<sup>29</sup> Semi-structured interviews were also appropriate because researchers use a set of questions and issues to guide conversation, but allow for enough flexibility that both researchers and participants can introduce new topics and take as much time as is needed to explore issues in detail.<sup>30</sup> This format is used to encourage participants to talk at some length, and may result in “more considered

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27 H. Merkmens, “Selection Procedure, Sampling, Case Construction,” in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, eds. U. Flick., E. von Kardorff and I. Steinke (London: SAGE Publications, 2004). See Chapter 4.4.

28 Christmann, 10.

29 Bridget Byrne, “Qualitative interviewing,” in *Researching Society and Culture*, ed., Clive Seale (London: SAGE Publications, 2004).

30 Ibid.

response...and therefore provide better access to interviewees' views, interpretations of events, understandings, experiences, and opinions."<sup>31</sup> During interviews, Salafis talked about their motivations, reasoning, personal histories, and beliefs, and about what attracted them to Salafism. Our research team was also interested in hearing the collective views of Salafis and therefore conducted a number of focus groups as well. Focus groups are useful for gathering data in an environment where relatively little other data exists. And, by empowering participants through group dynamics, some are encouraged to express views they would otherwise hold back. In this way, focus groups can reveal how views are formed while providing detailed, qualitative, in-depth data that simply would not be shared in a poll or survey.<sup>32</sup>

Focus groups took place from February through April 2016, at a time when intense negotiations were underway between some Salafi groups and the Islamic Community over parameters by which those groups would formally join the Community. These groups are generally understood as moderate in comparison to Salafis who have refused to negotiate. For obvious reasons, Salafis who deny the legitimacy of the Islamic Community were accessible only through informal networks, but speaking to them collectively in focus groups during a time when their community was undergoing major challenges to its legitimacy added a valuable dimension to our research, as they were eager to share their views and voice their concerns.

Issues of trust and honesty were nonetheless a factor with both groups. Even when access to radicalized individuals is possible, questions of transparency arise, because radicalized groups are burdened by frequent, if not constant, surveillance by security agencies, which makes them distrustful in general.<sup>33</sup>

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31 Ibid., 209.

32 N. Copsey, "Focus Groups and the Political Scientist," European Research Institute, European Research Working Paper Series, No. 22 (University of Birmingham, 2008).

33 A.M. Getos, *The Missing Dots in Terrorism* (European Society of Criminology, 2009), 9. There are notable exceptions of authors who have attempted to access violent extremists and terrorist groups and individuals. Among them is Jessica Stern, author of the 2003 *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (Harper Collins) and the more recent 2015 publication *ISIS: The State of Terror* (Harper Collins).



The topic of radicalization is not only provocative, but is the center of various security concerns in Bosnia. For this reason, and also due to reasonable associations between the Atlantic Initiative and security agencies (due to our previous work), the promise of anonymity for participants was imperative in this research. And, in light of recent threats issued against Bosnian citizens who oppose ISIL,<sup>34</sup> as well as against the Grand Mufti and Federal Television journalists,<sup>35</sup> security concerns were not confined to interviewees from the Salafi community; and so anonymity was provided to all participants, not just Salafi adherents.

Two researchers were present at most of the interviews that took place for this research. When respondents were comfortable with being recorded and gave their permission, an audio recording was made. Interviews lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours, resulting in many pages of written transcripts. When participants were not comfortable with being recorded, detailed notes were taken by interviewers. On two occasions, a female researcher interviewed Salafi women alone, because they were not comfortable meeting or speaking with a man outside their family circle; and on another two occasions, a male researcher met alone with Salafi men who were not comfortable talking to a female researcher.

In both one-on-one interviews and focus groups, interviewers attempted to find answers to questions related to individual identity, but also to more

34 In June of 2015, ISIL's al-Hayat Media Center broadcast a propaganda video entitled "Honor is in Jihad: A Message to the People of the Balkans." The 20-minute film hails Muslims of the region for shielding Islam from repeated onslaughts by European crusaders, past and present, and invites them to take part in the final battle yet to come – the victorious entry of ISIL into Europe. Evoking the repeated humiliation of Balkan Muslims in modern European history, which culminated in the 1992-1995 genocide, the film intermittently gives center stage to several ISIL fighters, both young and middle-aged, who address the audience in Bosnian, saying: "if you cannot make *hijrah* (migrate) to the so-called Islamic Caliphate, then live by its call and destroy the infidels where you live, by whatever means necessary." Available online at: <http://jihadology.net/2015/06/04/al-ayat-media-center-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-honor-is-in-jihad-a-message-to-the-people-of-the-balkans/> (accessed January 31, 2016).

35 Michael Kaplan, "ISIS Threatens Bosnian Mufti: Heightened Security After Militant Vows to 'Cut the throat of Top Muslim Leader,'" *International Business Times*, February 24, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-threatens-bosnian-mufti-heightened-security-after-militant-vows-cut-throat-top-2321952> (accessed May 3, 2016).

general questions about Bosnian society, including: What initially attracts adherents to radical Salafism? What is the nature of these adherents' relationships with their families, prior to and after their conversion?<sup>36</sup> What attitudes from their previous life have they changed and what attitudes have they retained? How do they relate to or see the rest of Bosnian society, especially mainstream Bosnian Muslims who are members of the Islamic Community? What are the attitudes of Salafis toward and their relations with the Serb-Orthodox and Croat-Catholic communities? Who actually belongs to the Salafi community in Bosnia? Is there a Salafi elite, is it networked, and is there a centralized plan to spread Salafism throughout Bosnia? And, how does the rest of society view Salafis?

Interviews were adapted on the spot depending on the rapport developed with participants. Typically, researchers have been advised to avoid engaging in discussion, disclosing their views on the research topic, or answering questions from respondents.<sup>37</sup> Finding the best approach to interviewing was a challenge with Salafi respondents, some of whom actively tried to influence our research team. Researchers had to learn not to react to this. Later, analysis indicated that the measure of an individual's insistence on the "conversion" of researchers was directly related to how deeply they were committed to Salafism and to their attitudes about Bosnian society at large. Some respondents may have mistaken the empathy and curiosity exhibited by researchers during interviews as an openness toward accepting their beliefs. Others, though, sometimes mistook the neutrality of researchers as dishonesty; and so the level to which researchers engaged with respondents varied depending on a number of factors. At times, female researchers would openly voice their disagreement with the rigid positions of respondents regarding their

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36 While only one respondent was a cross-religious convert, from Christianity, we treated all respondents as converts because the Salafi interpretation of Islam is so vastly different from traditional Bosnian Islam. Our Salafi respondents also went to great lengths to explain their otherness in relation to traditional Bosnian Muslims. Though they did not use the word "conversion" per se, they described their acceptance of Salafi teachings as the discovery of "true religion" and the changes they adopted in their lives can most certainly be seen as a conversion.

37 J. Galtung, *Theory and Methods of Social Research* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967); W.J. Goode and P.K. Hatt, *Methods of Social Research* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1952).

interpretation that women hold a subordinate position in Islam. Confronting these views was sometimes (but not always) valuable, leading to responses that helped indicate how far an individual may have traveled along the continuum of radicalization.<sup>38</sup>

### 2.3. Data Analysis

Data obtained from interviews and focus groups was explored through thematic and discourse analysis and data obtained from video and written materials was analyzed using content and discourse analysis. As with many techniques and methods used in qualitative research, there are no strict procedures guiding discourse analysis.<sup>39</sup> Our research focus framed the initial coding; however, due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, other themes also emerged. Thematic and discourse analysis rely on careful reading and re-reading, in this case of transcripts or detailed notes, so that “recurrent discursive patterns” can be recognized.<sup>40</sup> Considering that our largest group of interviewees, Salafis, are invested in their own “otherness” within Bosnian society and use a very developed rhetorical strategy to that end, discourse analysis was the natural choice of our research team.

However, as Coyle emphasizes, discourse analysis “does not use people’s language as a means of gaining access to their psychological and social worlds. Instead, it focuses on the language itself and examines how people use language to construct versions of their worlds and what they gain from these constructions.”<sup>41</sup> The research team wanted to know how members of the Salafi community construct versions of their world, but further, how this constructed reality reflects their psychology and identity. And so, discourse

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38 This issue will be elaborated on in an upcoming report that will present case studies and profiles of some interviewees.

39 M. Billing, “Methodology and scholarship in understanding ideological explanation,” in *Analyzing Everyday Explanation: A Casebook of Methods*, ed., C. Antaki (London: SAGE, 1988).

40 R. Wooffit, “Analysing Accounts,” in *Researching Social Life*, ed., N. Gilbert (London: SAGE, 1993).

41 Adrian Coyle “Discourse Analysis,” in *Research Methods in Psychology*, eds., M. Breakwell, S. Hammond, and C. Fife-Schaw (London: SAGE, 1995), 244.

analysis was sometimes combined with conversation analysis, which is concerned with “the fine grain of talk.”<sup>42</sup> In addition, substantive content analysis was used to analyze Salafi videos and online communications, enabling researchers to understand the substance of communication and its meaning in context; essentially, establishing what was said and what it really means.<sup>43</sup>

There were some methodological challenges encountered during the research and analysis. The biases of our research team against Salafism – which were acknowledged prior to undertaking the field research and were silenced, to the best of researchers’ abilities, during interviews and focus groups – were chief among them. Beyond that was the question of how honest respondents were, and the fact that male participants dominated the sample. However, different strategies used to achieve trustworthiness in qualitative research were employed, such as triangulation of sampling methods (purposeful and snowball) and of data collection methods (focus groups, individual interviews, and content analysis). The use of different analysis strategies also revealed to researchers whether certain concepts and themes emerged only through one method or across all methods of analysis. These triangulation strategies are employed in qualitative research to increase validity, overcome bias and one-sidedness, and to increase the representativeness and overall credibility of the research.<sup>44</sup>

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42 Ibid, 246.

43 Jarol B. Manheim, Richard C. Rich, Lars Willnat and Craig L. Brians, *Empirical Political Analysis: Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods* (Pearson Longman Publishing, 2014).

44 See: I. Steinke, “Quality Criteria in Qualitative Research,” in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, eds., U. Flick., E. von Kardorff and I. Steinke (London: SAGE Publications, 2004); A.K. Shenton, “Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects,” *Education for Information* 22 (2004): 63-75; and N. Golafshani, “Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research,” *The Qualitative Report* 8, no. 4 (2003): 597-607.

### 3. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS – PART I

#### 3.1. Defining Islamic Radicalization in the Bosnian Context

Searching for the best way to conceptually distinguish between the terms “radicalization” and “extremism” (often used interchangeably) and “violent extremism” and “terrorism” (also often used interchangeably) is a tedious exercise. One of the most quoted definitions of radicalization was offered by Peter Neumann, Director of the International Center for the Study of Radicalization, who referred to it as “what goes on before the bomb goes off.”<sup>45</sup> However, radicalization does not always imply violence. Most people who hold radical or extremist views are never personally involved in committing acts of violence, even if they may justify such acts or excuse those who commit them. Thus, it is wrong to automatically equate radicalization with terrorism; but it is necessary to distinguish between radicalization that is linked to violent extremism and terrorism and radicalization aimed at initiating sweeping changes to society that “may or may not constitute a danger to democracy and may or may not involve the threat of or use of violence to attain the stated goals.”<sup>46</sup>

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45 International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, *Perspectives on Radicalisation and Political Violence: Papers from the First Conference on Radicalisation and Political Violence* (ICSR, 2008).

46 T. Veldhuis and J. Staun, *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model* (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2009), quoted in: *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania* (Tirana: IDM, 2015), 21.

In defining radicalization, this research was informed by the advice of Sedgwick, who recommends that researchers “abandon the idea that ‘radical’ or ‘radicalization’ are absolute concepts,” in lieu of a more relative construction. Sedgwick also warns that both the continuum being referred to and what is seen as ‘moderate’ on that continuum must be specified.<sup>47</sup> According to Western literature, Salafi groups feature as moderate on the continuum of radicalization, with Salafi-jihadists marking the extreme end of that continuum.<sup>48</sup> However, the same continuum cannot be applied in Bosnia, where these lines are more blurred.

The Salafi ideology that arrived in Bosnia during the war was more rigid than the version that spread in Western European countries, and even more rigid than the version preached in Saudi Arabia, the home of Salafism. The mujahideen and *da’is* that flowed into Bosnia at that time – some of whom came from training camps in Afghanistan – promoted Salafism in its most militant form. Western experts refer to this form as Salafi-jihadism, but Islamic scholars in Bosnia, as well as a majority of Salafis we interviewed, see this term as derogatory and problematic because it narrows the meaning of jihad to a military context only and links it intrinsically to terrorism.<sup>49</sup>

In recent outreaches to the public, Bosnian security agencies have avoided any explicit mention of Salafis/Wahhabis when discussing the groups and individuals deemed to be security threats. Instead, they use the terms “takfirists” or “Kharijites.”<sup>50</sup> Still, this attempt to distinguish between Salafis and takfirists/

47 Mark Sedgwick, “The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4 (2010): 491.

48 Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (New York City Police Department, 2007). Some more recent literature does emphasize the link between Salafism and Salafi-jihadism, explored further in the conclusion of this report. See: Cole Bunzel, *The Kingdom and the Caliphate: Duel of the Islamic States* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016).are more theseonal Peace, 2016. nal Peace, 2016. be explored inthe s to ‘CUt ommunitu. d within the interpretaion e: s in the wo

49 Ahmet Alibašić, “Militantni ekstremisti, haridžije našeg doba,” in *Savremene muslimanske dileme*, ed. Ahmet Alibašić and Muhamed Jusić (Sarajevo: Centar za napredne studije, 2015), 376-380.

50 The Karijites were a group in the first century of Islam known for their excess in takfir – i.e., for abusing the right to accuse another Muslim of apostasy. This emphasis on making such a strong distinction between the ideology propagated by Salafi *da’is* in Bosnia and the ideology

Kharijites rests on the implication that the latter are willing to use violence. According to Bosnian Islamic Scholar Ahmed Alibašić, this, too, potentially places non-violent Salafis under the umbrella of violent extremism, because takfirism is “not practiced only by militants.”<sup>51</sup> He suggests that the most appropriate term for Muslim militants is Kharijites.

According to this perspective, groups that advocate *takfir* should not be seen as a threat unless they also promote violence. Alibašić rightly stresses the legal need for the respect of religious freedoms as well. Indeed, some Salafi *da'is* follow *takfiri* principles in their lectures and on online platforms, declaring Shias and Sufis as apostates and referring to some traditional elements of Bosnian Islam as *bid'ah* (novelties). They don't use or advocate violence, and yet they are obviously takfirists. And so, given these nuances, we argue that: **While the Salafi movement grew and spread *in opposition to traditionally moderate Bosnian Islam, Kharijites in Bosnia have emerged out of the Salafi movement.***

It is important to note, too, that even though a majority of Salafis live peaceful lives, they abide by an ideology obsessed with “pure Islam” and thus with purifying traditional Bosnian Islam. The fact that most *da'is* stop short of advocating violence does not mean they do not help create a discourse and culture that raises hostility toward everyone outside their circles; and this culture is a breeding ground for radicalism that *does not* stop short of advocating violence.

### 3.2. The Salafi Movement in BiH: Discourse and Structure

The Salafi movement that developed after the war revolved around the remaining mujahideen and was financed by Islamic charities. Despite warnings

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of takfirism and the Kharijites corresponds with a debate that intensified in early 2014 when pro-Al-Qaeda jihadis drew attention to extreme takfirism. For more on this, see: Cole Bunzel, *From the Paper State to the Caliphate: The Ideology of Islamic State*, Analysis paper, No.19, March 2015, The Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World, 10-11.

51 Alibašić, 371.

from media and NGOs about the dangers the expansion of this movement could pose to the security of the country, little response came from the Bosniak political and intelligence establishment or the Islamic Community.<sup>52</sup> But after September 11, 2001, under pressure from the international community, some Islamic charities suspected of supporting transnational terrorism were closed – among them the innocuous sounding Saudi High Commission for Relief of BiH – and the Bosnian citizenship of most mujahideen was revoked.<sup>53</sup>

With this security crackdown, the Salafi movement in Bosnia began to fragment. “Part of the protocol of some Middle Eastern charities was to condition monthly stipends for the children of fallen soldiers by their mothers’ willingness to wear *hijab*,” explained Senad Pećanin, lawyer and former editor-in-chief of the weekly *Dani*, which used to publish extensively on these topics. He feels that Salafism would have expanded more profoundly across BiH had it not been for September 11th. According to Pećanin, the “proselytism of Salafism was really organized, and they were doing it in a rather arrogant manner,” adding that “if the Saudis had not been stopped in 2001, half of Bosnian women would be wearing *niqab* today.”<sup>54</sup> But with the crackdown on streams of money from Middle Eastern charities, the pace of Salafi proselytism lost momentum, and it took some time for Salafism to find another foothold in Bosnia. In the meantime, though, key influences from outside the country, in Vienna, continued to shape Salafism in BiH.

The most radical homegrown Salafis in Bosnia – whose leader, Jusuf Barčić, died in a car accident in 2007 – were first influenced by two Bosnian clerics living in Austria, Nedžad Balkan from Sandžak and Muhamed Porča

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52 For more about this, see: Vlado Azinovic, “Bosnia and Herzegovina and Terrorism 1996-2011: Defining the Threat, Devising Counterterrorism Strategy,” in *The Dangerous Landscape: International Perspectives on Twenty-first Century Terrorism; Transnational Challenge, International Response*, ed., John J. LeBeau (The Partnership for Peace Consortium’s Combating Terrorism Working Group, 2013), 191-209.

53 According to a list compiled and reviewed by Bosnian authorities in 2007, citizenship for more than 600 people was revoked. *Ibid.*, 193.

54 Interview for the Atlantic Initiative, May 13, 2016.



from Sarajevo. Later, these clerics allegedly had a strong influence on the extremist Salafi community in Gornja Maoča and on some other similarly isolated communities, from which the highest number of fighters have been recruited to battlefields in Syria and Iraq. Militant Salafis generally live in very secluded villages or on the peripheries of towns, segregated from mainstream society. They tend to circle around *para-jamaats* that strongly oppose inclusion to the Islamic Community. According to security agency officials, approximately 3,000 Salafis are potentially militant; and, not surprisingly, it is from this ideological stream that fighters have been recruited to the Syrian and Iraqi war theaters.<sup>55</sup> The outbreak of war in Syria has led to a schism within the militant part of the Salafi movement, though, with some leaning toward the ideology of the Islamic State and others supporting the Al-Nusra Front.

The majority of Salafis in Bosnia do not advocate violence and simply want to live their lives according to their interpretation of Islam. The main problem posed by this group – which we can call the ‘mainstream’ Salafi movement – is that their own sense that they are moderate is not shared by the majority of Bosnian Muslims or Bosnians in general, who see almost all Salafis as radical. This is largely due to the main mission of Salafis *daʿwah*, or proselytization. Spreading Salafism is not only the task of *daʿis* but of all Salafis, who are encouraged to take every opportunity to ‘convert’ non-Salafis.<sup>56</sup>

This more mainstream group of Salafi adherents appears to be increasingly more organized, actively using online platforms, free lectures, and other recruitment strategies to attract new members. Their target audience seems to be traditional Bosnian Muslims, but also vulnerable youth with histories of substance abuse or crime and little to no religious background. And, while

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55 Information gathered from security agencies by the Atlantic Initiative team during a number of consultations from November 2015 to May 2016.

56 This theme came up often in interviews, during which Salafis even tried to convert our researchers. Our team spoke with police inspectors who have interrogated terrorism suspects and other Salafis who they said relentlessly tried to convert them as well.

Salafis continue to maintain a presence in rural areas, the latest trends show that their proselytism is now more oriented toward urban areas and a younger population. Most of these Salafis have, though perhaps reluctantly, accepted the Islamic Community's invitation for inclusion.

Still, while many *da'is* have moderated their discourse when communicating with Islamic Community officials, they have not given up on key criticisms of traditional Bosnian Islam in other forums. For now, this seems to be a debate put on hold as both Salafis and the Islamic Community aspire to influence the discourse of the other. Islamic Community imams who are more accepting to Salafism are optimistic that an inclusion policy will have a moderating effect on Salafi messaging; but others who harbor a stronger anti-Salafi stance fear that inclusion will in fact create space for more aggressive Salafi discourse to win this battle of ideas.

The rhetorical question asked by a number of moderate Bosnian imams on this topic during interviews was: Is it really possible to change the basis of an ideology that defines itself as a superior, purified version of Islam? And is there any way to reconcile that interpretation with traditional Bosnian Islam, if all it seeks to do is to change the way Bosnian Islam has been practiced for centuries?

### **3.3. The Bosnian 'Single Narrative' and the Role of Imad el-Misri**

The notion of a 'single narrative' originated in the British Government over a decade ago to describe the unsophisticated platform of Al-Qaeda – which emphasizes a Manichean reality in which the West is at war with Islam and is entirely to blame for repression or conflict in Muslim countries. Al-Qaeda proposed that taking up arms against the West (the 'Far Enemy') was the only way to damage the oppressor to the point of withdrawal. This was the position of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, and represented a turn for al-Zawahiri from his earlier view that Muslims themselves were

responsible for their own repression by supporting strongman regimes.<sup>57</sup> Unlike Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State has not focused on the United States, but rather on apostate regimes in the Arab world, namely in Syria and Iraq.<sup>58</sup> But this strategy has shifted since the November 2015 attacks in Paris, so that ISIL is now also aiming to inflict terror in “distant lands.”<sup>59</sup> Compared to ISIL, Al-Qaeda is actually less radical in its application of *takfir*; for instance, while they consider Shia Muslims apostates, they believe that killing them *en masse* is too extreme and that most Shia can be forgiven on the basis of their ignorance.

According to the narrative of Salafis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the West, and corrupt Arab regimes, are blamed for all the misfortunes of Muslim communities around the world. In interviews for this research, Salafis especially emphasized the responsibility of the West – mainly the United States and Israel – in creating the Islamic State. In fact, only 10% of interviewees also mentioned the responsibility of Arab regimes in laying the groundwork for ISIL. But in general, this was not a topic interviewees wanted to elaborate on, with many summarizing the situation simply as a “time of fitna,”<sup>60</sup> and explaining this as a reference to difficult and disturbing days when a Muslim’s soul is tried.

Ultimately, interviews revealed that the ‘single narrative’ of Salafis in Bosnia is not dominated by external loci, but is focused more internally, toward purifying Bosnian Islam and Bosnian Muslims. The sentiment that “God will not help the people until the people change from within,” was repeated many times during interviews. When asked about the literature that

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57 Harriet Allan, et al., *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review* (RUSI, 2015). Available at: [http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/Misc\\_Gov/Drivers\\_of\\_Radicalisation\\_Literature\\_Review.pdf](http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/Misc_Gov/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf)

58 Daniel L. Byman and Jennifer R. Williams, “ISIS vs. Al Qaeda: Jihadism’s global civil war,” Brookings Institute, February 24, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2015/02/24-byman-williams-isis-war-with-al-qaeda> (accessed May 3, 2016).

59 Eric Schmitt and David Kirkpatrick, “Strategy Shift for ISIS: Inflicting Terror in Distant Lands,” *New York Times*, November 14, 2015.

60 Aside from its use in the Qur’an, *fitna* has come to have a strong association with “revolt’, ‘disturbances’, ‘civil war’, but a civil war that breeds schism and in which the believers’ purity of faith is in grave danger.” See: L. Gardet, “Fitna,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. II: C-G, eds., B. Lewis, et al. (Brill, 1991): 930–931.

has led them to these views, most interviewees pointed first to a book by Imad el-Misri, who came to Bosnia in 1992 to join the El-Mujahid unit. He ran a network of nineteen *madrasas* throughout Bosnia, attendance at which was a requirement for volunteers to the unit.

Though he is Egyptian, el-Misri allegedly arrived to Bosnia from Saudi Arabia, bringing Wahhabi ideals with him and, in 1993, published a booklet titled “Understanding what needs to be changed.” After the war, el-Misri took to the lecture circuit, telling a gathering of Salafis in Bočinja in 2000 that “the true believer should not worry if he dies or how he dies. He should be interested in reviving Islam and supporting the religion. Based on this clear goal, the believer knows who should be his friend and who should be his enemy.” El-Misri also underscored his belief that God’s law will remain unchanged until Doomsday, clearly referencing the Salafi ideal of purity of the faith based on its earliest incarnations.<sup>61</sup>

In July 2001, el-Misri was arrested and deported to Egypt for his alleged involvement in terrorist activities.<sup>62</sup> After his release from Egyptian prison, he again began addressing Bosnian Muslims through online Salafi platforms and, in 2013, published an amended version of “Understanding what needs to be changed,”<sup>63</sup> with somewhat toned down justifications of violence. The booklet, conceived as a Salafi critique and refutation of Islamic practices in Bosnia, is based primarily on the observations of el-Misri but also on a more general understanding of Bosnian Islam. El-Misri’s critique is typically Salafi, discussing social, moral, and religious change in the context of Salafi notions of “pure” Islam.

According to Amila Buturović, professor of Islamic Studies at Toronto’s York University, El-Misri’s writing is neither original nor thorough; it is clear his text was born out of the specific circumstances of the war in Bosnia and

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61 Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8IpTJ-4a5E> (accessed March 20, 2016).

62 For more, see: Esad Hećimović “Ljeto kada su hapsili mudžahedine,” *BH Dani*, no. 222 (September 2001).

63 Imad el-Misri, *Shvatanja koja trebamo ispraviti* (Švedska Dawetska organizacija, 2013).

Herzegovina and its aftermath. Nonetheless, the booklet quite strongly (if uncreatively) targets Bosnian Islam as an example of a collective religious deviance and ignorance that must be rectified. He refers to Islam in Bosnia as “odd and incorrect” and calls Bosnian Muslims “ignorant,” referring to himself as their missionary (*da'i*).<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Bosnian Islam makes quite an easy target for Salafi critique. Local specificities that have developed over centuries embody a spiritual complexity and cultural finesse that most Bosnian Muslims are proud of, but these are anathema to the Salafi conception of Islam as purified, reductive, literalist, and frozen in the 7th century.

El-Misri warns that hellfire awaits those who stray from the one, true path of pure Islam; and in essence, this is the ‘single narrative’ he promotes. But in more complex terms, “the central dictum of his warning revolves around reinstating the tripartite principle of divine unity (*tawhid*): the oneness of Lordship (*rububiyya*), Godship (*uluhiyya*), and divine names (*sifat*). This is a strong Salafi call, appealing to the supposed deviance from such principles in the act of ritual or doctrinal ‘association’ (*shirk*), which constitutes the greatest transgression,” explains Buturović. She adds that el-Misri cites visits to shrines (e.g., Ajvatovica and Sedam Brace), talismanic practices, astrology, clairvoyance, and similar traditions as a challenge to the Qur’anic notion of divine unity; and thus he says they must be eliminated. Theological principles such as *ta'til* (divestment of God’s attributes), *tajsim* (an anthropomorphic God), and *ta'wil* (allegorical interpretation of God’s word) are also targeted, for standing in opposition to core Wahhabi/Salafi teachings. Buturović notes that the Wahhabis have been tested by the contradiction between accepting “the literal word of the Qur’an about God’s human attributes (sitting on a throne, for example) and the absolute rejection thereof.”<sup>65</sup> In this way, they take an even a more extreme stance than their forefather Ibn Taymiyyah, who argued that the *Salaf* should take a middle ground between anthropomorphism and allegorical interpretation.<sup>66</sup>

In his text, el-Misri emphasizes that nobody beyond the Prophet may

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64 Ibid., 6.

65 Interview, Amila Buturović, York University, Toronto, Ontario, March 2016.

66 Ibid.

engage in interpretation of divine words. This clearly runs counter to the rich intellectual tradition of Bosnian Islam, replete with works that do just that and which have influenced the way God is conceptualized and praised in both official and popular Bosnian Islam. El-Misri also weighs in on the issue of *taqlid* – that is, adherence to the inherited teachings of legal schools (*madhabs*). While he explicitly rejects *taqlid*, el-Misri nevertheless engages in a painstaking critique of practices that are governed by Islamic law. He emphasizes exactly how to pray, give zakat, behave around non-Muslims, dress, interact with the opposite sex, marry, and much more; all of which are issues of behavior rather than belief, and as such are subject to legal rulings. Purporting to stand apart from *fiqh* (Islamic law), in an attempt to revive the days of the *Salaf*, before any *madhab* were founded, “is a way of denying local customs that inevitably developed out of historical circumstances – Bosnian Islam being a case in point.”<sup>67</sup>

Bosnia does not lack for *dai's* who, like el-Misri, have mastered their rhetorical skills in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. Yet, they cannot compare with el-Misri in terms of the ‘moral credit’ he earned for sowing the seeds of Salafism through the network of *madrasas* that emerged during the war, and of course for fighting as part of the mujahideen. Thus, for the sake of cohesion, the weight of el-Misri has now been put behind Safet Kuduzović, who began gaining a significant following in recent years after posting online lectures. El-Misri’s involvement allows him to have some control over Kuduzović, especially in terms of his relations with the Islamic Community, but also offers Kuduzović credibility among other *dai's*.

### **3.4. Domestic Da'is and their Messaging**

The discourse of Salafis is propagated through the lectures of *da'is*, either attended in person or viewed online. As part of our research, the Atlantic Initiative team attended some of those lectures and analyzed videos posted on the Internet. There are thirty prominent *da'is* that travel throughout Bosnia

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

and Herzegovina and Sandžak (in Serbia); not all of them have studied in Saudi Arabia, but many have.<sup>68</sup> They interpret the Qur'an and hadiths for Salafi adherents and play the role of Sharia judge, proscribing rules and regulations.

The *da'is* capturing the most attention (and receiving the most hits on YouTube), and who are most popular among Salafis, are Safet Kuduzović and Elvedin Pezić.<sup>69</sup> The rhetoric of both is in line with the narrative of Imad el-Misri, and according to some sources close to Salafi groups, el-Misri continues to coordinate the network of Bosnian *da'is* despite his 2001 deportation, through Skype conferences. The Saudi-funded King Fahd Mosque has also tried to create some sort of administrative structure for *da'is* in Bosnia, by paying their salaries, but however abundant their funds, Mosque officials will never be able to establish an organization parallel to the Islamic Community. They cannot hold elections or elect the equivalent of a Grand Mufti because, a) it would be against the law, and b) the Islamic Community has too much power. But this lack of administrative structure leads to occasional conflicts among the *da'is* in Bosnia.

Links between el-Misri and Kuduzović are no secret. El-Misri was reportedly present during Kuduzović's doctoral defense in Saudi Arabia in 2013.<sup>70</sup> It is since then that Kuduzović has risen rapidly through the ranks of Bosnian *da'is*, so that he now occupies the top spot. Acting as something of an assistant or deputy to Kuduzović is Pezić, who has a particular appeal among a younger audience. Also popular are Zijad Ljakić and Dževad Gološ, considered slightly to the right of Kuduzović and Pezić.

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68 We tried to get these statistics from Islamic Community officials, but because Saudi Arabia offers scholarships and sends students abroad without their control, they were uncertain of the number. However, it is true that the most influential *da'is* in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sandžak have studied in Saudi Arabia.

69 We found that these were the *da'is* mentioned most by interviewees. Kuduzović is seen as the "ultimate authority" among adults, while Pezić is more popular among the younger population.

70 Haris Hećimović, "Uvaženi šejh Kuduzović doktorirao na Univerzitetu Mekka el-Mukkerema in Džedda," Minber.ba, November 16, 2013, <http://minber.ba/na-univerzitetu-mekka-el-mukkerema-u-dzeddi-doktorirao-safet-kuduzovic/> (accessed March 18, 2015).

Female *da'is* are mostly absent from the public space, but Nada Dizdarević has stepped into that role. She is the former wife of Hadj Boudella, one of the wrongly accused “Algerian Six.”<sup>71</sup> Dizdarević gained popularity by advocating strongly for her husband’s release and is now the only female *da'i* who speaks in public; though it does not appear that she is connected with the larger network of Bosnian *da'is* – made up of men who discourage women in *niqab* from speaking publically. Indeed, Salafi women are free to speak privately with other women, but it is men who are entitled to set the general discourse in the public space, especially in the fight for the hearts and minds of Bosnian Muslims.<sup>72</sup>

The topics discussed by *da'is* in lectures can be divided into two categories: a) religious worldview, religious ethics, and religious doctrines; or b) regulations and stipulations for everyday life. Our research team analyzed rhetoric that falls into this first category by focusing on speeches related to the righteousness of Salafism and those in which concepts such as *shirk* are defined, the “purity” of Islamic teachings is discussed, or questions of the afterlife are examined. To explore rhetoric that falls into the second category, researchers focused on messaging from *da'is* about the daily habits that make a “true Muslim.”

The relevance of theological doctrine in the context of radicalization is tied to how (or if) that doctrine defines “the enemy.” Our team analyzed the speeches of *da'is* – mainly those of Kuduzović and Pezić – with the aim to identify whether they included elements of hate speech. We found the strongest such messaging directed against Shias, and after that, at Sufis; which is in line with the takfirism that informs Salafi ideology. According to

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71 In October 2001, following the 9/11 attacks, six Algerian nationals were arrested in Bosnia and Herzegovina and accused of plotting fresh attacks against the United States. They were ultimately acquitted by the Bosnian courts, but on the day of their release, US agents took them by force to a then-unknown destination – the prison at Guantanamo Bay. In November 2008, a United States District Court judge ruled that five of the six had been wrongfully accused and ordered their release. For more on this, see: “Five of ‘Algerian Six’ Freed from Guantanamo,” *Balkan Insight*, November 21, 2008.

72 In a video entitled “Sisters who hold lectures” (*Sestre koje drže predavanja*), Kuduzović implies that female *da'is* should remain in the closed circle of women, but also that they should stick to general advisory topics related to the daily life of Muslims and avoid sensitive topics of Islamic law.



Kuduzović and Pezić, these two groups are beyond repair, and traditional Bosnian Muslims are also said to be “sick and in need of treatment” and are warned to return to the right path.

Lately, some Salafi *da'is* have moderated their position toward the Islamic Community, which is of course the keeper of traditional Bosnian Islam. Indeed, Kuduzović and Pezić are among the main proponents of inclusion in recent talks between Salafis and the Islamic Community. But in lectures, Kuduzović's seemingly tolerant discourse is often paired with dismissive or even hostile rhetoric, leading researchers to wonder whether his talk of inclusion is just a diversion meant to lessen the pressure applied by security agencies who closely monitor these *da'is*.

The double-edge of Kuduzović's messaging can be seen in a number of his lectures. During one, an audience member asked if Muslims should pay the annual membership fee to the Islamic Community “even though imams in the mosque practice *bid'ah* (novelties).” Kuduzović replied that “The whole Islamic world is full of novelties that spoil pure Islam and that is the case with Bosnia and Herzegovina as well. We wish that, in all the mosques, *sunnah* was practiced the proper way, but that is not the case. Should we stop going to the mosque because of that? Of course not.”<sup>73</sup> But the rest of his lecture was less conciliatory, and implied that the problems with Bosnian Islam and the Islamic Community actually lie at the feet of Bosnian Muslims themselves. “Once you, Allah's slaves, are ready and once you have changed from within, once each of you properly practice *sunnah*,” he said, “Allah will send you better leaders and will wipe the existing ones from the face of the earth.”<sup>74</sup>

In another similar lecture, Kuduzović again appeases the Islamic Community, encouraging respect for the institution because it has safeguarded Islam in Bosnia throughout history. But this is followed by a statement that could be seen as hostile to current Islamic Community leadership:

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73 Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-LCKcwWAc8> (accessed March 17, 2016).

74 Ibid.

*The Islamic Community is not Reis Kavazović, it is not the Grand Mufti and other muftis. The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina is all Muslims who live in Bosnia and Herzegovina. When you say to people, 'Islamic Community,' they immediately point their gaze to one or two individuals. But what if Kavazović dies tomorrow? A new Grand Mufti comes. Has the Islamic Community disappeared? The Grand Mufti dies, all the muftis die... Or the muftis decide to go to jihad one day and lose their life on the path of Allah... Will that mean the end of the Islamic Community? No of course not.*<sup>75</sup>

Ten months after that lecture, on February 24, 2016, ISIL militant Amir Selimović vowed from Syria to “cut the throat of the Grand Mufti.”<sup>76</sup> Beyond the fact that speeches given by Kuduzović can be seen as undermining the authority of the Grand Mufti and of the Islamic Community specifically, his rhetoric at times reflects a more generalized violent takfirism of the type promoted by ISIL. After the attack on Charlie Hebdo, for example, Kuduzović gave a passionate speech arguing that anyone who offends the Prophet Muhammed deserves to die. “Even if the person who offended the Prophet Muhammed repents afterward,” he said, “that person still needs to die.”<sup>77</sup>

Eschatology, dealing with life after death, is also a common topic of Salafi *da'is* in YouTube lectures. The option of going to heaven is said to be reserved only for “true Muslims.” Interestingly, while Christians and Jews are referred to as non-believers in this context, they are not the targets of hate in the way that Shias, Sufis, and to a lesser extent, traditional Bosnian Muslims are. Still, Salafi messaging on the question of what happens after death is in essence quite similar to that of imams from the Islamic Community; though traditional Bosnian imams balance their discourse between fear of God and love of God, while Salafi *da'is* focus on fear. It is this approach that

75 “Da li treba raditi na rušenju Islamske zajednice?” (Do we need to destroy the Islamic Community?), May 24, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fohi8i-gsAI> (accessed May 7, 2016)

76 Maja Nikolić, “Long distance IS Threat Roils Bosnia, Top Islamic Cleric,” *RFE/RL*, February 24, 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/content/bosnia-mufti-kavazovic-asks-for-protection-after-islamic-state-death-threat-/27570445.html>, (accessed May 7, 2016).

77 Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49etk\\_BC3GQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49etk_BC3GQ) (accessed May 7, 2016).

puts them at odds with Sufis especially, who emphasize love of God as a central tenet.

Of course, inducement by fear is the practice of many religious leaders and is not reserved to Salafis. However, Salafi *da'is* in Bosnia apply this approach with a fervor unfamiliar to Bosnian Muslims until recently. They dramatically depict the alleged punishment for impure Muslims, with hellfire said to be awaiting all those who practice *shirk* (like Shias and Sufis) or *bid'ah* (like traditional Bosnian Muslims), if they do not repent in time.

Repentance of the kind Salafis promote requires that Bosnian Muslims are more or less re-educated; and the speeches that receive the highest number of hits online (some of Kuduzović's have been viewed over 80,000 times) are related to regulation of the daily life of a "true Muslim." The emphasis of these messages is much more on what Muslims should *not* do than on what they should. They reflect an ultra-religious conservatism that has never been expressed (at least publicly) by imams of the Islamic Community, who have been tolerant of "occasional Muslims" who rarely attend prayers in the mosque and otherwise lead secular lives.

The rhetoric of Salafi *da'is* clearly condemns this notion of secularism among Bosnian Muslims. A recent speech by Kuduzović – which was ridiculed by mainstream secular society on social networks – harshly judged those who visit the seaside, where they are surrounded by half-naked bodies.<sup>78</sup> And Kuduzović not only promotes a puritan discourse (and one that could not have proliferated in the public space prior to the online and social media era), but also speaks regularly in opposition to Bosnian law in regard to gender rights, family law, and freedom of movement. Beyond the assertion he shares with all *da'is* that the primary role of women is to be a wife and mother, Kuduzović advocates a sort of gendered atavism; for instance, joking about and justifying polygamy, declaring that women should not be allowed to travel farther than 75 km (45 mi) by themselves, and restricting a woman's

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78 Ibid.

right to a job or education to only “appropriate” professions that allow her to contribute to the good of Muslim society. He specifically bans women from studying criminal justice, engineering, or any other profession in which they are likely to mix with men in the course of doing their job.<sup>79</sup> Kuduzović is so comfortable dictating misogynistic regulations to women that he has even weighed in on whether and what kind of sunglasses are permitted for a “proper Muslim woman,” proclaiming that they must be modestly designed so as to avoid attracting the gaze of men in the street.<sup>80</sup>

According to Kuduzović and his deputy Pezić, the list of what Muslims should not do is quite long. However, they do sometimes discuss what *is* allowed, and even offer advice about how husbands and wives can achieve *halal* pleasure in the carnal sense. Without going into too many of the bizarre, descriptive details they comfortably articulate, it is safe to assume that they take a rather liberal view regarding experimentation between spouses in bed; indeed, listening to them talk about it is akin to reading a *Cosmopolitan* advice column. But what makes their treatment of this topic all the more peculiar is that their advice is heavily referenced by hadiths. It’s true that some hadiths do discuss sexual pleasure, but traditional Bosnian imams have never spoken about this publicly, and sex remains a topic seen by these imams (and much of the Bosnian public) as taboo and left to individual believers to regulate in private.<sup>81</sup>

Ultimately, it is not the discourse of traditional Bosnian imams that Salafi *da’is* are competing with by discussing sexual issues so openly, but the discourse of sexual freedom that newcomers and converts to Salafism may have enjoyed previously. This openness is a powerful tool for attracting new, especially younger adherents, while at the same time reframing their sexual discourse. After all, who doesn’t like reading *Cosmopolitan*?

79 See: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_DY9gb7541I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DY9gb7541I); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9zmPuOrIaI>; and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_DY9gb7541I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DY9gb7541I) (accessed May 7, 2016).

80 Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_DY9gb7541I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DY9gb7541I) (accessed May 7, 2016).

81 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJYiY8A-hZg>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJYiY8A-hZg>; and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSBYuBVjNZk> (accessed May 7, 2016).

### **3.5. Salafi Lesson No. 1: We are on the wrong path and must change course**

Though many texts promoting Salafism have been published with Saudi and other Gulf region money, most of our interview subjects – and particularly those with no previous Islamic education – mentioned el-Misri’s booklet as their first introduction to the ideology. Many also referred to Safet Kuduzović as having influenced them on questions of everyday life and attitudes about the Islamic Community. It is easy to understand why el-Misri’s booklet is appealing to newcomers; it is a combination religious and political pamphlet with a clear and simple message, and it offers “knowledge” that is said to be the only path to salvation. El-Misri presents the 1992-1995 war and genocide in Bosnia as a lesson for Bosnian Muslims who were not on the “true path.” He implies that Bosnian Islam, with its embrace of local and cultural specifics, has led Bosnian Muslims astray. Though el-Misri softened his stance on this in the amended version of the booklet, and even appealed to Salafis to join the Islamic Community, he still devoted the largest part of the text to detailing what needs to be changed about Bosnian Islam and the Islamic Community – which he refers to in ways that imply its obsolescence, saying it “has its weaknesses, but...is most deserving for having maintained Islam in your region before many of you were born.”<sup>82</sup>

And, despite his explicit call for Salafis to join the Islamic Community and reject *para-jamaats*, el-Misri and Kuduzović both continue to speak in almost identical terms regarding issues of purity within Bosnian Islam and the need for Bosnian Muslims to take responsibility for the purported consequences of their impure practices. Thus, Salafis in Bosnia continue to understand and interpret the causes of genocide during the war through the oversimplified lens el-Misri introduced in his first publication – that “bad Muslims” in Bosnia were punished for walking the wrong path:

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82 El-Misri.

*There was no faith in Srebrenica, and that is the reason Bosniaks were the target of genocide. There was no fighting spirit. Compare the regions where Bosniaks succeeded in defending themselves. In 1992, Serbs threatened that they would overrun Tešanj and Zavidovići in two weeks, but they didn't manage it. That part of Bosnia was successfully defended because they were more turned toward religion. Syria and wartime Bosnia are a similar scenario. A child that refuses the authority of the parent will anger its parents.... We also have obligations to God. If you don't pray, you will bring the wrath of God upon you. [But] a man who prays is not an easy victim.<sup>83</sup>*

Reflecting this, Salafis interviewed for this study made it clear to researchers that adherence to just any interpretation of Islam will not save Bosniaks, and that only a return to “true Islam” can bring a better future:

*Allah will not change the state of mind of a people if the people do not change themselves. We do not impose anything on anyone, but we shall show everyone how to pray. Those people from Srebrenica have become greedy since the war. We donate cattle to them, but they sell it and buy rakija. So what can people expect from Allah? What kind of mercy do they expect?<sup>84</sup>*

Although members of our research team were aware that this kind of discussion takes place in some private circles, we were surprised to hear this opinion shared in an open forum. Insensitive expressions of this kind convey a moral superiority that is often the cause of conflict between “ordinary Bosnian Muslims” and Salafis, and is part of why Salafi teachings have not been well accepted in Eastern Bosnia. This apparent sense of moral superiority is true for many Salafis, who see themselves as “true Muslims” who have the right to judge friends, neighbors, and even family members that do not practice Islam in the same way. And, as the quote above illustrates, they do

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83 Focus group participant, near Sarajevo, February 19, 2016.

84 Ibid.

not hesitate to assign the blame for genocide to Bosnian Muslims themselves. This was also a common discussion among Jews after the Holocaust; but in Bosnia, this kind of argument would never have been heard in public before the introduction of Salafism.

A Bosnian imam close to former Grand Mufti Cerić during and after the war explained that any former support by the Islamic Community for Salafi teachings was largely linked to a combination of economic factors. But, he said, there was also overwhelming consensus that Bosnian Islam needed to be enriched in the wake of the war:

*In 1996, the values of our society, and the state, were totally destroyed. We welcomed every currency flow that entered the country, whether from the West or from the East. We had an organization from Kuwait that invested a million dollars for stipends directed at the children of shahids [martyrs]. Who could find any justification to stop that? And, of course, they were spreading some ideas that were radical to us. You know, most Muslims in Bosnia – common folks – did not know the difference between Shi'a and Sunni. Our Islam was...[well], we had Tito, the Party, and a bit of Islam that the Ottomans left to us. ...some leading circles in the Islamic Community and those in the SDA believed that some strengthening of our faith couldn't hurt. We believed that Bosniaks as a people were not radical and that Salafi teachings would not take root. We never expected it would spread so widely or go so far as to pose a danger to the state or radicalize Bosniaks to such a degree.<sup>85</sup>*

But radicalization came, spreading slowly and steadily around Bosnia and changing the matrix of Bosnian Muslim inclusivity, which some of our interviewees saw as an “immature” version of Islam. The Salafi message that “Bosnian Muslims are not Muslim enough” reverberated differently among different groups of people, and the majority rejected it. Salafi communities were at first isolated in villages, but in the past few years have also cropped

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85 Interview with Bosnian imam, central Bosnia, January 25, 2016.

up in urban areas and seem to include a younger generation. Perhaps this should not be surprising considering the fragmented nature of the Bosnian educational system, which features ethnicity-based curricula that reinforce stereotypes about other ethnic groups and fail to educate youth to develop analytical thinking skills.

Though Bosnia is formally committed to Euro-Atlantic values, its educational system works on the basis of an “ethnification” that encourages “an ‘us vs. them’ mentality in a post-war region that has experienced little genuine or social reconciliation.”<sup>86</sup> Alongside this exclusionary approach, Salafi *madrasas* produce yet another layer of otherness. These *madrasas* reflect the sense of belonging in opposition to an ‘other’ that is manifested in the state educational system as well as an oversimplified black-and-white view of the world. Indeed, the radicalization that is promoted in Salafi discourse differs little from that promoted generally among violent extremist groups; and experts emphasize that violent groups create “an identity and a sense of belonging in opposition to an ‘other’ who is vilified and dehumanized.”<sup>87</sup> This discourse offers no room for “doubt, critical thinking or self-criticism, and attributes the entire responsibility for an individual situation, in particular real or perceived grievances, to the ‘others’ and the society at large.”<sup>88</sup> While we did discuss a range of topics with Salafis during interviews – including domestic politics and economics, and the situation in Syria and internationally – they were most passionate when discussing the “purification” of Bosnian Muslims, who they identify as the ‘other’ and on whom, in a twisted interpretation of eschatological justice, they have conditionalized the moral and just future of the state.

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86 Valery Perry, “Countering the Cultivation of Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Case for Comprehensive Education Reform,” DPC Policy Note, No. 10, Sarajevo, September 2015.

87 “Youth Engagement to Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terror: Report on Findings and Recommendations,” Joint OSCE Secretariat-OSCE ODHR Expert Roundtable, October 23-24, 2012, 4. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/atu/103352?download=true> (accessed May 6, 2016).

88 Ibid.



## 4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS – PART II

### 4.1. The Islamic Community

Our research team labeled the official narrative of the Islamic Community as representative of a ‘moderate’ stance on the Bosnian ideological continuum (per Sedgewick). Attitudes of Salafies toward the Islamic Community were in fact a key variable in identifying the extent to which individuals and groups we interviewed adhered to Salafi ideology. Negative views about the Islamic Community had a direct relationship to more extreme Salafism. Those views were also reflective of how far along the continuum of radicalization within the Salafi ideological spectrum individuals and groups we interviewed were positioned. Combined with other factors, including the degree to which the identity of individuals within a group change, views about the Islamic Community were also an indicator of whether groups are likely to stray from mainstream Salafism into Salafi-jihadism.

Only 7 of the individuals we interviewed claimed they do not feel they can become members of the Islamic Community because they view its practices as impure. But even those who said they will compromise for the sake of inclusion reflected the position of el-Misri and Kuduzović that the Islamic community as the institution deserves respect for its historic role in maintaining Islam in Bosnia and the region, but not because of the people who lead it today, who are described as corrupt. “It will take time,” one focus

group participant told researchers, “but they will have to change. Time is on our side.”<sup>89</sup>

Research participants also emphasized the birth rate of Salafis, which they view as a demographic advantage over other groups. One noted the case of “four brothers that have forty-eight children between them,” and said he had recently attended a gathering at which there were “thirty of us adults and, imagine, one hundred and fifty children! Almost like a small settlement!”<sup>90</sup> The children of Salafis are raised in a strict environment and learn not to socialize with people outside Salafi circles. They attend local government schools and some even go to official Islamic Community religious schools, but they also attend parallel religious classes organized by NGOs that teach “pure Islam.”

Beyond their objection that traditional Bosnian Muslims and the Islamic Community discriminate against them, Salafis expressed a number of objections regarding the administration of the Islamic Community and the behavior of imams. The Islamic Community struggles financially and its imams have rather small salaries – ranging from 250 to 600 euros per month. The budget is not centralized and depends on local administration, and there is a tacit agreement that the salaries of imams are compensated by believers, who make donations that are usually given during funeral prayers. The fact that funeral services have to be organized through the Islamic Community, and thus come with expectations of monetary compensation, was a significant source of grievance among Salafi research participants, and one which many wanted to elaborate on.

One participant told us about the case of an impoverished neighbor that had no family and thus no one to take care of his funeral expenses, explaining that a Salafi organization covered them. “That is unacceptable,” he said. “A funeral service costs a lot. It varies from town to town, but it is between

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89 Focus group participant, city in Northeastern Bosnia, March 19, 2016.

90 Focus group participant, near Sarajevo, February 19, 2016.

1,000 and 1,500 euros. In Sarajevo, costs go up to 2,000 euros, depending on the place of burial. In addition to that, a grieving family is expected to give 50 euros to each imam.”<sup>91</sup> Another interviewee told us that “one does not have to give money to imams, but that is the widely accepting habit. According to Sharia that is not acceptable.”<sup>92</sup> Families feel the obligation to give, and if they don’t, they feel ashamed.

It is customary in Bosnia that imams who perform funeral services and other prayers for the memory of the dead are financially rewarded.<sup>93</sup> However, our religious consultants confirmed that Salafis do have a valid point of theological contention here. According to hadiths and generally accepted interpretations of Sharia, taking money from believers for Qur’anic prayer is a sin. We asked some imams about this, but they did not view it as corrupt or sinful, arguing that donations come from believers who understand that the salaries of imams are minimal. But Salafi *da’is* insist that this practice is a form of corruption and claim that traditional Bosnian burial practices are in fact designed so that imams can amass money from the faithful. This is a weak spot for the Islamic Community and one that will have to be addressed.

Salafis we spoke with expressed their view that mourning the dead should be a relatively small and private affair. “There is no need for a gathering when someone dies. Their family is already in pain. They do not need the obligation to serve people, cook for guests, and be burdened with socializing. It is better to go through that pain surrounded with just the closest members of the family.”<sup>94</sup> Moreover, Salafi *da’is* do not take money from believers for offering prayers. As mentioned above, these *da’is* are thought to be paid by the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs, and though we could not establish their monthly

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91 Interview with Salafi adherent, city in Northeastern Bosnia, March 19, 2016.

92 Interview with Salafi adherent, city in Central Bosnia, January 26, 2016.

93 *Bulas*, female leaders in the Bosnian Islamic tradition, also offer services – for women – in the wake of a death (including washing female bodies in preparation for burial), and interviewees were equally unhappy with the unspoken obligation to provide them with a “donation” as well; though *bulas* are arguably not seen as inherently tied to the Islamic Community as imams, for a variety of historical and social reasons.

94 Interview with Salafi adherent, Southeastern Bosnia, April 25, 2016.

salary, our sources estimated this amount to be between 1,000 and 2,000 euros, depending on the popularity of each *da'i* – a significantly higher monthly income than that received by Islamic Community imams. Allegedly, they are also compensated for contributing to the birth rate of Salafis, with incremental pay increases according to the number of children they have.<sup>95</sup>

A majority of Islamic Community imams who we interviewed expressed the danger Salafism poses to their interpretation of Islam, but also to Bosnian cultural traditions. Still, two-thirds of them advocated a policy of inclusion, and this may explain why they tend not to react in public to some of the aggressive rhetoric shared online by Salafi *da'is*. One of these imams explained, “We hope that step-by-step we will draw them toward us. We won’t get anywhere if we answer with aggression. I’ve been tolerant toward Salafis in my mosque, and I’ve had results, with some of them softening their aggressive behavior.”<sup>96</sup> Some imams warned that a policy of inclusion is having different results in different regions, though. Researchers raised this issue with both Islamic Community officials and imams, asking specifically about the influence of Salafis in the towns of Bihać, Zenica, and Travnik, where there are reportedly Islamic Community imams who have “purified their beliefs” after receiving further education in Saudi Arabia or other Gulf Countries. The concern is that Salafis are influencing them more than they are influencing Salafis. But this topic was brushed off quickly in group settings despite the fact that several imams were comfortable speaking to us about it in private interviews. “The Islamic Community already has a cancer that will metastasize if it is not cured in time,” one told us.<sup>97</sup>

Essentially, these imams are claiming that the Islamic Community already has Salafis among its ranks, in the three congregations mentioned above. We interviewed some allegedly pro-Salafi imams and, while they did not hide their views, they did not advertise them either. However, a high level of

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95 Most of the imams interviewed for this study mentioned having solid information that the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs pays *da'is*.

96 Interview with Bosnian imam, Sarajevo, March 23, 2016.

97 Interview with Bosnian imam, Sarajevo, December 15, 2015.

conservatism was nonetheless evident in their attitudes. They referred to some traditional Bosnian practices as novelties, were very conservative on gender issues, and stressed the discrimination faced by Salafis:

*[Salafis] are discriminated against by the wider community, and are under the scrutiny of security agencies. No wonder they are so anxious. The role of imams is to treat all Muslims who come to our mosque in the same way. We should not fall into the trap of treating Muslims... differently, because of some minor differences in their interpretation of the faith. Salafis who come to our mosque are peaceful. People look at them with hostility just because they have long beards, just because their women wear a niqab. The role of an imam is to make peace between traditional Muslims and Salafis.<sup>98</sup>*

Some animosity between traditional Bosnian Muslims and Salafis is practically a given. Bosnian Islam is under threat from Salafi discourse and proselytizing, and Bosnian Muslims have occasionally reacted aggressively toward Salafis who attempt to impose changes to the way they pray and live their daily lives. However, imams who fail to see the origins of this animosity are inherently more sympathetic to Salafism; and those who have started to reject some of the traditional practices of Bosnian Islam or advise their *jamaat* to give up 'cultural influences' in accordance with the messages spread by el-Misri, Kuduzović, and others are almost certainly practicing a form of Salafism in private.

Independent observers and openly anti-Salafi imams are more willing to discuss the problem of Salafism among Islamic Community ranks. But Islamic Community officials are still reticent on this issue, at least publicly, apparently hoping that the proposed inclusion policy will manage to dampen the influence of those favoring a Salafi interpretation of the faith. But whether absorbing Salafis into the wider context of the moderate Islamic Community will lead them to tone down their rigid rhetoric is unknown.

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98 Interview with Bosnian imam, town in Central Bosnia, February 25, 2016.

Given the focus on birth rates among Salafis and their deeply held belief that Bosnian Islam is “impure,” it is hard to visualize their true acquiescence to a policy of inclusion. Indeed, the compromise offered by Salafis – to meet the Islamic Community “half-way” – can only be achieved by changing the matrix of traditional Bosnian Islam. Thus, in some sort of poetic justice, anti-Salafi imams believe the Islamic Community will first have to “purify” its own ranks of imams who hold Salafi sentiments before any inclusion policy can be implemented. Indeed, both Salafis and anti-Salafis are calling for purification of two totally different kinds, and the clash of these ideals seems irreconcilable to the outside observer and appears to portend that the real problems with inclusion efforts are yet to come.

#### **4.2. How Homogenous is the Salafi Movement in Bosnia?**

Making distinctions among different sub-groups of Salafis in Bosnia was part of the goal of this research. Despite frequent talk of “the Salafi community/movement,” analysts are uncertain of who this actually encompasses. Questions about how homogenous or heterogeneous Salafis are, whether there is a Salafi elite, and whether Salafis centralize their planning were met with varied answers by interviewees. Nonetheless, several features of the Salafi movement did clearly emerge during our research.

Researchers identified differences between Salafi groups living in rural villages and those situated near more urban centers, with rural Salafis appearing more radical and more adamant in their refusal to accept any policies of inclusivity proposed by the Islamic Community. According to Bosnian law, only the Islamic Community is institutionally entitled to teach and interpret Islam in Bosnia, and groups outside that framework are now treated by the state security apparatus as potential security threats. Nevertheless, over the past few years, some Salafi groups have begun establishing local citizens’ associations across Bosnia to spread the Salafi message and attract new adherents. The focus of this proselytism is no longer just secluded rural villages, but has moved to bigger urban centers like Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, and Bihać.

These associations organize religious classes for children, Arabic language and IT courses for youth, and religious lectures for people of all ages. The majority have somewhat moderated their position toward the Islamic Community over time, mainly in response to repressive measures by security agencies and pressure from media. This change also seems to be linked to messaging from *da'is* who have issued public statements of support for inclusion.

As we already mentioned, Salafi proselytism in Bosnia depends on *da'is*, the preachers who invite adherents to Islam, and Salafi *da'is* are largely educated in Saudi Arabia or other Gulf countries, which means most of them have little working knowledge of the Islamic Community. Those who hold the most authority have completed studies at the university level in Saudi Arabia and, judging by their lifestyles, are well paid for their work; though they are not officially employed. Sources from security agencies indicated to researchers that most of the funding used to pay these *da'is* is supplied in cash and is very difficult to trace.<sup>99</sup> But all of the imams from the Islamic Community that we interviewed shared their belief that the Saudi-funded King Fahd Mosque pays some leading *da'is*.

*I know an imam who studied in Saudi Arabia. After his graduation, they offered him a really significant salary to spread Salafi Da'wah in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was to report to the King Fahd Mosque for monthly payment and also to coordinate lectures with them. He obviously refused, otherwise he would not have been telling me that. Instead he accepted a job with the Islamic Community, which paid less, but is a legal, monthly salary.<sup>100</sup>*

Islamic Community officials had mixed feelings about religious students who return from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Countries. Islamic Community procedures dictate that these students must attend a Bosnian *madrassa* prior

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99 Consultations with security officials, Sarajevo, April 26, 2016.

100 Interview with Bosnian imam, March 23, 2016.

to departure, but some do not attend, do not finish, or leave the country without informing the Islamic Community at all. One official told us:

*We don't have problems with those who go to study through our procedures. They usually have a job in the Islamic Community after they return. They do not get influenced by the Hanbali school or the Saudi lifestyle. The problem is those over whom we have no control.<sup>101</sup>*

But some officials and imams feel that even the teachings of Bosnian *madrasas* cannot stand against Gulf region interpretations of Islam:

*Rare are those who can resist their indoctrination. We did not have problems with students we used to send to Egypt or Syria, for example. But Saudi Arabia, Kuwait... Qatar, that is another story. They come back 'purified' and judgmental about our tradition. There is no way we can do anything to lessen that indoctrination. Officially, they practice our Hanafi school, but privately they assert that there is no difference between Islamic schools of thought or that the Hanbali school is preferred.<sup>102</sup>*

According to a source in the Islamic Community, high-level talks with Saudi representatives have failed to result in any changes to the funding streams that appear to support Salafi proselytism in Bosnia or in how students are selected for Gulf region scholarship aid:

*We have tried so many times, and failed so many times, to convince them that these students create problems for us upon their return. We tried to have conversations on a high diplomatic level...but they won't listen. There is also a propagation of Shia teaching [in Bosnia] due to students who have studied in Iran, but the Iranians understand the danger of having Shia and Salafi adherents teaching in such proximity.*

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101 Interview with an Islamic Community official, Sarajevo, February 10, 2016.

102 Interview with a Bosnian imam, Central Bosnia, January 26, 2016.



*The Iranians promised to cooperate to stop the spread of Shia teaching. I am not sure they will keep their promise, but...given that Bosnia is such a vulnerable country, if the status quo is maintained we can expect some serious security issues in the future.*<sup>103</sup>

It is obvious that, even without any formal administrative body, the Salafi movement in Bosnia maintains some homogeneity through its network of *da'is*, apparently financed by Saudi Arabian sources. But despite talk of inclusion, there are still over two dozen para-*jamaats* that refuse to join the Islamic Community, some of which are rather militant. When we raised this issue with research participants, they offered somewhat conflicting thoughts on the topic. Some stressed that there is no connection between mainstream Salafis—who want to be under one umbrella with the Islamic Community—and militant Salafis, who participants said issue threats against them as well as against other Bosnian Muslims. “The takfirists are against us, too,” they said, and “security agencies are surveilling us, who are peaceful, while they let the militants walk free.”<sup>104</sup>

Still, others emphasized that Salafis were best equipped to confront the problem of militancy within their own communities, saying “The guys that present a security threat do not recognize the Islamic Community at all. They will not talk to the Islamic Community. Our most respected *da'is* are not on the best terms with [militants] either, but would know how to handle them.” Indeed, a number of participants felt the “Islamic Community should let [Salafi] *da'is* negotiate with the militants...so that we all come under one umbrella,” and that “unity among the Muslims of Bosnia is a necessity.” Specifically, Safet Kuduzović was cited as “the highest authority among *da'is*,” and thus the obvious choice to mediate “between militants and the Islamic Community.”<sup>105</sup>

This notion that “our *da'is* can help the Islamic Community pacify those who strongly oppose them” emerged as a frequent theme in interviews. In

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103 Interview with Islamic Community official, Sarajevo, February 10, 2016.

104 These statements emerged in about two-thirds of the interviews we conducted with Salafis.

105 Statement such as these emerged in about half the interviews we conducted with Salafis.

some ways, this reflects a relativized logic of association that makes militant Salafis the bargaining chip of moderate Salafis hoping to gain access to or influence over the Islamic Community. But what is there for Salafis to gain through inclusion, from their perspective? One told us that “the Islamic Community treats us as if we are her stepchildren. We have graduated from prestigious schools in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait... we have better knowledge of Islam than many of their imams, and still they will not accept us.”<sup>106</sup> There seems to be something to prove for Salafis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and slowly increasing their influence over Islamic Community administration and gaining access to the fertile minds of Bosnian children in *maktabs* may allow them to change the practice of Islam in Bosnia for generations.

Salafi *da'is* who hold degrees from Saudi Arabian institutions earned outside the approved scholarship scheme of the Islamic Community have been insistent that their credentials be recognized by the Islamic Community anyway, and they argue that they should be licensed to teach in *maktabs* – the official religious schools for children. At the same time, these *da'is* acknowledge that their teachings could contradict those of the official Islamic Community. When asked if they would teach children that traditional Bosnian Islam is impure, one mid-ranking *da'i* told us:

*We will have to meet with the Islamic Community half-way. I say the best thing is if we agree not to teach children on, let's say, 10 topics that are the source of controversy between us and the Islamic Community. So if we do not touch upon those topics, there will be no need to speak about the errors of traditional Bosnian Islam.*<sup>107</sup>

However, it seems that the ideal position for *da'is* would equate to only part-time work for the Islamic Community, since their role as traveling lecturers brings them lucrative income, again, partly from the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Additionally, most *da'is* receive payments from the NGOs

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106 Interview with Salafi *da'i*, Sarajevo, December 29, 2016.

107 Ibid.

that organize these lectures, issued out of donations made by believers. Thus, Islamic Community officials claim that some Salafi *da'is* do not really want a full union with the Islamic Community, for financial reasons. And while Salafis firmly believe that some of the practices of traditional Bosnian Islam – such as those related to burial, collective prayer, and shrine visitations – are novelties that must be banned, monetary incentives may be a more pragmatic reason for them to resist complete inclusion. If Salafi *da'is* fully join the Islamic Community, they will have to give up their alternative lecture network and, on top of that, would refuse to engage in the practices that bring supplemental income to Islamic Community imams. This would mean a significant cut to their income, from an estimated 1,000-2,000 euros to just 300-600 euros. We asked some Islamic Community officials about this, and one told us:

*Not all [Salafi da'is] want inclusion. The most popular of them will not give up their lectures, their coordination of NGOs, and their work with the King Fahd Mosque to publish materials. However, there are about thirty really popular da'is who, wherever they go, gather lots of people; but there are around 300 graduates from Saudi and other Gulf countries universities. They want to be employed with the Islamic Community, those graduates. They do not earn money like those 30 very popular da'is. In fact, many of them are involved in other kinds of businesses, mostly with Arabs who are finding Bosnia attractive for real estate business of late.<sup>108</sup>*

These dynamics make the homogeneity of the Salafi movement difficult to assess, but some organization clearly exists and is more or less consistent from region to region, with little if any variation in ideology, and “mainstream” adherents across the country recognizing Safet Kuduzović as the ultimate authority. Lectures organized by NGOs are well attended not only by locals but usually by people from surrounding villages who are provided transport. It is hard to believe that this kind of organization, not only throughout Bosnia

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108 Interview with Bosnian imam.

but across the region as well (in Sandžak, Kosovo, and parts of Macedonia), is the result of spontaneous activism. And the same goes for the consistency of the statements and demands of Salafi leaders throughout Bosnia, which suggest a well-developed and centralized strategy.

### 4.3. Recruitment

After initial desk research and preliminary interviews with imams from the Islamic Community – who complained about the dominance of online Salafi platforms – we assumed that most converts to Salafism were first drawn to the ideology by content in these online portals. One of the most surprising of our findings was that this assumption was incorrect. In fact, interviewees told us without exception that their **recruitment to Salafi circles always involved in-person interaction.**<sup>109</sup>

This does not match trends in other European countries, where online platforms do appear to be a primary entry point for recruitment. Instead, Salafis interviewed for our study all reported being drawn to Salafism primarily through friends, usually after being invited to a lecture or being given literature. It was only then that they engaged online. Through our interviews, we identified three main groups of Salafis, based on the way they were recruited:

*Group A* – These are “senior” Salafis, who were recruited in during, or right after the war. They are now between 35 and 55 years old. They feel that their adherence to Salafism corrected their previous belief system, and that Salafism is a purification of Bosnian Islam, which is burdened by “novelties” and cultural traditions that deviate from “pure Islam.” They do not consider their choice of Salafism as conversion to a different Islamic school, but rather a return to the original faith of the first three generation of Muslims. We found Salafis who fit this category throughout Bosnia. Most of them were

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109 This was the conclusion drawn from interviews with Salafis; though some secondhand accounts from interviews with Bosnian students who are not in Salafi circles indicated that they believe some of their friends were radicalized through Salafi internet platforms.

recruited through Active Islamic Youth, an organization once supported by the High Saudi Commission. Since the security crackdown on Islamic charities and the loss of that support, Active Islamic Youth has become a proponent of inclusion, with the aim to change traditional Bosnian Islam from within. The organization has created an alliance with some Salafi-leaning imams from the Islamic Community.

*Group B* – These are Salafis who have been recruited through the King Fahd Mosque, which is an apparently very common entry point. The mosque offers free courses in English, Arabic, calligraphy, and computers, and though they are open to people of all religions, are mostly attended by young Muslims. A significant number of the new generation of Salafis, especially youth from Sarajevo, have been recruited after attending these courses, which have been offered over the past 13 years to some 18,000 people.<sup>110</sup> This younger generation of Salafis is even more critical of the Bosnian Muslim tradition, views the ideology they have chosen as pure, and sees no reason to compromise with the Islamic Community. Most of the interviewees from this category with whom we spoke were recruited through one-on-one contact by someone they met in a course or at a lecture.

*Group C* – This group of Salafis were recruited through NGOs supported by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, or other Gulf region countries. These NGOs exist across Bosnia, usually in the form of citizens' associations, but most are near Sarajevo, Travnik, and Zenica. Just like the King Fahd Mosque, these associations host lectures and offer courses in languages and computers. Security agency officials claim that the work of these organizations has intensified alongside a rising interest among Middle Eastern investors in Bosnian real estate. According to some interviewees, there are a number of *da'is* involved in the real estate business with these investors, as a way to supplement their income.

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110 See: Ambasada Kraljevine Saudijske Arabije Kulturni Centar "Kralj Fahd," <http://kf-cc.ba> (accessed February 20, 2016)

#### 4.4. What Attracts People to Salafism?

A common feeling expressed by interviewees was one of social alienation, which spurred their need for belonging and social support. In other words, it was their desire to be part of something, as opposed to a rejection of mainstream religion, that led them to seek membership in a Salafi community. According to Berman and Iannaccone: “Sectarian movements flourish because they provide their members hope for the future, benefits for the present, and insurance against misfortune. They assist those who suffer financial setbacks and ill health. Their social networks help members form joint business ventures, establish long-term friendships and find suitable marriage partners.”<sup>111</sup>

Indeed, most of our interviewees were attracted to the idea of brotherhood before they were even very familiar with the theological doctrine of Salafism. One male interviewee, who is around the age of 40, acts as a recruiter and role model for many younger Salafi men. He belongs to the Salafi business network; though, interestingly, he does not look like a typical adherent, sporting a very short beard and full-length pants. He described his first experiences in the Salafi brotherhood:

*I felt a really nice, warm energy from them. I never before felt this way in someone's company. I was invited to a Salafi event by one of my old friends, who had the beard. I decided to go and to see what it's all about. They were so, so kind to each other, so kind to me. I was shocked that as we were coming into the house they were bending to put slippers on one another. And all of that with a smile. At the end of that day, that old friend of mine told me a hadith: 'Those people you like in this world will be with you, will be your circle in the other world as well.' That was kind of an awakening for me, and I realized that all the people I socialized with were full of negative energy. I was overwhelmed by negative energy.*<sup>112</sup>

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111 Eli Berman and Laurence R. Iannaccone, *Religious Extremism: The Good, The Bad and The Deadly*, NBER Working Paper Series, September 2005. Available online at: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w11663.pdf>

112 Interview with Salafi adherent, December 5, 2016.

This description was a surprising and valuable revelation given the prevalently negative views of people outside Salafi circles about Salafis. For instance, one Bosnian imam, who says he has tried and failed to engage with Salafis who have visited his mosque, harbors very negative feelings toward them. When we shared with him that Salafis told us they rejected the Islamic Community because informal Salafi circles offered them a greater sense of brotherhood and social support, he responded strongly:

*That is absolutely not true. That is the lie they tell to spoil the image of the Islamic Community. Those that join Salafi circles are often from a criminal milieu; they're former drug addicts or football hooligans. Do you really think that learning a little bit of some distorted Islamic views will make them better men overnight? They are not honest in interviews with you. I've had contact with them, but I also hear a lot from their neighbors. They are usually tough men, prone to violence, who mistreat their wives and children. They are very aggressive toward everybody outside of their circles. And the Islamic topics they discuss are the ones that offer them justification for that aggressive behavior. I hear that in their closed sessions they often discuss jihad and how the enemies of Islam feared Muhammed A.S. Those are very sensitive topics that need to be put in context and told with care. There are many other hadiths that talk about the Prophet as a person who was kind not only to people close to him and his followers, but to their enemies as well. You see, those are hadiths and testimonies you will not hear in Salafi circles. They like just the warrior stories. They actually like the idea that the world fears Muslims.<sup>113</sup>*

While security agency officials indeed confirm some of the claims of this imam, the characterization he offers may apply only or mostly to the most militant Salafis. In only two police actions in the secluded communities where Salafi adherents live has any evidence been found of the mistreatment

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113 Interview with Bosnian imam, town in Northeastern Bosnia, January 15, 2016.

of children or women.<sup>114</sup> Among mainstream Salafis, there appears to be little basis for accusations of physical domestic abuse, and social services and police we spoke with affirmed this. Yet, given the isolation in which most Salafi women live, it is fair to say that we cannot draw any firm conclusions with regard to this issue; and other violations of gender rights among these mainstream Salafis are well-known.

The simplicity of the Salafi religious narrative is another feature that attracts new adherents. This simplicity, rooted in the Hanbali school, has been the subject of much intellectual scrutiny – not only by Muslims but also by the international academic community. Critiques of Salafism are united in the assertion that its simplification leads to a distortion of Islamic thought. Yet, Salafis would not call it a simplification but a simplicity. And it is exactly this simplicity that makes Salafism attractive to new members, because it barely relies at all on knowledge of Islamic culture and history. Only the lifestyle of the Prophet and of the first three generation of Muslims are to guide Salafis, and this interpretation selectively references just two sources, the Qur'an and the hadiths. Converts often report having been mired in the ethical and organizational challenges of (post)modern life, living in constant doubt because of such a multiplicity of choices. They say that when they were introduced to Salafism, life became simpler:

*There is no stress anymore. My life is organized around five daily prayers. People say that prayer takes lots of your time; but it is not the case. Our Namaz is short, it keeps me focused throughout the day. I have much more time now than I used to have before. I am just more organized and focused. Our religion is simple: we refer to trusted sources and live life like the Prophet and those first three generations of Muslims. Our path is the true path.<sup>115</sup>*

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114 Based on a number of consultations with security sources.

115 Interview with Salafi adherent, town in Southern Bosnia, February 14, 2016.



These simplified interpretations are presented in lectures by Salafi *da'is* peppered with hadiths offered as proof for every assertion. One Bosnian imam we interviewed compared an introductory Salafi lecture on praying with that used by the Islamic Community in religious classes for children, and found that the Salafi lecture, due to its assertion-then-proof design, had the false appearance of more authority:

*They give proofs for everything. Let us take Namaz, for example. We have a different way of praying. But when they teach children or novices how to pray, they always say 'This is how the Prophet did it.' For every move in the Namaz, they have an explanation. We don't do that. We don't give explanations as to why one needs to lift their hands at a certain point. In our school, we just say, 'This is the way to do it.' We teach kids religion, but we do not give them the argumentation. Not that we don't have the argumentation, we just do not bother using it. It is as if we fear using argumentation. When I compare our introductory religion lecture to theirs, it is like different writing styles. They have a scientific style, with footnotes... Footnotes always give scientific writing the appearance of higher truth... We in the Islamic Community, we don't use footnotes much. Our teaching, in comparison to theirs, is like that of the publicist or journalist. Never mind that our argumentation is stronger if we don't bother proving it and backing it up with footnotes.<sup>116</sup>*

Most of our Salafi interviewees emphasized that the five daily prayers they practice take less time than those practiced by Hanafi Bosnian Muslims. Their quicker way of praying makes it easier to fit into their day. They are obliged to pray at the proper times, while traditional Bosnian Muslims tend to be more flexible, and they say that the regularity of five daily prayers helps keep them grounded throughout the day. Yet when they join mainstream Bosnian Muslims for prayer in mosques, the fact that Salafis often leave before the majority of the *jamaat* is finished praying has been the cause of friction and is interpreted by many as a sign of disrespect.

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116 Interview with Bosnian imam, Sarajevo, January 15, 2016.

Salafi teachings also emphasize a very strong social dimension. As we have already mentioned, Salafi circles offer an almost Tito-esque sense of ‘brotherhood and unity.’ And according to some interviewees, the richer among them are obliged to support poorer Salafis. One told us:

*We have a Viber [messaging app] group with more than 150 members. All of us are in the position to help. So when we hear that a brother or sister is in need, we quickly raise money for different purposes. Whether someone’s roof needs repair or someone needs heating for the winter, we quickly donate to solve the problem. This is an informal group and we have no vested personal interest except the desire to provide charity, and the honest intent to help family in need.<sup>117</sup>*

This sort of humanitarian action is made known through Facebook and other Salafi online platforms, and for poorer Bosnian Muslims, may attract them to Salafism.

#### **4.5. How Conversion Affects Personal Relationships**

Ten years ago, in an article titled “They are coming to take our children,” respected Muslim scholar Rešid Hafizović warned that Wahhabists would have a damaging, long-term influence on Bosnian Muslim youth.<sup>118</sup> Three of the younger Salafis we spoke with, who live with their parents, did not want to talk very much about their relationship with them. They mentioned having “some problems” with their parents, who had noticed changes in their appearance. One mentioned, for instance, that his relationship with his parents became strained after he started growing a beard. But their parents all eventually accepted them after seeing that they had “become better people.” And, it’s hard to argue when a young man reasons:

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117 Focus group near Sarajevo, April 23, 2016.

118 Rešid Hafizović, “Oni dolaze po našu djecu,” *Oslobodjenje*, November 25, 2006.

*Now I don't go out in the evening. Is it better to go to the discotheque, get drunk, drive drunk, and put lives in danger, or to pray five times a day, to socialize with proper Muslims, do humanitarian work, and go to religious lectures? They were shocked with the beard to start with, but they accepted the "new me" eventually.<sup>119</sup>*

Several of the younger interviewees who spoke with our team proudly said that they had actually steered their parents onto the "right path" as well.

*My mother did not pray at all, now she does regularly, with no need to remind her when it's time for prayer. She has also accepted that some of the habits of our tradition are wrong. She was saving money for tawhid, for when she dies. Now she tells me that, when she dies, I should give that money to the charity. She understands that it is better to feed the poor than to spend on silly customs.<sup>120</sup>*

Still, not everything that emerged during interviews painted such an idyllic picture of family relations in the context of conversion to Salafism. This was especially the case for young women from secular or traditional Muslim families who became involved with Salafi men who were extremely judgmental about Bosnian Islam. Asya, an only child from a secular Bosniak family, grew up in a small town in northwest Bosnia.<sup>121</sup> She had diverse interests and the highest grades in high school, and could have studied anything she wanted. Her parents hoped it would be medicine, but she ended up studying art in Sarajevo. As her graduation neared, her parents noticed small changes – her skirts had become longer and she had started praying. By the next time she came home for a visit, she was wearing a *hijab*. Asya grew distant from her parents, who were not inclined toward religion. Her visits home became shorter, and she avoided their phone calls. When she stopped answering her phone altogether, they travelled to Sarajevo to find her, only to learn from her college friends that she had gone to live as the

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119 Interview with Salafi adherent, village in Southern Bosnia, March 18, 2016.

120 Interview with Salafi adherent, city in Northeastern Bosnia, March 20, 2016.

121 A pseudonym was used to protect the subject of this story.

second wife of a Salafi *da'i*. Her parents went to the police, who tracked Asya down and contacted her, but she declined to meet them. That was six years ago. They tried calling her new husband, but he also refused to speak to them, and the police could do nothing more; she was of age and it was her choice.<sup>122</sup>

Interviewees also told stories of parents cutting off contact with their children, embarrassed by their choices. Obviously upset, one man told us:

*I never forced my wife to wear the niqab. When we accepted Salafism, she wore the hijjab at first. One day, she decided that she would start wearing the niqab. I was surprised, and worried. I knew her parents, who are secular intellectuals, would be against it, and I was right. They stopped communicating with her altogether. One day my wife met her mother in a tram, and tried talking to her. Her mother just walked to the other side of tram. This was really painful for her.<sup>123</sup>*

This insight is valuable, because it reflects that, beyond the need to discern between Salafis/Wahabbis and traditional Bosnian Muslims, it is also important to recognize that adherents of Salafism are not a monolithic group. While they do share religious ideology and lifestyle choices, for some it remains just that, a religion and lifestyle. Whether Salafi adherents will become isolated and radicalized further may sometimes depend on the reaction of their family, friends, and the wider society to their choices.

#### **4.6. 'Newborn Muslims' and the Question of Identity after Conversion**

In Salafi messaging in Bosnia, the 'other' is the traditional Bosnian Muslim, represented by the Islamic Community. Redefining oneself as a 'newborn Muslim' is thus the first step toward purification from that tainted religious identification. Salafi rhetoric that asks Muslims to re-define their

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122 This story was relayed to us by Asya's first cousin.

123 Interview with Salafi adherent, Sarajevo, December 5, 2015.

identity in this way is actually grounded in research from mainstream psychology, which shows that many individuals join radical groups as part of a search for meaning, identity, and belonging.<sup>124</sup> And this theme emerged strongly in our interviews.

Psychological research is also “beginning to examine how identity-formation can become ‘maladaptive’ and why some individuals are more vulnerable to radicalization than others,” and whether “certain cognitive ‘propensities’ can combine to create a ‘mindset’ that presents higher risk.”<sup>125</sup> In the interviews we conducted, a majority of Salafis showed no propensity for violence. In fact, we observed that only one group and two people had this propensity, all of whom were also considered by security agencies to represent a potential threat.

Still, the change in identity undergone by most converts to Salafism, however peaceful they may be, is nonetheless dramatic and often entails breaking deep connections with family members and friends. This is part of a larger expression of animosity toward society more broadly and toward “impure” Muslims particularly – meaning secular Bosniaks, traditional Bosnian Muslims, and the Islamic Community. So, who were these young people before ‘converting’ to Salafism, and who are they now?

One young male interviewee is in his early twenties, and is from a small central Bosnian town. He was introduced to Salafi teachings during his studies in Sarajevo, when he lived near the King Fahd Mosque. His appearance is modern, and he arrived for his interview dressed in expensive, sporty clothing. It was a sunny day, so he wore Ray Ban sunglasses. It is only his just-slightly longer beard that may be seen as distinctive; it is longer than most ‘normal’ beards, but still not long enough that he could be mistaken for a hippie. He approached us with a smile and an open mind, yet ready to explain his views.

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124 For more on this, see: Borum,

125 Allan et al., 18.

He grew up in a traditional Bosnian Muslim family, and attended Islamic Community children's school (*maktab*) as a child. He became an exceptional student of social sciences, with a passion for reading and understanding international politics and current affairs. He accepted his first invitation to a Salafi lecture out of curiosity, which led to several more; and then, the lectures started to ring true for him. So, when a circle of friends signed up for a religious course at the King Fahd Mosque three years ago, he did, too.

He has since graduated with distinction and returned to his hometown, where he is not employed but is very active with a local NGO that helps to organize Salafi lectures. He never really drank alcohol, but now he won't even sit in a cafe that serves it. He prays five times a day, and says Islam gave his life a whole new meaning. Indeed, he is so committed to his faith that other topics no longer interest him. Asked what kind of literature he reads, he cites only Islamic sources. Other literature, he says, "is just waste of time. It is sin to waste time." He did listen to music but he read a hadith about it and now believes that "music stirs up passion, induces you to sin." So, he listens to Qur'anic prayers, which he says are "soothing."<sup>126</sup>

He is not married, but says he will find a wife once he finds a job. Will his wife have to wear a *hijab* or *niqab*? Will he let her work? As if suddenly reminded that the woman interviewing him lacks a scarf on her head (though, prior to the interview, he said there was no need), he directs his eyes to the male interviewer and says with conviction that a Muslim man must marry a proper Muslim woman, who will respect him by wearing a *hijab* at minimum, and maybe even a *niqab*. "No, she will not work," he adds, "there is no need for a woman to work if a man can support his family. If she works, she won't have time to properly raise the children and educate them in the Islamic tradition."<sup>127</sup>

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126 Interview with Salafi adherent, city in Central Bosnia, February 27, 2016.

127 Ibid.

Like this young man, most of the Salafi men and women we interviewed have stopped listening to music. One notable exception was a Salafi artist from central Bosnia, who stressed the importance of music and art from a moral perspective:

*Of course, I do not listen to turbo folk. That is poison for the masses. People in Bosnia listen to turbo folk a lot. I listen to Pink Floyd, Andrea Bocelli, Luciano Pavarotti... I listen to people that left an important mark on the musical scene, but also to those that are humanitarians. Surviving members of Pink Floyd for example, like Roger Waters, David Gilmour, they do humanitarian work. Waters is a spokesperson for the boycott against Israel. They use music to force the world to pay attention to important issues. They put on concerts for the children of Palestine. Pink Floyd made the song 'Palestina,' the Cranberries made the song 'Sarajevo.' Painters also use their work to draw attention to human rights. Picasso's Guernica would not have had such value had it not been dedicated to the suffering of war.<sup>128</sup>*

However, this artist really was the exception. In a focus group he participated in, others were vigorously opposed to the idea that a good Muslim could listen to music. Still, some other participants disagreed with but seemed relatively undisturbed by the artist's views, as if they respected and had some tolerance for his choice. And indeed, most of the Salafis we interviewed claimed that, while their old self was behind them, their reinvented identities are tolerant of "otherness." And so, to get a more specific sense of how sincere that claim of tolerance is in practice, researchers also asked questions about how Salafis perceive themselves in relation to the rest of society.

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128 Focus group participant, city in Southern Bosnia, January 26, 2016.





## 5. ATTITUDES WITHIN BOSNIAN SOCIETY

### 5.1. Attitudes of Salafis toward the Rest of Bosnian Society

When discussing their status in Bosnia and Herzegovina, most Salafis interviewed for this research complained about the discrimination they suffer because of their appearance – men wear long beards and short pants, and most women wear a *niqab* (in urban areas, some wear only a *hijab*, but this is rare). Salafis generally see themselves as disadvantaged minorities who must constantly answer to other members of society for their choices:

*They treat us all as if we are terrorists. After the attack in Rajlovac, media were not only reporting about the alleged terrorist attack, but also about the danger of Salafi groups. The day after that attack, I entered the tram in Sarajevo. There were not many people in it, but when I entered all of them went to the other side, and I stayed alone near the tram entrance. It was an awful feeling. But I will never give up having a long beard. They will have to get used to it. The Prophet had a beard and I am proud of it.<sup>129</sup>*

Some Salafis interviewed in Central Bosnia expressed less of a sense of discrimination and acknowledged that they had begun to feel more accepted. Travnik and Zenica, and the surrounding areas, are more accustomed to Salafism

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129 Focus group participant, near Sarajevo, February 19, 2016.

and, compared to other Bosnians, people there seem to view Salafis as less different from mainstream Bosnian Muslims. Another group of interviewees – this time, women who wear the *niqab* and were interviewed in Sarajevo – also did not raise the issue of discrimination. They are all members of a Gulf-funded NGO and claim that their openness and humanitarian work has led to their acceptance by the community.

When asked about their attitudes toward the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its government, Salafis were reticent about their specific political views. Only one, in Central Bosnia, said that he is active in the local SDA party, but admitted that he is criticized for this by his Salafi brothers. This is consistent with a more radical reading of Salafism that places devotion to the global Muslim community, the *Ummah*, over that to any secular state and thus forbids participation in secular politics.

This loyalty to the *Ummah* is not a position Salafis state openly. They are under constant pressure from security agencies as the flow of Bosnians departing to fight in Syria has come under greater scrutiny; and the fact that many of these fighters are motivated by the potential establishment of a caliphate for all Muslims makes talk of the *Ummah* feel riskier, even for non-violent Salafis. Not surprisingly, Salafis we interviewed had many grievances with both security agencies and the media. They protested that security agencies “overstep their authority and accuse and arrest innocent people, making them feel like second-class citizens,” and media feed the public with reports that encourage the stereotype that “every Salafi is a potential terrorist.”<sup>130</sup>

## 5.2. Attitudes of former Salafis toward Salafism

There is an understanding in Bosnia that it is very difficult to ‘escape’ once an individual becomes an adherent of Salafism. Acceptance of the ideology is not only about a “purification” of beliefs and the adoption of lifestyle changes on an individual level, but comes with a whole package of

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130 This view emerged in all interviews and focus groups.

obligations to each circle of Salafi brothers and sisters as well as expectations of loyalty to a wider network of Salafis and to shared beliefs among them. Some second-hand stories of Salafi women who have tried to leave the circles they joined after the war indicated that pressure and threats were directed against those who indeed managed to escape. In some cases, it has even been necessary for families to take rather drastic measures, such as the parents of a woman who divorced a Salafi man, who reportedly sent her out of Bosnia to study abroad after he made threats. Still, in interviews with Salafi women, we saw no evidence of them having been coerced into accepting Salafism or that they desired to escape.

It is important to note, though, that those women were chosen as participants for our research by men that belong to the Salafi elite; and we did not get access to women from the most isolated communities. Some interviewees that do have contact with these women indicated that many women in these very secluded communities have regrets and serious doubts about marrying Salafi men and giving up their previous lifestyles and ties to society. Some of these sources claim that these women wish to escape but are trapped not only by fear of their husbands, but because they have children and lack the economic means to proceed with divorce.

However, it seems that different rules apply to men who seek to leave Salafism. In interviews with five former male adherents of Salafism, they said they had joined and left Salafi circles without any problems and on their own free will. Two of them have even maintained close relationships with some of their Salafi brothers after returning to traditional Bosnian Islam.

Two of these former Salafis attended *madrasas* supervised by Imad el-Misri, associated with the El-Mujahid unit that was dominated by foreign fighters during the war.<sup>131</sup> Looking back at their experiences, one told us that this had been “a special kind of indoctrination. Maybe others who did not

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131 Based on interviews with former Salafi adherents in Sarajevo on December 10, 2015 and in a town in Central Bosnia on February 25, 2016.

go through the drill of El-Mujahid *madrasas* and who accepted Salafism the normal way, did not go so deep into the religion.” Both of them suffered personal losses during the war, which inspired them to join the El-Mujahid unit, and after the war ended, they both stayed for a short time in Salafi communities in Sarajevo and Central Bosnia, but over time, felt the ideology was “a difficult burden to carry.” They felt the limitations imposed on them by rigid Salafi teachings caused problems in their communication with their families and friends, who were concerned they had “lost their minds.” One explained:

*Now, when I think about it, there was a period when I really lost touch with reality. I think I could have been manipulated into all sorts of stupid things. I felt, I mean I was taught, that I live among sinful people in a sinful world, that I have to protect myself from anything that can induce me to commit sin. But I really loved reading, I really loved listening to music, I loved watching movies. I missed that badly and because of this I felt guilty. And that made me even more angry at the world, at my friends and family. It was like a vicious circle that I could not get out of. I wanted out, but the more I wanted out, the more I was compelled to stay.<sup>132</sup>*

This former Salafi returned to his own ‘normal’ with the help of close friends and a local imam who, after the death of his father, treated him as his own son. The imam would tell him that “practicing Islam does not have to be that difficult” and that “the Bosnian tradition is actually beautiful.” What this man described as “coming back to normal again” did not happen overnight, but over a couple of years. He is now an observant, but moderate, traditional Bosnian Muslim; though, he admits that sometimes when he prays in private, he spontaneously prays “Salafi style.”<sup>133</sup>

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132 Interview with a former Salafi adherent, town in Central Bosnia, February 25, 2016.

133 Ibid.

The other interviewee who went through the El-Mujahid *madrasa* did not elaborate as much on his state of mind during the time when he was a Salafi, saying only, “I was really extreme.”<sup>134</sup> This man also had a very strong interest in reading a wide variety of material, and this is something he kept doing despite the advice of his circle of brothers and *da’is*, who told him he should read only Islamic literature. “I think that is what helped me view my life and this extremist thought I was exposed to in a critical way,” he reflected. “I did not really have much help from anyone. I was surrounded by people who were members of the circle and I did not share my doubts...” Again, the process of returning to ‘normal’ was slow, but eventually, this man got himself “out of that state,” which he described as being “almost as if you are a prisoner from within.” At some point, he said, “I decided I would be free again.” He is now an observant Bosnian Muslim.

While both of these men speak critically of the extremism of Salafi teaching, they have remained friends with some Salafis who lead otherwise typical lives. Yet three other former Salafi adherents we interviewed have stopped communicating with anyone in the Salafi movement and are rather judgmental about their former friends and the *da’is* they encountered.<sup>135</sup> After joining Salafi circles, they all felt they discovered a hidden agenda of Salafi proselytizing and disliked the aggressiveness with which Salafis expressed their perceived moral superiority. They were especially irritated by the hypocrisy of *da’is* who preach that giving up a life of modern luxuries is the precondition for being a proper Muslim, while at the same enjoying those luxuries, sometimes in great excess, themselves.

*Despite what they say, despite the purity of beliefs they are advocating, these circles of Salafis are also full of people exhibiting vanity, greed for money, and all the other human weaknesses that are of course characteristic of all human beings. I was simply not convinced that following this more rigid interpretation, with all its limitations and*

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134 Interview with a former Salafi adherent, Sarajevo March 15, 2016

135 Based on interviews with former Salafi adherents in Sarajevo and a town in Northwest Bosnia.

*abstinence from modern life, was making them become better men. I certainly saw that I was not becoming a better man. So I just left. I spoke my mind, so we did not leave it on good terms; and I do not socialise with them now.*<sup>136</sup>

Another of these men witnessed financial irregularities in the NGO that his circle gathered around, and that was mostly what turned him off. He described his indoctrination as “not too deep anyway.”<sup>137</sup> Prior to joining a Salafi circle, he had been a Sufi. He was experimenting with trying to find the best way, the truest path, to Islam. Now, he says he is “a traditional Bosnian Muslim again” but occasionally goes to Sufi gatherings because Sufism remains “close to his heart.”<sup>138</sup>

Common to all these former Salafis is that they held onto their ability to think critically and had personalities that made them less prone to accepting dogma without question. For some of them, a family member or close friends helped them leave Salafism and re-join a traditional *jamaat*. The decisive factor for one was a girlfriend, now his wife, who did not accept his rigid way of life and did not want to follow him into Salafism.

The first phase all of these men went through, after preparing mentally to leave Salafism, was to shave their beard and change their appearance. Other steps were more difficult, such as moving past the guilt of doing things they had been told were forbidden.<sup>139</sup> One of them described this as an obsessive-compulsive disorder, saying “that is why it takes so much time to actually leave all these things in your head behind. It is easy to physically leave, but psychologically...that is the real challenge.”<sup>140</sup>

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136 Interview with former Salafi adherent, town in Northwest Bosnia.

137 Interview with former Salafi adherent, Sarajevo, February 2, 2016.

138 Ibid.

139 Only one of these five men did not experience feelings of guilt after abandoning Salafism. He said that he never fully accepted Salafism in his heart, perhaps because he had been a Sufi and faced issues of cognitive dissonance because the Salafi platform advocates very strongly against Sufism.

140 Interview with a former Salafi adherent, town in Central Bosnia, February 25, 2016.

### **5.3. Attitudes of non-Salafi Bosnians toward Salafism and Radicalization**

Many Salafis in BiH told us that the discrimination they feel from other Bosnians is the reason they live in seclusion, even if they live in cities. To gain insight into the views of other Bosnians about Salafis, we spoke with 40 non-Salafi Bosnians in four cities – Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka, and Tuzla – in interviews and focus groups. Three focus groups were ethnically homogenous and included participants between 21 and 47 years old.<sup>141</sup> The majority of participants had university degrees or were students.

Focus groups were ethnically homogenous because it was expected that people would be more open and honest about their views this way.<sup>142</sup> Though participants were not randomly sampled from among the entire population, they were diverse as far as home cities, ages, and ethnicities, and this variation provided important nuance regarding what different groups of Bosnians think of Salafis in BiH. These attitudes were the main theme of focus groups, but participants' opinions on radicalization in Bosnia in general were also addressed. Participants shared their views on a range of issues, from whether or how they distinguish between Salafism and traditional Bosnian Islam, to whether they believe Salafism is connected to terrorism, to their opinions on the future of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

#### **5.3.1. The Views of Bosnian Serbs**

In the focus group of Bosnian Serbs, held in Banja Luka, most participants did make a distinction between traditional Bosnian Muslims and Salafis, and they were also aware of the animosity that exists between them. “The difference is obvious. Our [Serb] media are trying to cast Wahhabis and traditional Muslims as equals, because their aim is to incite additional nationalist hostility,

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141 Three focus groups were held in Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka; individual interviews were also held in these three cities as well as in the city of Tuzla.

142 N. Copsey, “Focus Groups and the Political Scientist,” European research Working Paper Series, No. 22, 2008.

but it is necessary for all of us to be aware of the difference between them.” Participants generally defined Salafism as a “sect” of deviant teaching that “Islam does not support.”<sup>143</sup>

Still, while they made a distinction between Salafis and traditional Bosnian Muslims, none of the participants in this focus group were knowledgeable about the nuances of radicalization at different levels. They all believed Salafism is inherently linked with terrorism. One participant went so far as to claim that Salafis have been “planted in Bosnia...because they would be useful in case a new war starts,” but he refused to elaborate. Another participant said similarly that “big powers hold influence over the Salafi movement, because it is in their interest to keep the Balkans insecure.” Participants said they did not personally know any Salafis, and only one said she had a former friend who “de-friended [her] on Facebook after he turned radical.”

All but two participants in Banja Luka acknowledged that they are afraid or feel uncomfortable when they meet a Salafi in the street. One woman compared Salafis to “evil spirits walking around.” Another described an incident when a woman wearing a *niqab* and a man with a Salafi beard stopped her on the street and asked for directions, and she was so afraid that, as she walked away in a rush, she had the feeling “they would start shooting.” Yet, when asked if they are afraid of Chetnik adherents, who also wear distinctive beards, every participant in this group said they were not. Only one participant felt that the Chetnik movement is radical; all others said it is unfair to compare it with the Salafi movement – which they did identify as radical.

Most participants in this focus group described modern Serb Chetniks as part of a cultural movement inspired by remembrance of WWII-era Chetniks, who they generally viewed as progressive. The one participant who saw Chetniks as “the same as Salafis” and said “they should stop wearing

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143 Quotes in this section are based on the transcript of the focus group discussion conducted by the Atlantic Initiative in Banja Luka on March 3, 2016 and two individual interviews March 11, 2016.



beards and frightening people of other nationalities” received judgmental looks from the group. To further capture the views of these participants on radicalization among Bosnian Serbs, they were asked about their opinion on the latest decision by Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik to name a dormitory after convicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić. But for the same dissenter as before, every participant approved, with some giving credit to Karadžić for the survival of Serbs in BiH. The general opinion of the group was reflected in the statement of one participant who said “Karadžić is a historical personality and his place in history will be evaluated in twenty, fifty years, once all these passions calm down.”

Participants were also asked their opinion about the renovation and re-opening of the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka. Two female participants wholeheartedly supported the renovation on the grounds that “it is a cultural monument,” “part of the history of Banja Luka,” and “should never have been destroyed in the first place.” Others did not discuss the Mosque’s destruction, but objected that now they would “have to listen to shouting from the mosque” (in reference to the call to prayer). They felt it was “okay as a cultural monument,” but said that “Orthodox [Serbs] make too many concessions to Muslims.”

As far as the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is concerned, Bosnian Serb participants seemed interested only in Bosnian unity for economic purposes, if that is possible. They do not believe in the Euro-Atlantic future of the state but feel the future is unclear because “everything is falling apart.” It was obvious that a majority of this group held nationalistic feelings that strongly influenced their views of the state and of radicalism among their own ethnic group.

Two Bosnian Serbs interviewed independently, apart from the focus group, gave more moderate and uniform responses. They both condemned radicalization on “all sides” and were quite positive regarding the renovation of the Ferhadija Mosque. They said they do not fear Salafis, though were

aware that they are a cause of tension. They both claimed that their fear of terrorism is no greater than it would be in any other European country, and talked extensively about how corrupt leaders favor a radicalized environment. Their views diverged only on the question of Bosnia's future, with one believing that BiH should pursue membership in the European Union but not NATO, and the other supporting integration into both.

### 5.3.2. The Views of Bosnian Croats

Bosnian Croats, who took part in a focus group and individual interviews in Mostar, were generally well informed about the Salafi movement, and made a very clear distinction between Salafis and traditional Bosnian Muslims. One acknowledged that "Bosnian Muslims are trying to make the difference known between them and Salafis and other radical factions that manipulate Islam."<sup>144</sup> Another said that "Salafis want to present that they practice 'true religion,' but that's not the case. I think the moderate way of the traditional Bosnian Muslims better captures the true meaning of Islam."

These participants were cautious to draw a direct line between Salafism and terrorism, though acknowledged that Salafis seek to force their ideology upon others. Only one participant said that, given the nature of Salafi ideology, "it is highly possible that terrorism is linked with Salafism." Most participants said they do not feel afraid of men with beards and women wearing the *niqab*. Though, one woman recalled once attracting an aggressive look from a woman wearing a *niqab*, in a shopping mall in Mostar, because, she believes, she was wearing short sleeves and shorts. "I respect their choice and I think they should respect mine as well," she said. "I will not infringe upon their integrity, and their right to choose their religion and way of life, but I expect the same from them."

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144 Quotes in this section are based on the transcript of a focus group discussion conducted by the Atlantic Initiative in Mostar on April 25, 2016, and two individual interviews held on April 24, 2016.

Bosnian Croat participants openly conceded that the Bosnian political scene is radicalized and that nationalist emotions and manipulations of history have been the tools of politicians who wish to control the masses. Only two participants marginally justified radicalism, saying that Croats “are a minority and sometimes come across as radical because they talk a lot about the defense of our national interests” and that “our symbols from WWII are all forcefully connected to fascism, which is not fair.” Another participant reacted by calling the NDH (the Independent State of Croatia during WWII) “a fascist state,” continuing that “the Chetniks were a fascist movement, too. What are we doing now, competing in radicalisms? Is that the point? They are radical so we also need to become radical?” The rest of the group did not want to discuss this issue.

These participants all believe that the future of Bosnia rests on a Euro-Atlantic orientation. They are sure that the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina will survive. “Dodik is talking about secession,” one said, “but there is no way he will succeed. That is just the empty talk.”

### 5.3.3. The Views of Bosnian Muslims

Most of the Bosnian Muslims who participated in a focus group and individual interviews<sup>145</sup> harbored considerable animosity toward Salafis and did not hesitate to share strong opinions about Salafis they had encountered. A female teacher in a school near the King Fahd Mosque complained about the attitude of Salafi parents in parent-teacher meetings:

*They are so arrogant, and they behave as if their children are entitled to good grades. Those women with the niqab treat us as if we are lesser human beings. Their judgment about our way of life is so apparent that it is very difficult to communicate with them.*

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145 Quotes in this section are based on the transcript of a focus group discussion conducted by the Atlantic Initiative in Sarajevo on March 21, 2016 and individual interviews held in February and March 2016.

The exception to this were participants who, due to some personal incentive, seem to have reconciled the Salafi interpretation of Islam. These people either have business dealings with Gulf countries led by conservative Muslims or political affiliations with the SDA and SBB parties. Interviewees close to the SDA and SBB, and in some way politically active, were especially careful to sound inclusive toward Salafis, calling their ideology “legitimate” and emphasizing that “we need to make the distinction between the ‘Khrajites’ – the militant ones – and those who just want to have the freedom to practice their religion the way the Prophet and the first three generations of Muslims did.”

One apolitical Sufi who participated in the focus group was rather open about his distaste for Salafism and called inclusion “a fairytale,” saying “there is no way Salafis can ever fit into [Bosnian] society with their way of life.” Another man, who admitted to having contact with Bosnian Salafis and also to having done business with firms from Gulf countries, challenged the first man’s Sufi faith, saying “Sufis aren’t mentioned anywhere in the Qur’an. What do you do? Stab yourself with knives? That is novelty in Islam; made up. That has nothing to do with Islam... I will send you YouTube links of Kuduzović and Pezić, who clearly explain, with references, how wrong that all is.” The Sufi participant, undisturbed, acted as though he’d never heard of Kuduzović and Pezić and said, “I can tell you one thing. We love everybody, even Salafis.” Though he claimed he is not a Salafi, the young man who referenced Kuduzović and Pezić is clearly a Salafi sympathizer and echoed the views promoted by leading Salafi *da’is*. This is evidence that the Salafi influence on discourse in Bosnia reaches far beyond Salafi circles, also affecting conservative Bosnian Muslims.

Most Bosnian Muslim participants agreed on certain key issues relating to the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They all believed that Euro-Atlantic integration is crucial, and around two-thirds are hopeful it will happen. The other one-third think that if it’s possible, it will occur in the distant future, and fear obstructions from leaders in the Republika Srpska. These participants

believe the international community should do more to condemn secessionist rhetoric from the Republika Srpska and tone down nationalism among Bosnian Croats; but there was little willingness among participants to look realistically at the radicalism of political representatives from their own ethnic group. Still, with the exception of those who are politically active, they condemned corruption in politics in general.

#### **5.3.4. The Views of Bosnians with no Religious or Ethnic Affiliation**

We interviewed these participants in individual, semi-structured interviews only.<sup>146</sup> They identify with non-ethnic political parties or are apolitical, and strongly advocate the Euro-Atlantic integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are worried not only about radicalization in the context of Salafism, but of all ethnic groups. They are aware that a Salafi interpretation of Islam is confronting the Bosnian Muslim tradition and believe that secular society must awaken to this new reality. These participants also hold the opinion that the victimization of Bosnian Muslims in the 1992-1995 war is the main cause of the spread of Salafism. Reminded that Salafism is a global phenomenon, one participant said that, “had Yugoslavia had a peaceful dissolution, had the Bosniaks not been the main victims of genocide in the war, the Salafi movement would probably still exist, but I do not believe it would have spread so much.”

It is interesting that all of these interviewees referred to themselves not as atheists, but as agnostics. Most were children of mixed marriages and had respect for all the religious traditions of Bosnia, but did not feel they belonged to any. Their only affiliation is to the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and they have friends from all ethnic groups, though they tend to socialize only with those that are “more relaxed about their ethnic and religious feelings.” When asked whether they had friends among Salafis or if they would choose

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<sup>146</sup> Interviews were conducted in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Mostar and Banja Luka during March and April 2016.

Salafis as friends, one said yes, but most stated that the Salafi way of life is incompatible with theirs. One woman noted that Salafis would never choose her company anyway “so there is no point in even discussing that issue.”

Interviewees complained that Salafis they encounter try to change their minds “and they do so aggressively.” One man from Sarajevo, who had a friend who converted to Salafism, explained that he feels uneasy about Salafis because “their denial of Bosnian Muslim identity is scary... If they behave and talk in such a way toward people who come from their own ethnic group, and toward Muslims, what should the rest of us expect?” This feeling of unease and insecurity about Salafis was dominant among these interviewees.

This group of interviewees had conflicting views about women wearing the *niqab*. Even though they believe in freedom of religion, most still find it uncomfortable when meeting women who wear the *niqab*. “I’ve caught myself feeling uneasy,” one told us. “Lately, there are a lot of Arabs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, so I meet lots of women in the *niqab*. But I am always thinking that anyone could be hiding behind it. I read in the news about a situation in Sarajevo where criminals used a *niqab* to rob a bank. So I always wonder who is behind it when I see them.”

When asked to reflect on the role of former Grand Mufti Cerić on the spread of Salafism in Bosnia, most of these interviewees were clear that Cerić not only did nothing to prevent it, but as one said, “he did not know the boundaries between religion, politics, and daily life.” Still, people from this group of interviewees also stressed the role of radicalized politicians from the Republika Srpska as well. “Milorad Dodik is one of the main recruiters of Salafis,” said one. And another found similarities in the agendas of Dodik and Salafis, noting that “they both deny the national and religious identity of Bosnian Muslims... [and] are both against the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. While Salafis swear allegiance to the *Ummah*, Dodik swears his allegiance to Serbia.”

## 6. CONCLUSION

One of the inescapable questions that must be asked when discussing Salafism and radicalization is whether or not Salafism is inherently radical. Much of the discussion regarding radicalization in Bosnia revolves around concerns related to stereotyping and discrimination, and includes calls that adherents of Salafism not be treated as inevitably or inherently radical. Proponents of this approach rightly quote human rights declarations, cite rights to freedom of religious expression, and also validly point out that Salafis cannot be seen in a vacuum as the only radicalization risk without acknowledgment that Radicalisation exists among various groups in Bosnia. Indeed, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a highly polarized society, and some state actors harbor radical nationalistic views that undermine general security and add to social tensions.<sup>147</sup> However, sad as it may be, the question of ethnic radicalization is a familiar one for Bosnians and has thus been thoroughly researched. It has been linked to attacks on minorities and, on a number of occasions, to incidents of mass violence. Salafi radicalization cannot be viewed in isolation, for it occurs within this generally radicalized context, and yet it is an under-studied phenomenon in Bosnia. This research is meant to fill this gap.

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<sup>147</sup> Schmid warns that “radicalization is not necessarily a one-sided phenomenon” and that is “equally important to examine the role of state actors and their potential for radicalisation.” See: Alex P.Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*, ICCT Research Paper, March, 2013.

Most international research on radicalization distinguishes between radicalization of belief and radicalization of behavior that leads to violence, with only the latter treated as a security threat. This study, however, sought to explore how radicalization of belief and radicalization of behavior that does *not* lead to violence can still present security challenges by offering narratives that create an atmosphere of insecurity or distrust. This is a rather controversial issue, as it was demonstrated throughout this study, but one that must be treated seriously. And in Bosnia, this is an issue that has international dimensions, since Salafi proselytism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is driven largely by the Saudi-funded King Fahd Mosque and several other private Gulf region funding sources. And Bosnian *da'is* – even those from traditional Muslim families – are indoctrinated during their education in Saudi Arabia and other universities in the region.

Our research shows that radicalization is not a spontaneous event, but a process that depends on various factors. While some of the Salafis in our research did have troubled pasts, psychological issues, and experiences of trauma, that does not seem to be the case for all of them. It was difficult to establish a clear pattern of radicalization from traditional Bosnian Islam to Salafism, though, because we could not count on the total honesty of interviewees, especially as it relates to their personal histories. Only a few shared, for instance, that they had previous problems with alcohol and drugs. Still, the dominant opinion in BiH that only poor, uneducated, and troubled individuals are attracted to radical Salafism, especially those with criminal pasts, was not reflected in interviewees. A majority of the Salafis we interviewed hold university degrees or were university students, and 60% of them were employed.

What became clear in interviews was that almost two-thirds of interviewees did not have previous knowledge of religion before adopting Salafism, with the other third coming from traditional Bosnian Muslim families that had practiced religion. Some scholars have emphasized that “radicalization of



attitudes need not result in radicalization of behavior.”<sup>148</sup> Yet, our research findings indicate that Salafi indoctrination does in fact result in radicalization of behavior; it impacts the personal and group identity formation of all adherents, and among a small percentage, it inspires violence. Indeed, in Bosnia, terrorist attacks have been carried out by adherents of Salafism or by attackers inspired by the ideology. On the research continuum advised by Sedgewick, if the official narrative of the Islamic Community is moderate, Salafism rates as radical, and the teaching in some para-*jamaats* represents an extreme radical view that threatens to lead members into violence.

Of course, Bosnia is not the only country struggling to balance freedom of religious expression with real security concerns, and thus facing the challenge of avoiding discrimination and stereotyping while at the same time warning about the potential dangers of Salafism. Indeed, a 2014 Dutch study found that a majority of Salafis in the Netherlands shun violence, and concluded that “a more nuanced and contextual approach is necessary to assess and interpret potential threats.”<sup>149</sup> The author noted that the Salafi movement “allows no room for moral or religious pluralism” and yet has no ultimate authority, and so, “paradoxically, in its endeavor to attain moral purity, the movement is strongly fragmented.”

This is not exactly the case with the Salafi movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, though. While some groups are isolated and radical, and fragmented from the mainstream Salafi movement, this more moderate mainstream appears to be reasonably coordinated through the network of *da'is* and Salafi NGOs. And so, while it may be true that all Bosnian terrorism has been linked to Salafism, not all Salafis are linked to terrorism; and this must be recognized in efforts to prevent radicalization.

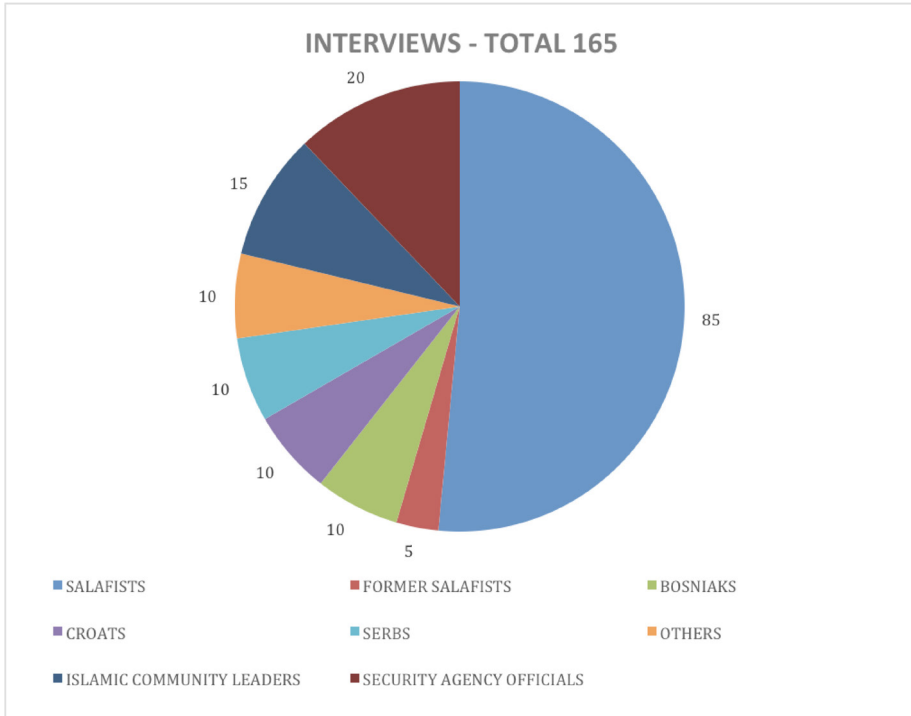
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148 For more about psychological research on attitudes and radicalization, see: Fathali M. Moghaddam, “De-radicalization and the Staircase from Terrorism,” in *The Faces of Terrorism: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed., David Canter (New York: Wiley & Sons, 2009), 280.

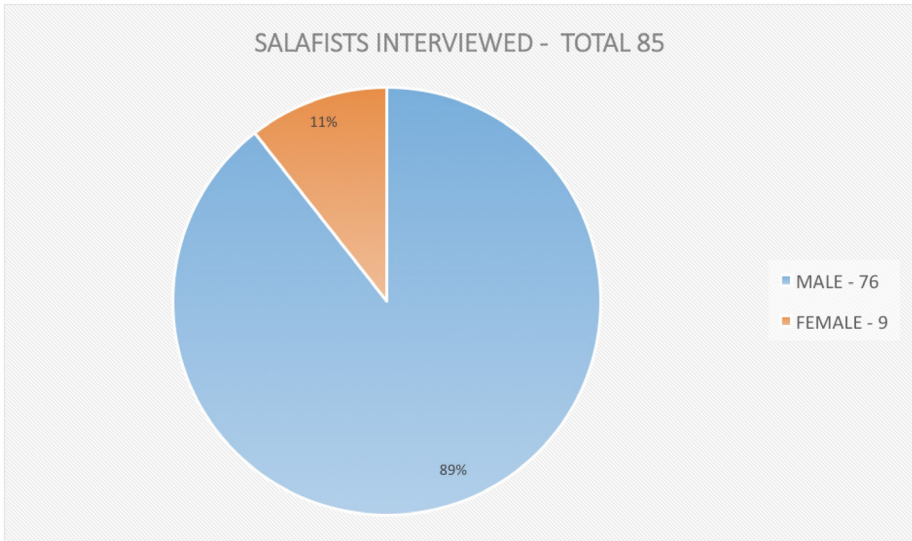
149 Ineke Roex, “Should we be Scared of all Salafis in Europe? A Dutch Case Study,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 3 (2014), <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/346/html> (accessed May 6, 2016).



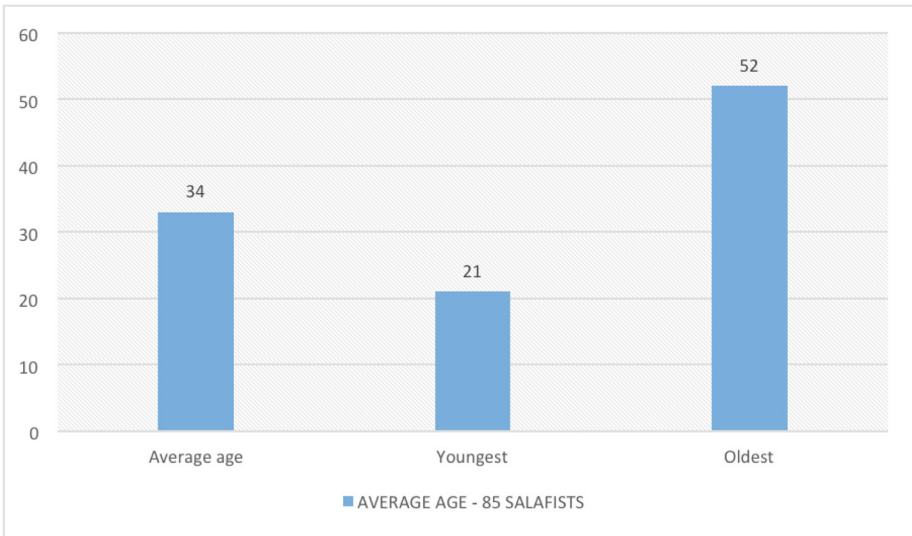
## ANNEX 1 TABLES AND FIGURES



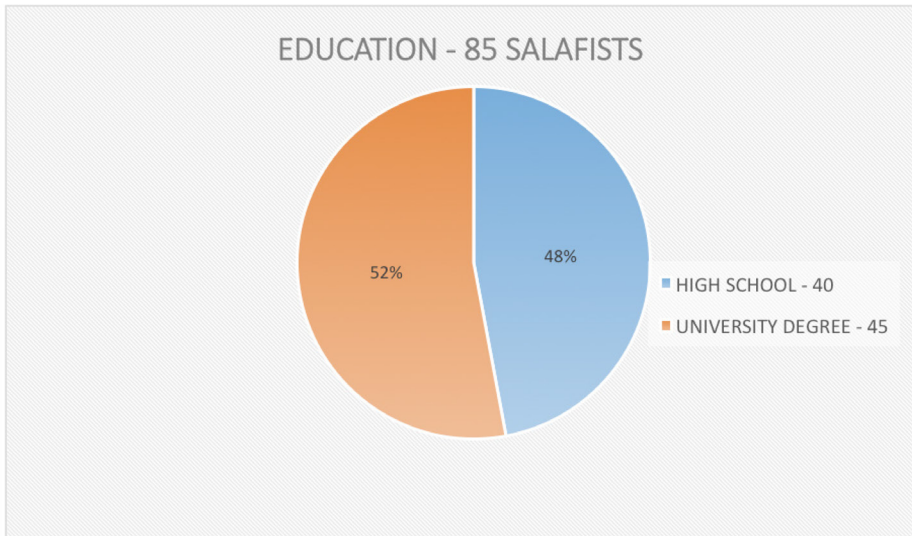
**Figure 1.** Total number of interviewees, by group



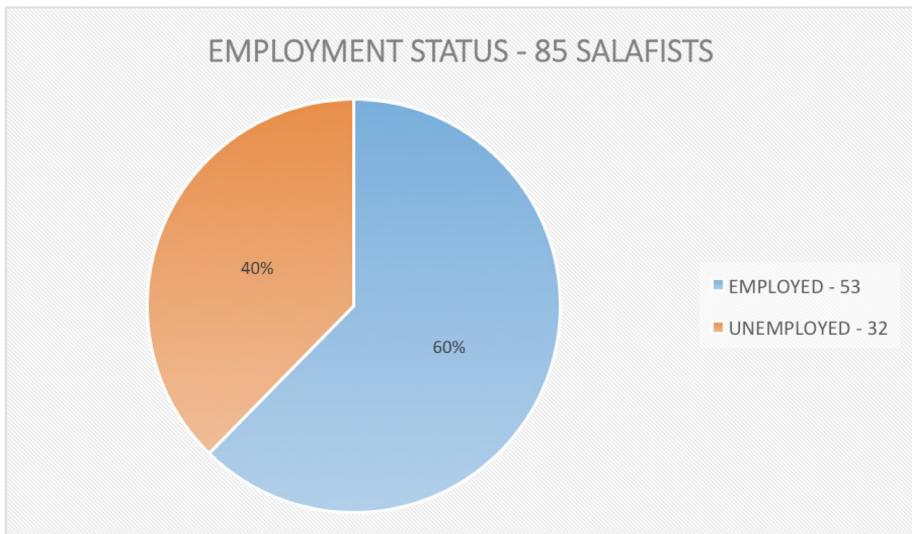
**Figure 2: Gender** – Out of 85 Salafi adherents interviewed, 76 were male and 9 were female



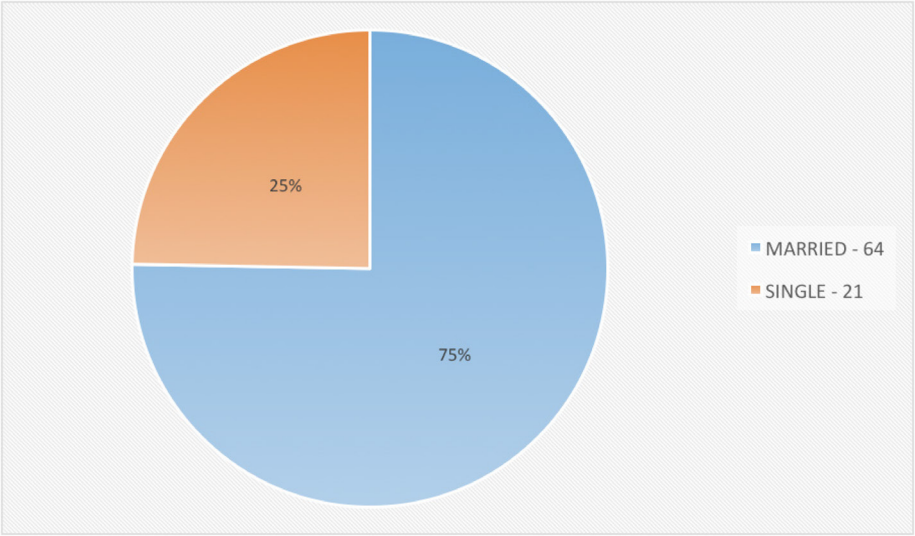
**Figure 3: Average age** – Out of 85 Salafi adherents interviewed, the average age was 34



**Figure 4: Education** – Out of 85 Salafi adherents interviewed, 40 (48%) had completed high school and 45 (52%) hold a university degree



**Figure 5: Employment status** – Out of 85 Salafi adherents interviewed, 53 were employed (60%) and 32 (40%) were unemployed



**Figure 6: Marital status** – Out of 85 Salafi adherents interviewed, 64 (75%) were married and 21 (25%) were single

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## REVIEWS

“European nations are grappling with how to absorb Islamic practices that in some cases are antithetical to social and legal norms, such as gender equality. In this important study, Edina Bećirević, a world renowned authority on the breakup of Yugoslavia, undertakes to explain why and how Salafi Islam appeared in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a country where the practice of Islam has long been considered to be a private matter, and where religious tolerance was the norm. What is the appeal of Salafism? Why is it spreading now? Bećirević explains that Salafi Islam was initially brought to BiH by foreign mujahideen who came to fight what they viewed as a *jihad* against the Serbs; but it has been spread further with Saudi funding by Bosnian imams trained in Saudi institutions. What will this mean for the future of BiH, where gender equality is guaranteed by the Constitution? Bećirević’s study is based on interviews with a wide variety of individuals – Bosnian Muslims who converted to Salafism, converts to Salafism who ultimately rejected the narrow and strict Salafi approach, as well as non-Salafi Bosnian Muslims, and Bosnian Croats and Serbs. The way in which BiH addresses this imported interpretation of Islam and the challenges it poses to the BiH Constitution will ultimately contain lessons for many other nations.”

*Jessica Stern, Research Professor,  
Pardee School of Global Studies, Boston University*

“Islam in BiH has undergone a substantial revival and change since the end of the 1992-1995 war. As its visibility in public space increases, so do its manifestations in practice and belief. This growing internal differentiation has to a considerable extent been occasioned by the spread of Salafi teachings. The unease with which these teachings have been met, locally as well as internationally, has resulted in a troubling gap in knowledge and communication between the mainstream Islamic community, its leadership, the members of the expanding Salafi movement, and the general public. Issues of public religiosity, political security, and ethnic relations have all been affected by this gap, leading to more misunderstanding, sweeping generalizations, and dismissive attitudes. Bećirević’s study appears as an important and necessary intervention in this atmosphere of multilayered distrust. Based on an impressive set of first-hand interviews, data analyses, and theoretical questions, this study provides a nuanced assessment of the local context, ideological underpinnings behind the spread of Salafism, its specific appeal to local followers, and its many points of contention with the mainstream Islamic Community. This study also counteracts general arguments on global Salafism by offering a much-needed reference to specific currents *in situ*, commonly absent in the international discourse on Islamic radicalism. Bećirević’s study should be widely read by journalists, policy makers, politicians, non-governmental organizations, educators, and all those interested in the social challenges facing post-war BiH, especially those pertaining to religious affairs.”

*Amila Buturović, Associate Professor of  
Islamic Studies at York University*

*“Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the ‘Hearts and Minds’ of Bosnian Muslims* by Edina Bećirević is a must-read for anyone who wants to know more about the Salafi movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is the first comprehensive, empirical study on Salafism in Bosnia, and discusses the discourse and structures of this movement in-depth. Bećirević addresses internal and external factors across the past 25 years that have contributed to the establishment and consolidation of Salafism in Bosnia, as well as the drivers that push individuals toward this radical religious interpretation. An added value of this research is that it reveals not just how Salafis see the world around them, but also how non-Salafi Bosnians perceive Salafis and the question of radicalization in Bosnia in general.”

*Sead Turčalo, Assistant Professor of Security Studies,  
Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo*



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Aner Zuković identified a number of research subjects and meticulously transcribed the recorded interviews and focus groups. Majda Halilović and Maida Čehajić offered their comments and insights all along. Vlado Azinović contributed substantially to the design of the study and the final report. Kimberly Storr's editorial assistance and input were of great help. Senad Pećanin also generously shared his knowledge of the topic as well as his time. I am grateful to Jessica Stern, Amila Buturović and Sead Turčalo for their comments and for recommending changes that have improved this study. Two other part-time researchers and a number of consultants who chose to remain anonymous, were also crucial for the implementation of this project. And, of course, many anonymous interview subjects who spoke with researchers individually and in group settings were essential to this study.

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While this research relied on a strong team effort, the analysis and interpretations presented in this report, including any errors, are solely the responsibility of the author.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Edina Bećirević is an associate professor at the Faculty of Criminal Justice, Criminology and Security Studies at the University of Sarajevo and co-founder of the Atlantic Initiative. Her research interests are: human rights, war and genocide, transitional justice, radicalization, extremism and she has published extensively on these topics. Bećirević is the author of *Genocide on the Drina River*, published by Yale University Press in 2014.

## **ABOUT THE ATLANTIC INITIATIVE**

The Atlantic Initiative – Center for Security and Justice Research, is a Sarajevo based non-profit organization. It is dedicated to non-partisan security research, policy analysis and advocacy, and training for professionals and students. The Atlantic Initiative researches a broad range of security issues including radicalization, violent extremism, gender and security and gender and judiciary problems in BiH. The researchers and specialists working with the Atlantic Initiative are widely recognized experts in the aforementioned subjects and are committed to expanding the research focus further and into related fields.



