



Antisemitic Discourse and Historical Amnesia in Bosnia

The Case of Mustafa Busuladžić

KJELL MAGNUSSON

ACTA UNIVERSITATIS UPSALIENSIS

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Mustafa Busuladžić (1914–1945). Public domain.

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Preface

The present study deals with the influence of the past on contemporary culture and politics. Beginning in 2017 there was a heated controversy among Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Initially, the polemics concerned Mustafa Busuladžić (1914–1945), an Islamic scholar sentenced to death as a collaborator, but the controversy involved more general issues related to Bosnian Muslim identity, in particular the role of religion.

The focus was on the stance of Muslims during World War II, when Bosnia was part of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) ruled by a Fascist regime. Especially problematic were Muslim participation in the murder of the Jews and massacres of Serbs, the organization of a Bosnian-Muslim SS-division, and efforts to establish Muslim autonomy under German protection. The polemics were bitter, and there was a divide between those who condemned the behaviour of Muslim elites during the war, and those who downplayed antisemitism, or avoided sensitive topics, arguing that Muslims were victims acting in self-defence.

The conflict may be seen in the light of the specific dilemma of Bosnian Muslims. On the one hand, although people in the region were speaking the same language, due to centuries of foreign domination, a common identity never developed. On the other hand, the Bosniaks were part of a Muslim world which after the fall of the Ottoman empire was confronted with Western culture. The same tendencies to assimilation, rejection, or synthesis affected the Bosnian Muslims, in contact with currents in the Middle East.

Therefore, there is a century-long continuity of cultural influence, partly interrupted by Communist rule 1945–1990. In 1939, the organization *Young Muslims* was formed, inspired by the *Muslim brotherhood* in Egypt. It was banned in 1945 by the new regime, which executed leaders and sent members to prison. Among them was Alija Izetbegović (1925–2003), future president

of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1970, his *Islamic Declaration* was published abroad. It was a classic example of Islamism, i.e. the idea that Muslims should return to a social order built on the Quran, a prerequisite for the establishment of an Islamic state being part of the international commonwealth of believers.

In 1983, Izetbegović and five of his friends were sentenced to long prison terms for plotting against the state. They were released in 1988 and two years later there was a triumphant return of the Young Muslims. *The Party of Democratic Action*, SDA, formed in 1990, won the first free elections as part of a short-lived coalition with Croat and Serb nationalists. Although ex-communists joined the SDA, its nucleus consisted of former Young Muslims and post-war associates of Izetbegović. It dominated Bosniak and Bosnian politics both during the war and afterwards. In 2015, Bakir Izetbegović, Alija's son, became chairman of the party.

Although the ideals of the *Islamic Declaration* were not implemented, Bosniak society was ruled by a nationalist party with close ties to the Islamic Community. The religious component played an important role during the war in the 1990s, when the relations to the Muslim world intensified on several levels, and a radicalization occurred with the creation of Islamic military units composed of both foreign and Bosniak soldiers. Afterwards the stress has been on state-building and maintenance of a national-religious identity.

Of great importance is that in the interwar years, as well as during World War II and afterwards, Muslim Bosnia was influenced by ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is telling that both the political and religious elite had cordial relations with Yusuf Qaradawi (1926–2022), the leader of the Muslim Brothers. The main international ally of SDA, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is another supporter of the Brothers.

It is well-known that leading personalities in the Muslim Brotherhood – like Hassan al-Banna, Haj Amin el-Husseini, and Sayyid Qutb – openly expressed antisemitic views. It is hard to escape the fact that certain religious and secular leaders of the Bosnian Muslims during WW II had similar views, and that antisemitic ideas, or a reluctance to address them, may also be found today. However, it was obvious during the conflict that Bosniak intellectuals and politicians strongly opposed the official cult of a dubious past and, apparently, the position of the SDA has been weakened.

PREFACE

The study deals with the conflict in recent years, as well as with the ideas of Mustafa Busuladžić and the historical context in which he was active. Besides texts by Busuladžić and his contemporaries, I have relied on Bosnian sources, as well as international research.

I am most grateful to valuable suggestions by those who read the manuscript before publication and appreciate the comments on an earlier draft. I am particularly indebted to Lars M Andersson for his encouragement and support.

Kjell Magnusson

Antisemite or Martyr?

In the autumn of 2017, the United States¹ and Israel² officially protested that a school in the Bosnian capital was named after Mustafa Busuladžić (1914–1945). The two governments argued that due to the offensive character of his posture during World War II, a school should not bear the name of Busuladžić, and in the ensuing debate an excerpt from a text³ published in 1944 was to play a key role:

In our country, people were fighting against the Jews and their speculations, against their deceptions and exploitation. They disappeared from the bazaar, but the Jewish spirit of speculation, hoaxing, price-fixing, hiding and hoarding, smuggling and usury remained in the bazaar, to such an extent that the corruption of certain merchants, regardless of religion, overshadowed the behaviour of the absent Jews.⁴

This was written when most of the Jews in Bosnia and Herzegovina had been killed by the Ustasha regime, i.e. by Croat and Muslim perpetrators. The author never regrets their fate and uses the euphemism “disappear” to convey what cannot have escaped anyone in Sarajevo, a city where Jews had lived since the 16th century and constituted more than 10,000 of its 85,000 inhabitants.

Mustafa Busuladžić, born near Trebinje in 1914, had finished the prestigious Gazi Husrev Beg *medresa* in Sarajevo and obtained a degree from the Higher Islamic Sharia-Theological School. He spent two years in Rome, specializing in Oriental Studies and working for the Italian radio, broadcasting

¹ Ambasada SAD u BiH razočarana nazivom osnovne škole po Busuladžiću. *Dnevni Avaz* 18.08.2017.

² Protest Izraela zbog škole ‘Mustafa Busuladžić. *Slobodna Evropa* 24.10.2017.

³ Texts in South Slav languages are translated by the author.

⁴ Busuladžić 1997:154.



1. Old Sephardic Synagogue in Sarajevo. Built 1581, now museum. Photo: Bjoertvedt. Source: p. 7.

programs in Croatian. Upon his return to Sarajevo in 1942 Busuladžić worked as a journalist and teacher at Islamic colleges. He was affiliated with the *El-Hidaje*, the association of Islamic scholars,⁵ which in 1943 appointed him supervisor of the organization *Young Muslims*, formally a youth section of El-Hidaje.

During his stay in Rome Busuladžić met with Amin el-Husseini, the pro-Nazi Mufti of Jerusalem, and participated in the education of imams in the Bosnian-Muslim SS division, a project furthered by the Mufti on behalf of Heinrich Himmler. Busuladžić was arrested by the Communist authorities in April 1945 and sentenced to death as a Nazi Collaborator on May 23. He was executed on June 29.

In 2017 and 2018 there was a heated debate between, on the one hand, liberal and social-democratic politicians, as well as independent intellectuals,

⁵ Islam like Judaism does not have a priesthood. The ulema [or “Islamic clergy”] are theologians/lawyers.



2. Jewish Cemetery, Sarajevo 2017. Photo: Julian Nyča. Source: p. 7.

and, on the other, representatives of the ruling party SDA and Islamic theologians.⁶ The latter, who defended Busuladžić, emphasized that he had been executed for political reasons. Mustafa was a *šehid*, a martyr, who had died for Islam and his people.⁷

The ruling party in the canton of Sarajevo defended the name of the school,⁸ and the Sarajevo Institute of History called for a formal rehabilitation of Busuladžić.⁹ No reaction from the Bosnian Foreign Ministry was published, and the party leadership, i. e. Bakir Izetbegović [son of Alija], then member of the Bosnian state presidency, was silent for a long time.

Instead, a response came from the board of the elementary school, addressed to Israel, not the United States. After noting that “a state which has

⁶ For a review of various aspects of the case of Busuladžić, see Kamberović 2018. On the ideas and activity of Busuladžić, see the book *Kritika bosanskog uma*, [A Critique of the Bosnian Mind] by Tarik Haverić 2016.

⁷ e.g. Halilović 2016.

⁸ SDA odbacuje navode Glavnog odbora SDP-a. *Avaz* 28.II.2016.

⁹ Begović 2018.

violated most UN resolutions has no right to lecture others on moral behaviour” it says:

Mustafa Busuladžić was not an antisemite at all but spoke, as an intellectual and religious scholar, about the immoral character of Jewish, but also other merchants, who were not Jews, but engaged in speculation, withholding of goods and “usury prices”.

The board further stated that Busuladžić had subsequently been proven right:

That Mustafa was right is obvious from conditions in today’s world, where similar behavior of merchants and bankers provokes economic crises and throws millions of people into poverty, all because of the insatiable greed for money of those who have most of that commodity.¹⁰

An unusual argument appeared in the major Sarajevo daily *Oslobođenje* written by the renowned theologian Mustafa Spahić. In 1983, along with Alija Izetbegović and other intellectuals, he was sentenced to prison in a political trial, accused of planning to create an Islamic state in Bosnia. Spahić emphasized that Israel, due to the behaviour against Palestinians, is today the main cause of antisemitism, but another important theme in his text was the “Jewish family Rockefeller” – a well-known trope in antisemitic literature. The head of the Rockefeller Foundation had, according to Spahić, more power over life and death than Stalin or Hitler. And through its support of eugenics research in Germany, the family was responsible for the suffering of Jews in the Second World War:

It is an indisputable fact that the vast sums of money the Foundation of that family gave to various eugenics institutes in Germany brought the greatest evil and misfortune upon Jews in Hitler’s concentration camps. When their so-called scientific results were tested alive. However, this role, especially that of the recently deceased D. Rockefeller III, is shrouded in a wall of impenetrable silence. Why?¹¹

¹⁰ Odgovor Ambasadi Izraela u BiH iz škole “Mustafa Busuladžić”. *N1 Vijesti* 27.10.2017.

¹¹ Spahić 2017.

In other words, the Jews were largely to blame for their own death, an idea very close to arguments found in the *Black Notebooks* by Heidegger.¹² Consequently, Israel had no reason to attack an innocent scholar like Busuladžić:

It is an unquestionable truth that not a single Jew suffered from his words or deeds. The Communist authorities first shot him and then demanded non-existing guilt. Now, although he is dead, everything repeats itself a second time. It would be more constructive and useful for the Jewish people and state to investigate the facts of how much the Rockefeller Endowment, by helping Nazi institutes, contributed to the suffering of Jews, since experts from those institutes, like Dr Mengele, experimented and evaluated their findings.¹³

The issue was also raised by Džemaludin Latić, poet and professor at the Islamic Faculty in Sarajevo. He was the youngest of those convicted in 1983, and during the Bosnian war a close confidant of Alija Izetbegović, later disillusioned with a policy leading to stagnation and corruption, due to cooperation between the Islamic movement and the former nomenclature.¹⁴

Latić was highly critical of Communism and Tito (“incidentally an extramarital child of an Austrian Jew and his Slovene housekeeper”)¹⁵ and argued that Busuladžić in his article “Islam and Socialism” clearly distances himself from Nazism and racism:

While Communism strives for the dictatorship of the proletariat, Islam is democratic and maintains that all people are equal and excludes any class and racial differences. [...] Like Marxism, Islam rejects fascist-racist beliefs and national chauvinism. Unlike the Marxist class hatred, however, Islam emphasizes a universal brotherhood that encompasses all human beings.¹⁶

These and similar quotes reoccur among those who defend Busuladžić against allegations of antisemitism. What is seldom mentioned, though, is that the text was written in 1938 and that Busuladžić changed during his stay in Rome 1940–1942.¹⁷ This is clear from his writing in 1943 onwards, and also notice-

¹² Magnusson 2015.

¹³ Spahić 2017.

¹⁴ Isaković 2014; Begović 2020b, R.I. 2021.

¹⁵ According to all accounts, Tito’s father, Franjo, was a Croat peasant, while his mother, Marija, was a Slovene. She gave birth to 15 children.

¹⁶ Latić 2015.

¹⁷ This is also pointed out by Omerika 2014:62.

able in an interview Busuladžić made with the Mufti of Jerusalem in 1942 in the Ustasha-controlled magazine *Osvit*. The title of the interview was “Hitler is a great friend of the Muslims” and the text deals with the common interest of Muslims and Germans, united by their struggle against Communist Russia. The war will lead to a new and more righteous social order:

The present war is not only a battle between opposing armies but also a wrestling of ideologies, a struggle between oppressors and rejuvenated peoples, above all Germany, for a more just order.¹⁸

What is common to certain reactions in contemporary Bosnia is both the denial of charges of antisemitism, and, as we shall see, that antisemitic motifs are used when defending Busuladžić. It is revealing that Busuladžić’s book *The Muslims of Soviet Russia* (1943) is seldom mentioned, and the beginning passed over in silence:

The gigantic struggle that Germany and its allies are waging against Bolshevism is not a war between two imperialisms. Today’s conflict is a battle between two worlds, it is the struggle between an old world, which under the pressure of the forces of renewal, is turned into ashes, and a new world being born: a combat between “Das Kapital” and “Mein Kampf”. After this battle, a new economic, social, and political world-order will be created, which will enable a peaceful and dignified life for both individuals and all peoples on earth.¹⁹

This is an unequivocal position in favour, not only of Germany, but of Nazism as such. Yet, the booklet was reprinted by the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996²⁰ and a year later included in a collection of texts by Busuladžić, published by Šaćir Filandra, professor of political science.²¹

¹⁸ Busuladžić 1942/2020.

¹⁹ Busuladžić 1996:7.

²⁰ Busuladžić, Mustafa. *Muslimani u Sovjetskoj Rusiji*. 1996 Sarajevo: Rijast islamske zajednice u Republici Bosni i Hercegovini; Izdavačka djelatnos El-Kalem; Islamske informativne novine Preporod.

²¹ Busuladžić, Mustafa, priredio Š. Filandra, *Muslimani u Evropi: izabrani spisi*. 1997 Sarajevo: Sejtarija.

During an official visit to Croatia in 2018, Bakir Izetbegović was asked in a TV interview about his views on Mustafa Busuladžić.²² Izetbegović answered that in his opinion, the Islamic scholar was by no means a Nazi sympathizer.

The debate on the name of the school, which was not exactly a debate but monologues in opposing media, was going on for two years. In the meantime the canton parliament was addressing the issue, and even when it decided in 2018 that the school should go back to its earlier name,²³ nothing happened. On June 29, 2021, the school celebrated its anniversary as usual.²⁴

The inflamed discussion on Busuladžić, which is related to the sensitive issue of Ustasha/Nazi rule, was not the only example of a discourse close to antisemitic traditions. The following is not an exhaustive analysis, just some examples.

Under the heading “Chronology of Indecency”, Ferid Muhić, a well-known Bosniak philosopher, in early August 1995, wrote an article in the Islamic-oriented magazine *Ljiljan*, close to the ruling party SDA:

O World, in Bosnia you have lost your honour! Both through what you have done and what You failed to do! Utterly shameless, the fourth year in a row, you allow a genocide, in which the fate of the victims makes even the Fascist pogrom against the Jews in World War II seem more acceptable. Because you, World of freedom, honour, and humanity, were on the side of the Jews. You struggled to save them when you found out what was happening. As custom and sacred duty demands, you did everything possible to give the victims absolute restitution, while mercilessly condemning the guilty. But when it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, you don't even know who is guilty!?

In Bosnia you do not want to know about the victims, displaced, killed, humiliated, or looted. You World of power! On whose side are you, World, in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Do you regret that you hurried to the defense of the Jews – were not their torments enough!? Do you want to see those whose suffering is worse than theirs! Do you want to expose the people of Bosnia to everything that the Jews were subjected to – except that no one is on their side?²⁵

²² He was interviewed in the program *Nedeljnom u dva* [Sunday at Two o'clock] 04.02.2018. *Nedeljnom u 2* – Bakir Izetbegović 2018. HRT. *Nedeljnom u 2*. See also: Izetbegović u NU2: Bez konflikta i rata nije moguć treći entitet. *HRT vijesti* 04.02.2018.

²³ Skupština KS: Stavljena van snage odluka o nazivu OŠ Mustafa Busuladžić. *S radosarajevo.ba* 05.03.2018.

²⁴ Kadrić 2021.

²⁵ Muhić 1995.

It is easy to understand the anger and bitterness after the atrocities in the 1992–1995 war, but the idea that the Jews during the Holocaust – referred to as a pogrom – were protected by powerful friends is an expression of antisemitic stereotypes which is surprising in view of what happened in Bosnia during World War II.

In January 2005, the writer Fatmir Alispahić, in a revisionist manner, argued in *Saff*, the magazine of an Islamic youth organization, that one should learn from the Jews and use Hollywood to make the Bosnian genocide known. Relying on Holocaust deniers such as Faurisson, Alispahić declared that the figures on Jewish victims were greatly exaggerated:

In the West, for years attempts have been made to construct a scientific alternative to the fabrication of Jewish suffering during World War II. However, we [in Bosnia] are not familiar with this kind of research. This is natural since the political power of the Jews does not allow the “truth” about the Holocaust to be questioned. Scientists who tried to confront the official version with facts, have been brutally persecuted. Dr. Robert Faurisson barely survived the beatings he was subjected to by Jewish bandits. Ernest Zündel authored a book in which he revealed the trials against the Nazis. Whereupon his house in Toronto burned down. [...]

Moreover, the author claims that Jews collaborated with the Nazis:

These scientists argue that the information about six million dead Jews is a simple lie, because in the territory controlled by the Nazis there were four million Jews, two million of whom fled to Russia. It is estimated that only 300,000 Jews lost their lives due to typhus and exhaustion in the concentration camps. The main argument is the agreement between Zionists and Nazis on the emigration of German Jews, with the aim of creating Israel, in which both sides were interested, everything else is theatre.²⁶

The only response came from Jakob Finci of the Sarajevo Jewish Community, and a few independent journalists.²⁷

Since then Alispahić has continued to voice his anti-Jewish views. One example is his repeated derogatory language about Jakob Finci, and his allegation that the Jews of Sarajevo cowardly left the city in 1993:

²⁶ Alispahić 2005.

²⁷ Dizdarević 2005; Lovrenovic 2005.

Traditionally we²⁸ have for centuries fostered a benevolent attitude toward Jews. Ever since we accepted them after the persecution from Spain, and throughout the Second World War, when we were hiding them from the Holocaust in our houses, families, clothes, this neighbourly brotherhood lasted. And then, during the genocide against Bosniaks, the Jews went to Israel, or who knows where. They were able to leave the Bosnian hell, and we were not. It never occurred to them to show their solidarity with us in death. Maybe they could be understood. But our grandfathers risked their lives hiding Jews from the Nazis. The cowardly departure²⁹ of Jews from Bosnia broke the centuries-old tradition of neighbourly relations, which only we, as hosts, could be proud of. [...]

The main obstacle to the reaffirmation of Bosniak ties with Jews is Jakob Finci, around whose crimes and malevolence the entire Bosnian Jewry revolves today. [...]

The fact that his family has been here for three hundred years or more does not mean anything if a single member of that family turns out to be a degenerate in the tradition of Bosniak-Jewish neighbourhood relations, and sometimes, even, brotherhood. Those who push Jakob Finci into all these positions, and give him pharaonic power, should be informed that Bosniaks do not regard this Jew as a Jew, but as a Chetnik [derogatory for Serb].³⁰

Similar views were put forward in 2020 by Sead Zubanović. The Jews were protected by the Muslims throughout history, even during the Second World War, when the Bosniaks risked their lives to help their Jewish countrymen who were persecuted by Germans and Croats. Yet, the Jews let the Muslims suffer alone in 1992–1995 and did not condemn the Serbs. Their leader, Jakov

²⁸ Actually not “we” (Bosniaks) but the Ottoman political system, where higher officials as a rule were former Christians, who as children had been taken from their parents to be educated as Muslims. The Grand vizier – the highest official in the empire – was often a Serb or Albanian.

²⁹ The remaining Jews of Sarajevo were largely secular. When the present author visited Sarajevo in 1974 there were no regular services in the Ashkenazi synagogue, as it was impossible to gather ten men. The old Sephardic synagogue was closed, not even a museum. About 950–1000 Jews left Bosnia in 1992–1993, as well as 1,650 non-Jews; Softić-Kaunitz 2017:39–40. Among the organizers was the well-known Belgrade writer David Albahari, Kamhi 2017:7–8, who himself emigrated to Canada. It may be recalled that 1,170,000 people fled Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war 1992–95: 610,000 Bosniaks, 307,000 Croats, and 253,000 Serbs. Cf *International Crisis Group* 1997.

³⁰ Alispahić 2008:133–134.

Finci is a Serbian convertite, and the Jewish Community has referred to the “anticommunist and antifascist Mustafa Busuladžić” as a Fascist:

And this only because of two sentences in which he writes about the world-famous Jewish feature of usury and warns Bosniaks that they must stop trading in such a way, noting that usury i.e. interest, is forbidden by religious law, sharia. One has to admit that such speculations, artificially raising prices, and fraud were characteristic of the Jewish population all over Europe before World War II.³¹

These are single examples, and as such they do not tell us much about the strength of antisemitism in Bosniak society as a whole. It is noteworthy, though, that it is possible to publish views like that in media close to the leading political party and the major religious institution in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or print collections of anti-Jewish articles as books, and nothing much happens. It is, nevertheless, doubtful whether antisemitic attitudes are more widespread in Bosnia than in neighbouring Croatia or Serbia. According to an attitude survey, distance towards Jews is more pronounced in Bosnia than in both Croatia and Serbia, although the method may be questioned.³² However, text analyses have shown that antisemitic content is more common in Bosnia than in Serbia or Croatia, especially concerning the Holocaust and the Israel-Palestine conflict.³³

*

That the understanding of the Holocaust is sometimes ambivalent, may be illustrated by statements of the former reisu-l-ulema, Mustafa Cerić (leader

³¹ Zubanović 2020.

³² The respondents were asked to answer if they would accept Jews in their family. Due to religious prescriptions on marriage this does not necessarily measure prejudice. However, of 34 European states, with 37 % yes, Bosnia is on place 31, compared to Croatia, on 15, with 69 %, and Serbia on 18, with 61 %. However, if people were asked about acceptance of Jews in their neighbourhood the result was different. In Bosnia 84 %, Croatia 85 %, and Serbia 87 % answered yes. See Pew Research Center 2018:5.

³³ In a content analysis of press and online sources, it was found that in Bosnia 5,8 % of the material could be classified as antisemitic, while the same was true for 3,7 % in Croatia, and 3,9 % in Serbia. Cf. pp 65–66, 84–86, and 153–155 in Merheim & Aleksov 2021.

of the Islamic Community in Bosnia 1993–2012) after a visit to Auschwitz in 2011:

I never cared about Auschwitz and never knew about it until it happened to my people, and I am here to tell you and the entire world not to wait for the next genocide. You have the ability to prevent it. If we had prevented the Holocaust in Auschwitz, we could have prevented the Srebrenica massacre.”³⁴

Eight years later he says:

I admit, the story of Auschwitz did not touch me. Moreover, I was inclined to think that it was all made up until a Genocide happened to my own people in Bosnia and until I realized that “Never Again” was not a trustworthy vow of humanity.³⁵

The parallelism “Auschwitz and Srebrenica” means not only that the Holocaust was primarily enacted in Auschwitz, but that anyone who questions that a genocide occurred in Srebrenica, has also denied the Holocaust: “because the negation of the Genocide in Srebrenica also implies the negation of the Holocaust in Auschwitz”.³⁶

³⁴ Cerić 2011.

³⁵ Cerić 2019b.

³⁶ Cerić 2019a.

The Past

The answer to the question why people affiliated with the political party SDA or the Islamic Community would defend statements or behaviour which in other contexts are embarrassing, must be sought in the contradictory past of Bosnia.³⁷ Also, the father of the present chairman of SDA, Alija Izetbegovic, was a member of the *Young Muslims*, the youth movement supervised for a time by Mustafa Busuladžić.

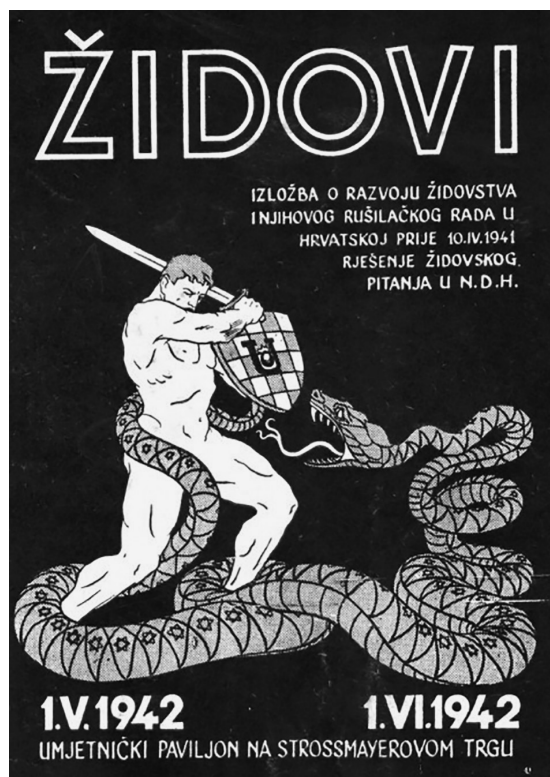
After Hitler's attack on Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941, all of Bosnia, together with areas in Serbia and Montenegro, became part of the NDH (The Independent State of Croatia), governed by the Fascist Ustasha-party under German and Italian control. According to the Ustasha, the Muslims were the flower of the Croatian people, and Muslims with Ustasha sympathies were members of the government. Those not enrolled in the Ustasha party largely welcomed the new regime, hoping to gain a status they did not have in Yugoslavia.

The Ustasha very soon embarked on a genocidal policy which aimed at killing Jews and Roma, and deport, convert to Catholicism, or exterminate the Serbs. In NDH as a whole between 29,000 and 31,000 Jews perished. Of these 75 percent were killed by the Ustasha, and 25 percent by the Germans. As Dragan Cvetković remarks "NDH was the only country in Europe where, during the Holocaust, local authorities were more responsible for the deaths of Jews than Nazi Germany."³⁸ In Bosnia, the figure was even higher, more than 93 percent (or between 10,000–11,000) of the Jewish victims were murdered by the Ustasha regime. Around 79–80 percent of the Bosnian Jews lost their lives.³⁹

³⁷ For a comprehensive discussion on Bosnian Muslims and the NDH, see the book by Kisić-Kolanović 2009.

³⁸ Cvetković 2011:171.

³⁹ Cvetković 2011:172.



3. Text: The Jews. An exhibition on Judaism and its destructive consequences in Croatia before April 10, 1941, and the solution of the Jewish question in NDH (Independent State of Croatia). 01.04.1942–01.05.1942 The Art Pavilion, Strossmayer Square, Zagreb. Source: p. 7.

The anti-Jewish policies started as soon as the government was established.⁴⁰ On April 16, the main synagogue in Sarajevo was desecrated and the library of the Jewish community was destroyed. Later in April and May Jewish property was confiscated, and forced labour introduced. In July, the first Jews and Serbs were shot as hostages.⁴¹ After a period of confusion in summer,

⁴⁰ For a recent overview of the fate of Bosnian Jews in WW II, see Londrc 2017:81–112.

⁴¹ Levntal 1952:64–66.

when Jews tried to save their lives converting to Catholicism or Islam, the NDH started to enforce the racial laws adopted in April.⁴² The deportations began in September, reaching their highest point in November 1941. Jews were assembled in temporary camps or directly put in railway cars for transport to death camps in Croatia, the most notorious being Jasenovac, where about 60 percent of the Jewish victims in the NDH perished.⁴³

It was in this milieu that Busuladžić was active as a journalist and religious teacher after his return from Italy in 1942. He and other personalities have become important symbols in some versions of Bosniak history being written since 1995. The Muslims of Bosnia, especially the leadership, were faced with a complex situation where they at the same time tried to uphold a traditional Islamic way of life and save their community. This inevitably meant compromises. We will discuss four issues: the enrolment of Muslims in Ustasha forces, the attitude towards the persecution of Serbs and Jews, the autonomy movement, with its Memorandum to Hitler, and finally the creation of a Muslim SS division. The main actors, besides Ustasha government structures, are the Islamic Community, the Association of the *Ulema*, and the Young Muslims. As we shall see, this history is related to the image of Busuladžić today.

Muslims in NDH Military Units

In contemporary Bosniak writings on World War II one sometimes gets the impression that Muslims were neutral during the war, that they had nothing to do with the NDH or its military formations. However, according to lieutenant colonel Hamdija Osmanović at the Bosnian Assembly of the Antifascist Council for National Liberation on April 26, 1945 this is not true:

Some people say that Muslims at the time did not follow the ustahsa movement, were not among the usasha, not among those behind the occupier, but, comrades, we Muslims have to recognize that the vast majority of Muslims were on the side of the occupier.⁴⁴

⁴² Greble 2011:88–120.

⁴³ Levntal 1952:67–73; Cvetković 2011:181.

⁴⁴ Džaja 2004:260.

It is clear from Enver Redžić's research that Muslims in parts of Bosnia played an active role in the Ustasha atrocities against Serbs and Jews:

Practise of genocide against the Serbs of eastern Bosnia intensified during the summer of 1941 in the areas of Birač, Vlasenica, Zvornik, Višegrad, Bijeljina, around Sarajevo, Foča, and Goražde, where Ustasha troops under the command of Jure Francetić excelled in particular. [...] In these areas [...] where the Serb element constituted 75 % of the inhabitants, the formation of ustaša organizations and state institutions were overwhelmingly Muslim and in the hands of Muslims. Recruited among the local Muslim population, the Ustaše committed severe violence and crimes of a genocidal character against the Serb inhabitants in the counties of Nevesinje, Gacko, Bileća, Ljubinje, as well as in other parts of Eastern Hercegovina.⁴⁵

Pavelić had no intention to be deprived of the old Rightists and Frankists among Croat Muslims [...] who through their cooperation provided a political cover for Ustasha violence against Serbs and Jews. Influenced by such politicians, motivated by self-interest, religious hatred, revenge, robbery, Muslim elements inclined to violence, actively participated in the realization of the Ustasha genocidal program in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to make it an ethnically pure Croat land.⁴⁶

This is corroborated by the French historian and specialist on Balkan Islam, Xavier Bougarel:

Although few Muslims were present in the upper echelons of the state apparatus, they often held local responsibilities in regions with Muslim populations, thus participating in the Ustasha violence against Serbs and Jews.⁴⁷

At least until 1943 most Bosnian Muslims involved in the war were in the various armed formations of the NDH, ranging from the regular Croatian army to various Ustasha units, such as the infamous Crna legija ("Black Legion"). In late 1941 several militias made up solely of Muslims combatants appeared. These were generally local units, although some of them had several thousand members such as the Home Guard Volunteer Regiment (*domobranska dobrovoljačka pukovnija* – DOMDO) founded by Muhamed Hadžiefendić in the Tuzla region. [...] Although these Muslim militias enjoyed broad autonomy on the ground, they still had ties with and were largely armed by, the Ustasha authorities and occupying troops.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Redžić 1998:126.

⁴⁶ Redžić 1998:306.

⁴⁷ Bougarel 2018:56.

⁴⁸ Bougarel 2018:59; cf also Bougarel 2020:42.



4. The Ustasha formation Black Legion (Crna Legija) parading in Sarajevo. Source: p. 7.

In general, Bosnian Muslims in the beginning looked upon the Ustasha government and especially the Germans as liberators.⁴⁹ Although the attitude towards the NDH regime changed, especially after the cruel war in Eastern Bosnia, many Muslims joined the NDH forces, or volunteered as soldiers on the Eastern Front.

According to British sources during the war about 12 percent of the Muslim population were enrolled in Ustasha units, which roughly corresponds to their share of the population of NDH (13 %). On lower levels in Bosnia, it is estimated (Communist sources) that about 40 percent of the Ustasha were Muslims.⁵⁰ Other sources, relying on Kisić-Kolanović⁵¹ speak about 30 percent.

In the text “One year in a state of our own” published in *Glasnik*, the journal of the Bosnian *ulema* in 1942, it is taken for granted that Muslims are enrolled in NDH military forces:

⁴⁹ Cf. Bougarel 2020:42–43 on the warm welcome of German troops entering Bosnia in April 1941.

⁵⁰ Džaja 2004:259–260.

⁵¹ *Ustaška vojnika*, Wikipedia, refers to Kisić-Kolanović 2001:286.

Other brothers gave their lives to their homeland and religion by fighting a treacherous domestic enemy, either as Ustashas or as home guards. Others again, died on the eastern battlefield, struggling against the most dangerous plague of our time, Bolshevism and infidelity, shedding blood for the foundations of a new Europe in which our homeland, the Independent State of Croatia, will have a respectable place and we as Muslims will be completely equal citizens. [...] ⁵²

Another indication of the sentiments of the Muslim population is that more men died as members of NDH forces, than as partisans. According to Vladimir Žerjavić ⁵³ 70,000 Croats and 29,000 Muslims in Bosnia died as soldiers in “Quisling or Collaborationist forces”, whereas 46,000 Croats and 11,000 Muslims lost their lives as partisans. ⁵⁴

The Muslim Resolutions in 1941

In the autumn of 1941 a number of resolutions written by members of the Muslim elite, both religious and secular, criticized the violence in Bosnia. ⁵⁵ It is often stated that they were a courageous protest against the murder of Serbs, Jews and Roma. ⁵⁶ In 2019, all the resolutions were published in one volume, and it is clear that none of the texts condemn the murder of the Bosnian Jews. ⁵⁷ Jews are mentioned by name only in the Banjaluka resolution, which

⁵² Glasnik IVZ, October 1942, quoted by Sušić 1980:38.

⁵³ Žerjavić 1992:77.

⁵⁴ In his dissertation Cvetković 2016:442–443, whose figures, like those of Dulić 2005:313 are based on later estimates, gives a lower number of killed partisans than Dulić, but as far as the Muslims are concerned the figures are similar. According to Dulić Muslim losses amount to 6 % of the total partisan losses, according to Cvetković, 6,89 %, or in numbers 5,827, respectively 6,146. This means that the Muslim partisan losses are lower than their share of the population of NDH (13 %). Figures for Bosnian Croats and Serbs are 23 % vs 48 % respectively 68 % vs 32 %.

⁵⁵ Prijedor (23 September), Sarajevo (12 October), Mostar (21 October), Banjaluka (12 November), Bijeljina (2 December), Tuzla (11 December), and a seventh in Zenica (26 May 1942).

⁵⁶ e.g. Kasumagić 1997; Cetin 2009; Džunuzović 2019f; Imamović 2019.

⁵⁷ Karić & Spahić 2019.

complains that Jewish property has not been fairly distributed. The deportations and killings are not questioned.⁵⁸

The Sarajevo resolution, regarded as the most important, since it was signed by religious leaders and other Muslim dignitaries, is usually described as initiated by El-Hidaje, the organization of the *ulema*. The text of the resolution concentrates on the situation of the Muslims, who are victims of the uprising of (Serb) rebels. In rather cautious words it is pointed out that rebel violence is a reaction to irresponsible behaviour on the part of the authorities. The situation is made worse since troops are deliberately wearing fez and calling each other by Muslim names, thus perceived by the “Greek-Easterners” as Muslims.

Tarik Haverić, professor at the Faculty of Law in Zenica, has analysed the issue of the Muslim resolutions in three longer texts.⁵⁹ At first, he points out that the Assembly of El-Hidaje took place on August 14th, and that the Sarajevo resolution was made public on October 12. He mentions that the the Islamic Community, when publishing the resolution in 2007, obviously mixes them up.⁶⁰

At the meeting in August 1941, the ulema begins by expressing its loyalty to the Ustasha leader Ante Pavelić:

The Muslim clergy assembled at the annual conference of its association El-Hidaje, for the first time arranged in the Independent State of Croatia, has the honour to greet You as Poglavnik [leader] of our young and dear Independent State of Croatia, who always has shown full understanding for the needs of our Islamic religious Community. For the Homeland Ready,⁶¹ Chairman, M. Handžić.

As pointed out by Adnan Jahić “the El-Hidaje resolution looks more like an act of loyalty and support for NDH, than a declaration criticizing its policy”.⁶²

⁵⁸ Jahić 2020:201 concludes: None of the signatories [of the resolutions, KM] raised their voice against racial laws and other anti-Jewish measures.

⁵⁹ Haverić 2020a, 2020b, 2021.

⁶⁰ The text is called Sarajevo Resolution of El-Hidaje but contains the text of the Sarajevo resolution of October. Cf. Sarajevska rezolucija El-Hidaje. *Islamska Zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini* 05.06.2007.

⁶¹ For the Homeland Ready – *Za dom spremni!* was the official Ustasha greeting.

⁶² Jahić 2020:178.

According to Haverić, this antecedent of the resolutions of 1941 has not been published. Apart from the expression of loyalty, the text mainly refers to the equality of Catholics and Muslims, the economic situation of the Islamic community, the issue of Muslim unity, and that the Sandžak area (in Serbia and Montenegro) should be part of Bosnia. In the conclusion, where the government is asked to undertake measures, Serbs, Jews or Roma are not mentioned.⁶³ The only part of the resolution which does regret violence is this:

With pain in our soul and with deep pity, we remember all those virtuous Muslim victims who have fallen innocently in the unrests that are occurring in certain areas these days. We condemn all individual Muslims who, on their part, might have caused any disturbances and committed violence. We conclude that only irresponsible elements and uneducated individuals, whose disgrace we reject from ourselves and all Muslims, could have done so. We call upon all Muslims, in the spirit of the high guidelines of their faith and in the interest of the state, to strictly refrain from any evil deed. We ask the state authorities to establish law and security in all parts of the country as soon as possible, not allowing people to in any way act on their own, so that innocent people do not suffer.⁶⁴

This part was repeated in the Sarajevo Resolution on October 12, 1941, which also contained the following passage where the signatories argue that those responsible for the unrest cannot be Muslims and suggest that someone wanted to blame Muslims for the killings.

And we now conclude that the atrocities could only have been committed by scum and criminal types, which are present in every community. We also note that they did not do it themselves, until they were given weapons, uniforms, authority, and often times orders. For that reason, Muslims are in no case responsible for these atrocities, nor are they the originators. We also state that, in order to make Muslims responsible for these misdeeds, Muslim names were used as well as the fez. Namely, they wore fez, which is part of the uniform of the Bosnian army, when committing various crimes against non-Muslims, calling each other by Muslim names. Muslims did not prepare

⁶³ And yet, on the promotion of the book *Islam and the West in the Thought of Mustafa Busuladžić*, in Zenica on December 1, 2018, Mustafa Spahić, claims, contrary to evidence, not only that El-Hidaje protested against persecution on ethnic, religious, and racial grounds, but by name referred to Jews, Serbs, and Roma. Cf. Hafiz Mevludin ef. Dizdarević: "Islam i zapad u mišljenju Mustafe Busuladžića" *SAFF* 04.12.2023.

⁶⁴ Quoted from Haverić 2020a.

plans to harm anyone, nor did they think of any evil, which is confirmed by the fact that all Muslims – former Yugoslav soldiers – immediately after the war surrendered their military weapons. Also, in the past, in the time of Turkey, when Muslims were the only lords, they tolerated without distinction all religions and did no wrong to anyone. Therefore, neither today Muslims may be characterized as initiators of crimes or those who cannot stand Greek-Easterners, and provoke disturbances, which some people deliberately do.⁶⁵

In view of what is known about Muslim Ustasha forces in the very areas where the Orthodox population was attacked, it is hard to believe that it would have been necessary to stage a performance where Catholic Ustasha would call each other by Muslim names.⁶⁶

On the whole it is difficult to look at the protests as heroic or unique. At the very time when these documents were written, the Jews of Bosnia and Herzegovina were systematically deported to an inevitable death, without any open protest. Haverić mentions the study of wartime Sarajevo, where Emily Greble has the following to say about the resolutions:

While it is tempting to interpret the Sarajevo resolution (or any of the resolutions) as a moral stand, it cannot be overlooked that most of the signers had supported the German and Ustasha agenda in the preceding months. Though they now preached against religious intolerance, twelve of the men had also signed the antisemitic petition to “stop the Jews” in March 1941. Countless others were involved with the same institutions represented at that prewar meeting. Almost all the ulema belonged to El-Hidaje, the organization that had initially worked closely with the Ustasha deputies. Most of the politicians held posts in the NDH courts or bureaucracy. Although only a handful had supported the Ustasha Party, many had benefited from the regime’s discriminatory program, particularly the expropriation of property. And only a handful had criticized, let alone protested, the discrimination and deportation of the Jews.⁶⁷

Among those who want to defend Mustafa Busuladžić and his colleagues, or the organization Young Muslims, it is argued that the Communists tried to

⁶⁵ Karić & Spahić 2019:97.

⁶⁶ The issue has been addressed by Ivica Šarac 2020 who shows that the atrocities in Eastern Bosnia leading to a Serb uprising and violent revenge, were perpetrated by predominantly Muslim Ustasha troops. This confirms the already mentioned account by Redžić 1998.

⁶⁷ Greble 2011:126.

obscure the resolutions, falsely pretending that only they were anti-fascists.⁶⁸ This is, in fact, misleading. The first systematic, although short, discussion of the resolutions is a conference paper from 1971 by the historian Muhamed Hadžijahić.⁶⁹ He writes that the Sarajevo resolution asked the authorities to establish “real security of life, honour, property and religion for all citizens in the state, without regard to differences of any kind”, and then adds in his own words “*that is, Serbs and Jews as well*” (italics KM).⁷⁰

The editor of the volume was the leading Communist historian Enver Redžić. In his book on the Muslim autonomy movement and the SS Handžar division, he says about the Sarajevo resolution (italics KM):

The resolution notes the plight of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, *condemns violence against Serbs and Jews*, rejects Muslims responsibility for atrocities and at the same time condemns those Muslims – “irresponsible elements” who participated in the violence.⁷¹

Redžić then writes the following (italics KM):

The emergence of these resolutions may be seen in the light of the views expressed in the Resolution of the General Assembly of the Muslim Ilmia Society “El-Hidaje” (August 14, 1941) which *condemns violence against Serbs and Jews* and their perpetrators from the ranks of Muslims.⁷²

As we have seen, it is clear from the resolutions that the atrocities against Jews are not condemned and the murder of “Orthodox Serbs” is directly criticized in one case (Mostar)⁷³ and indirectly in two (Banjaluka and Bijelinja where “killing of priests” or those of “other faith” are denounced).⁷⁴ Most problematic is perhaps the description of the El-Hidaje conclusions in August 1941. Haverić has convincingly shown that the text formulated by the Assembly is far less outspoken than the resolutions which followed, and nowhere does it explicitly speak up for Jews or Serbs.

⁶⁸ Kasapović 2021a:9–10.

⁶⁹ Muhamed Hadžijahić 1973.

⁷⁰ Hadžijahić 1973:278.

⁷¹ Redžić 1987:16.

⁷² Redžić 1987:16.

⁷³ Karić & Spahić 2019:81.

⁷⁴ Karić & Spahić 2019:85, 93.

The logic behind the discourse on the Resolutions seems to be: A) Jews, Serbs, and Roma were persecuted in Fascist Croatia/Bosnia 1941–1945. B) A number of documents written by Muslim leaders question the violence. C) Therefore, they have condemned the violence against Jews, Serbs and Roma, even if they did not explicitly mention the victims or – indeed – the perpetrators by name.⁷⁵

Why would a historian like Enver Redžić argue something that is not supported by the sources? The only reasonable explanation is the changing position of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1968 the LCY (League of Communists of Yugoslavia) decided that the Muslims of Bosnia would be considered one of the South Slav nations constituting Yugoslavia. In 1971, when Hadžijahić wrote his text, it was possible to declare a Muslim *national* identity in the census, and the Muslim nation was formally recognized in the constitutions of 1974. Since the end of the 1960s Bosnia was characterized by a process of Muslim nation-building which meant a positive emphasis on Muslim culture and history, but also religion.

The presentation of the 1941 Resolutions has obviously become a historical truth, repeated by Communists and anti-communists alike. After all, most people have not read the documents. In that perspective, it is interesting that the religious editors of the book *Against Evil*⁷⁶ actually never claim what Enver Redžić, member of the Central Committee, did. And one can only agree with professor Karić who suggests that the subject should be further researched.

The Zagreb historian Mirjana Kasapović⁷⁷ has independently of Tarik Haverić studied the resolutions. She regards present interpretations, also in historiography, as a kind of revisionism. Her general point is that you cannot, contrary to the sources, speak of a genuine antifascism among people who according to documentary evidence at first supported the NDH, and then turned to Hitler. There is, according to Kasapović, after 1990 a revisionist

⁷⁵ Robert Donia shows that no one is actually blamed for the violence “The circumlocutory resolution avoided assigning blame to any person or group. As socialist-era historians have pointed out, the Muslim signatories criticised atrocities as aberrant excesses rather than attacking the Ustasha’s score program to eliminate certain groups by force. Donia 2006:187. This was pointed out by Haverić 2020b.

⁷⁶ Karić & Spahić 2019.

⁷⁷ Mirjana Kasapović 2021a.

discourse based on a Bosniak nationalist narrative centered on victimhood. Either the Bosniak people suffered because it stood up for Serbs, Jews, or Roma, or were direct targets of violence.⁷⁸ However:

By discursive analysis of the resolutions, it is not possible to prove that they were political expressions of an anti-Ustashism, and especially, anti-fascism, as a broader and more complex concept. Words like Serbs, Jews, Roma, anti-semitism, extermination, pogrom, genocide, anti-fascism, etc. are read into the resolutions – but are not to be found there.⁷⁹

Memorandum to Hitler

The resolutions indicated that the Muslim leadership was dissatisfied with the Ustasha-state. A *Council for National Salvation* was formed in August 1942, under the leadership of Mehmed Handžić, the chairman of El-Hidaje. In November 1942 this group turns to Hitler asking for Muslim autonomy directly under Germany. In a Memorandum⁸⁰ to the Führer leading rep-

⁷⁸ Kasapović 2021a:30.

⁷⁹ Kasapović 2021a:29.

⁸⁰ Professor Husnija Kamberović 2014:180–181 argues that the document was initiated by the Germans: “Every serious analysis will show that behind this Memorandum does not stand any well-organized group of Muslim politicians. It is a case of German planting, in order to form the 13. SS division in 1943.” His view is not shared by other historians like Redžić 1987:71, Kisić Kolanović 2009:158, Hoare 2013:157, Greble 2011:143–145 or Motadel 2014:183. Bougarel writes that the Memorandum “did not necessarily reflect the views of all members of the Peoples Salvation committee.” Bougarel 2018:60–61, nevertheless, argues that in the given context “This memorandum was de facto a ‘final draft’ of a Muslim nation-state project, and it reveals the inevitable contradictions of such a project.” Adnan Jahić 2013 in his study of Muslim autonomy aspirations is arguing that perhaps the goal was not complete autonomy. He does not question the sentiments among leading Muslims, but notes that Suljaga Salihagić, according to Bougarel 2018:53 the probable writer of the Memorandum, was part of a German network in Banjaluka. The view of Kamberović does not exclude a genuine wish for autonomy among Muslim leaders. Kisić Kolanović 2009:329–236 and Motadel 2014:183–184 refer to the divisions among the Germans, where the anti-Muslim attitude of the ambassador to Zagreb differed from that of the SS. In any case, the rhetoric of the document is an interesting example of Muslim attitudes during WW II.

representatives of Bosnia's Muslims⁸¹ stress their loyalty to Germany and its anti-Jewish policies:

No one, no ethnic group, no tribe, no nation in the whole of Europe has felt and understood your gigantic initiative for the establishment of a new order in Europe with more affection than we Bosnians, Muslims of Bosnia. We adhere to the principles of National Socialism. [...] All our sincere sympathies and feelings for National Socialism, for the German people, who took on the fight against Judaism, Freemasons, Bolshevism, and the English exploiters, were known in former Yugoslavia. That is why Jews and Serbian journalists declared us fifth columnists and caused many problems.⁸²

A major idea in the document is that the Muslims are betrayed by the Ustaša state, which is even acting against Hitler's own will. The text singles out the Catholic priest Božidar Bralo, who together with the Muslim politician Hakija Hadžić, was commissioner for Bosnia.

He betrayed your intentions and provisions regarding the Jewish question and immediately began to accept numerous Bosnian Jews into the Catholic Church, especially in Sarajevo, where there are many and very rich Jews. He thus tried to protect them from what had to happen after the victory and conquest of this country.⁸³

According to the document 3,800 converted Jews⁸⁴ were able to conspire until they were deported:

When they felt protected, they again began their treacherous work. They started to organize Chetnik and insurgent gangs, and to generously support them financially. God knows how far these newly baked Catholics of Bralo would have gone with their harmful and treacherous activities, protected as members of the Catholic Church, if the Croatian authorities had not finally sent them to a concentration camp at the energetic request of the German Army.⁸⁵

⁸¹ The drafters of the document were according to the German authorities Uzeir Hadžihasanović, merchant and politician, Mustafa Softić, mayor of Sarajevo and the engineer Suljaga Šalihagić, Banja Luka. Cf. Dedijer & Miletić 1990:250. It was not forwarded to Hitler.

⁸² Dedijer & Miletić 1990:251.

⁸³ Dedijer & Miletić 1990:253.

⁸⁴ Greble 2011:95 writes that "this number appears to be an exaggeration."

⁸⁵ Dedijer & Miletić 1990:253.

Then a motive from the resolutions is repeated, i.e. the idea that the Zagreb government deliberately used fez as part of Bosnian uniforms, in order to blame the Muslims for atrocities against Serbs.

When the problem of Jews in our country was finally solved, the black clergy, fell on the Orthodox Serbs [...]. In order to achieve two goals with one blow, namely, to destroy the Muslims in Bosnia and Serbia, as well as the Orthodox Serbs, several Ustasha battalions were sent from Zagreb wearing our hats (fez) with the order to slaughter and kill Serbs wherever they were found, and to call each other by Muslim names during the massacres. This infernal plan aimed to show that the Serbs were slaughtered and killed by Muslims.⁸⁶

Especially revolting is that the Catholics governing Croatia have accused Muslims of being Communists:

We, who so often showed our love and faith to you and your great idea both during Yugoslavia and after its collapse. The first volunteers from the Croatian state were all Muslim units from Bosnia. Apart from these volunteers at the Eastern Front, Muslim men and women hurried to work in Germany, and in that way showed their trust and love for the German people.⁸⁷

It is further argued that Muslim loyalty to Germany is not a result of pure interest, but due to the fact that Bosnian Muslims are not Slavs, although they speak a language “similar” to Serbian and Croatian. They are actually Goths, and racially close to the Germans, besides being the original inhabitants of Bosnia.

We Bosnian Muslims are not loyal to you or the German people due to currently political calculations and interest. Although we live in a country where the majority are Slavic peoples, although we speak a Bosnian language that is similar to Serbo-Croatian, by race and blood we are not Slavs, but of Gothic origin [...]. In the sixth century, Slavs came to our country under the name of Serbs and Croats, who were received by our ancestors as workers on their estates.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Dedijer & Miletić 1990:254.

⁸⁷ Dedijer & Miletić 1990:255.

⁸⁸ Dedijer & Miletić 1990:256.

According to the Memorandum, anthropological and psychological characteristics are still visible. Not only are Slavs dark, in contrast to the fair Muslims; the former are servants, the latter masters:

The differences between Bosniaks and Slavic peoples, Serbs, and Croats, have been maintained to this day. 90 % of Bosniaks have thin, blond hair, blue eyes, and light skin colour, 80 % of Serbs and Croats have thick black hair, black eyes, and dark skin colour. Bosniaks are known as people of an open character, while Slavs tend to be submissive.⁸⁹

The rather lengthy description of the history and culture of Bosnian Muslims ends with concrete proposals concerning autonomy directly under Germany. This involves the formation of regular military forces based on Muslims already enrolled in the Ustasha corps and the Home Guards, except those who are fighting against the Soviet Union. Also, transfer of populations are suggested, in order to become a majority in a Muslim ruled part of Bosnia.⁹⁰

It is interesting that the Muslims are referred to as the majority population of Bosnia, although the numbers provided illustrate that they are a not. This way of stressing a supposed majority status occurs later as well, and perhaps reflects the idea that Bosnia until the arrival of the Austrians in 1878 was a land ruled by the Muslim Ottomans.

The Handžar Division

On Himmler's suggestion, in February 1943, Hitler decided to form a SS division consisting of Bosnian Muslims.⁹¹ The Croatian leadership of NDH was opposed to the idea, but finally had to give in. The *13th SS Voluntary Bosnian-Herzegovinian Mountain Division (Croatia)* was formed on 22 of September 1943, and in May 1944 was referred to as the *Handžar Division*. It was

⁸⁹ Dedijer & Miletić 1990:257.

⁹⁰ Serbs and Croats together formed a majority in the Bosnian part of NDH. After transfers and expulsions, the autonomous Muslim Bosnia would be the home of 925,000 Muslims, 500,000 Orthodox Serbs and 225,000 Catholic Croats. Cf. Dedijer & Miletić 1990:263–264. The actual population of Bosnia according to the census 1931 was roughly 1,028,100 Serbs, 789,080 Muslims, and 547,950 Croats.

⁹¹ On the *Handžar* division, see Gensicke 1988; Redžić 1987; Lepre 1997; Bougarel 2020.



5. Handžar members read *Islam and Judaism* by the Mufti of Jerusalem. Source: p. 7.

planned to consist of about 26,000 men, of which 23,200 would be Muslims and 2,800 Croats.⁹² Later the total number was set to 21,000.⁹³ It was trained in France and Germany, and took part in fighting in Bosnia and Srem, the border area of Croatia and Serbia.

The Handžar division was a creation of the SS and Heinrich Himmler personally. An important role was played by Haj Amin el-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who was a close ally of the Nazi leadership. El-Husseini was sent to Croatia and Bosnia between March 30 and April 14 1943. He spent five days in Sarajevo where he met with a large number of Muslim dignitaries and obviously impressed those who listened to him. When he addressed the assembled in the Gazi Husrev Beg mosque, some people were crying, listening to the Mufti:

⁹² Tomasevich 2001:499.

⁹³ Lepre 1997:139.

The bond between religious brothers is one of the strongest among men, and Islam has made all Muslim brothers wherever they live in the world [...]. I have come to you to visit, to personally get to know your situation and to speak about it to the Islamic world and everywhere it would be necessary. In these difficult times, I recommend that you above all have trust in God, that you within yourselves develop faith and trust in him and his power. Muslims have earlier in their history been affected by difficulties, but they have always stayed fast in their faith, which helped and saved them.⁹⁴

He already had acquaintances in the Islamic Community and among Bosnian politicians going back to the Islamic conference in Cairo (1931), which had been visited by members of the Ulema Medžlis and others who are regarded as belonging to the autonomy movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Uzeriaga Hadžihasanović, Mujaga Merhemić, Muhamed Mujagić.⁹⁵

Different from other SS divisions, the Handžar had military chaplains, i.e. imams on different levels, responsible for the religious and moral needs of the soldiers.⁹⁶ Among them were prominent scholars, such as Kasim Dobrača and Husein Đozo, who both had studied at the prestigious Al Azhar in Kairo. Three of the imams were members of The Young Muslims.⁹⁷

Mustafa Busuladžić played a specific role as teacher of the imams in Germany in 1944. He had met el-Husseini in Italy, and published an interview with the grand mufti in August 1942. The ideas presented are interesting, since they are similar to views by Busuladžić and others in Bosnia in the 1940s.

When the Handžar division entered Bosnia after training in France and Germany, it was involved in a series of massacres⁹⁸ in eastern Bosnia and Srem⁹⁹ and the SS division was also killing Jews.¹⁰⁰ As the French historian

⁹⁴ Kisić-Kolanović 2009:367.

⁹⁵ Lebel 2007:34–35.

⁹⁶ Lepre 1997:71–79; Motadel 2014:252–282; Sulejmanpašić 2000:132–139; 409–410.

⁹⁷ Bougarel 2018:67. Ivan Ejub Kostić 2021 mentions only one of them, and finds the information “imprecise”, as the person in question did not belong to the original group of Young Muslims, the so-called group A.

⁹⁸ Kostić 2021:77 refers to an *UDBA* (Secret Police) document speaking of “hundreds and hundreds” of victims mentioned by name, often women and children killed in the most brutal manner.

⁹⁹ Bougarel 2020:221–236.

¹⁰⁰ Bougarel 2020:243–250.



6. Haj Amin el-Husseini inspects the Handžar division, 1943. Source: p. 7.

Xavier Bougarel mentions they were few, primarily doctors and their families affiliated with the partisans. By this time, the Holocaust in Bosnia was practically over, and the SS-division's contribution to the murder of European Jews was marginal.

This is contrary to general views on the Bosniak participation in the war. The present chairman of the organization Young Muslims, for example, emphatically argues that no Young Muslims were members of any military formation except the partisans:

It is a lie that the “Young Muslims” were Quislings and collaborators with the occupier, or with the Ustasha state [...]. they did not want to be part of the Young Ustasha [...]. they were the initiators, signatories and transmitters of the antifascist resolutions which were written in 1941. These resolutions condemn the Ustasha crimes against Serbs, Roma, and Jews [...], the Young Muslims were not members of any military units whatsoever, except the partisans. There is no proof that even one member was in the Ustasha, or the Handžar division etc.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Begović 2017.



7. Haj Amin el-Husseini inspects SS-division Handžar, 1943. Source: p. 8.

I can responsibly claim that neither should the Handžar division be equated with Chetniks or Ustashes, since its members were not guilty of crimes like those committed by Chetnik or Ustasha forces.¹⁰² They constituted an SS formation made up of Muslims who were convinced that Germany could best protect our people from extermination, and except for combatting chetniks and partisans, they did not attack unarmed civilians.¹⁰³

The Young Muslims

The organisation Young Muslims, *Mladi Muslimani*, was formed in 1939, respectively in 1941. The name (a translation from the Arabic *aš-Šubbān al-muslimūn*) reveals the influence of the Islamic renewal in Egypt, and in its documents the Young Muslims are advocating a vision similar to that of the Muslim Brotherhood. A main idea was to create an organisation of conscious

¹⁰² As we have seen the SS-division was responsible for massacres in Bosnia, including killing Jews. Moreover, Muslims were, after all, members of Ustasha formations guilty of atrocities.

¹⁰³ Begovic 2017.

and engaged Muslims prepared to struggle for the creation of a society imprinted by Islam.

To create, wherever Muslims are living, at home and in the world as a whole, an Islamic society and an Islamic milieu which according to existing conditions and opportunities, as far as possible follows Islam, protects, and develops Islamic culture and civilization. In addition, such a milieu and society will prepare, materially and spiritually, a political and spiritual liberation of the Islamic world, establish an Islamic order, and renewal, as well as an Islamic culture and civilization.¹⁰⁴

The movement has been described as autochthonous,¹⁰⁵ but there is no contradiction between this statement¹⁰⁶ and influence from abroad, since the Muslims of Bosnia were living in a socio-cultural situation, affected by the same ideas as elsewhere in the Islamic world. Bosnia and Herzegovina had been part of the Ottoman Empire since the 15th century, and when the country was occupied by Habsburg in 1878, it was suddenly confronted with modern Western society. The Ottoman *millet*-system, which classified inhabitants according to religion, was replaced by a separation of religious and secular spheres. The Austrians organized Islam as a church-like institution and tried to create a common Bosniak identity, which failed since Croat and Serb national movements were already mobilizing Catholics and Orthodox, whereas a majority of the Muslims saw no reason to leave traditional Islamic culture.

The Bosnian Muslims were affected by an identity crisis which would last for a hundred years. Those belonging to higher social strata, having a Western education, started to identify as Croats or Serbs¹⁰⁷ which was not unproblematic. During Ottoman rule religion was the main marker of cultural differences among people who spoke the same language. This meant that in

¹⁰⁴ Trhulj 1992:123.

¹⁰⁵ Kostić 2021:82–111.

¹⁰⁶ Kostić concludes that: “although the ideological influences discussed in this subchapter certainly existed, what is also important to conclude in the end is that, despite this, the Young Muslims in organizational terms represent a spontaneous organization of young people that emerged from their intuitive understanding of the Qur’anic message, and reflections on how (Bosnian) Muslims can preserve their identity in the future and regain their former power”; Kostić 2021:111.

¹⁰⁷ Donia 1981.

order to become a secular Serb or Croat, a Muslim would nevertheless have to assimilate a tradition formed by Catholic or Orthodox Christianity.

Thus, in the first Yugoslavia, the Muslims of Bosnia constituted a *socio-religious group* resembling the Muslim *millet* in the Ottoman Empire. They were a people, not a modern nation, but somehow managed to enjoy a certain degree of autonomy under the political party *Jugoslavenska muslimanska organizacija* (JMO).

Against this background it is natural that an organisation like the Young Muslims was constituted in 1941. For political and legal reasons in the NDH, the Young Muslims 1943 became a youth section of *El-Hidaje*, the organization of the *ulema*. The future president of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegovic, belonged like other members of the Young Muslims to the upper middle classes, or the “nobility” which had dominated Bosnia in the Ottoman era. They were students of medicine, natural sciences, technology or law, less often Islamic theology. Their families had besides the loss of a civilization also lost their property in the agrarian reform between the two world wars.

The Young Muslims, like similar groups in the Muslim world, blamed the West for the predicament of Islam, but were also highly critical of official Islam, which in their eyes had failed to protect the faith. Although they were devoted believers, observing *Namaz* (the daily prayers) and *Ramazan* (the fast), their version of Islam was highly ideological. They criticized the Sufi tradition, which had been a living reality in the Ottoman Balkans, and wanted the peasants to get rid of what they regarded as superstition and non-Islamic habits. Also, they were against or ambivalent towards nationalism. Their goal was the creation of a universal Islamic order and their ideas would be reiterated in Alija Izetbegovićs *Islamic Declaration* of 1970.¹⁰⁸

The anticlerical stand of the Young Muslims was a potential problem since they were dependent on the Muslim Scholars. On the other hand, they respected leaders like Mehmed Handžić, Kasim Dobrača, and others who had studied at al-Azhar and who were themselves advocates of renewal. This is obvious from this statement by Dobrača:

¹⁰⁸ On the history of the Young Muslims, see Omerika 2014 and Kostić 2021. For documents and interviews, see Trhulj 1991 and Ključanin 1991.

The Islamic peoples are in need of a spiritual rebirth, they need a spiritual and religious renewal, a revitalization of precious Islamic beliefs and morals, a renaissance which will throw them out of the somnolence, apathy and retardation in which they find themselves. It is a religious rebirth, a religious rejuvenation, which will teach them not so much to learn about the Islamic faith and the principles of Islam, they already know them, but to fulfil and implement those beliefs and principles in life and work, because this is what is totally lacking.¹⁰⁹

However, when the Young Muslims became a section of El-Hidaje in 1943 they had to co-exist with members who did not belong to the original group, and who were often students of Islamic theology. The initial circle formed a “Group A,” which represented the members from 1941, and met in secret.¹¹⁰

There has been a discussion about the name of the organization and its relation to a youth organization close to the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt, carrying the same name. Some former members of the Young Muslims state that the name was decided on, more or less by accident¹¹¹ an opinion shared by Ivan E. Kostić.¹¹² However the Islamic scholar and historian of ideas in Bosnian Islam, Enes Karić, has a different view. In an interview in *Dani* (2002) he says:

We should bear in mind the first phase of the Young Muslims, when these young people were able to hide under the umbrella of another alternative movement, among the ulema gathered around El-Hidaje. This circle consisted of brilliant thinkers, excellent theologians, Islamists, Arabists, above all Handžić and Dobrača. When the Young Muslims entered El-Hidaje, they became, as is clear from its name, the youth section of that movement, with the task to guide Muslims into Islam. The literature which formed the Young Muslims during the first phase came from the Kairo anti-ulema intellectual milieu which called itself “Muslim Brothers.” The movement “Muslim Brothers,” like our Young Muslims was not born in a vacuum, but a product of a concept of Islam stressing moral rebirth of the Muslim society of which it was a part.

¹⁰⁹ Kisić-Kolanović 2009:210.

¹¹⁰ Kostić 2021:111–131.

¹¹¹ Trhulj 1992:39.

¹¹² Kostić 2021:90.

He goes on to say that it is a fact that looking at the texts of the Young Muslims in El-Hidaje in 1942 and 1943

the Young Muslims did not develop ideas which might be classified as Islam in Bosnia. The texts published in El-Hidaje, could easily have been read by Muslims in Egypt, Uganda, or Sri Lanka.¹¹³

Raphael Israeli and Ana Dimovska¹¹⁴ also stress the connection to Egypt. Their book is relying on Bosnian sources¹¹⁵ and its main point is that students from Bosnia and Herzegovina attending al Azhar, would have met with people who sympathized with the Muslim Brothers.¹¹⁶

Recently, an article in the *Novi Muallim* by Fikret Karčić¹¹⁷ discusses the issue and rather convincingly shows that it is very likely that there were direct contacts with theologians from Sarajevo and the Brotherhood. Mehmed Handžić, the leading Islamic scholar of Bosnia, studied in Cairo between 1926 and 1931. In 1927 the youth association *Eš-šuban-ul muslimun* was founded, close to Hassan al-Banna's *El-Ihvan-ul muslimun* (Muslim Brothers). Through his friendship with the circle around the magazine *El-Feth*, for which Handžić contributed texts in Arabic, as did Hassan al-Banna, he was acquainted with sympathisers of the Brotherhood. It is also a fact that the symbol of the Young Muslims, besides a picture of the Emperors Mosque in Sarajevo, carried its name in Bosnian and Arabic. In other words, theologians from Bosnia – after Handžić came Kasim Dobrača, who graduated from al-Azhar in 1935 and was the first supervisor of the young Muslims – were influenced by certain ideas of the Muslim Brothers.

In general, intellectual Muslims in Bosnia were affected by the same currents and literature as their fellows in Egypt and elsewhere. When Handžić returned to Sarajevo he started the magazine *El-Hidaje*, which also existed in Egypt. It is clear that the Islamic reform and revival literature was discussed in journals in Bosnia. One popular author in Bosnia was Emir Šekib Arslan

¹¹³ Karić 2009:261–262.

¹¹⁴ Israeli & Dimovska 2021.

¹¹⁵ For example Prljača 2006.

¹¹⁶ According to Israeli & Dimovska 2021, Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb were also students at al-Azhar, which does not seem to be the case. However, the Bosnian theology students may have come across the movement anyway.

¹¹⁷ Karčić 2021.

advocating a third way between Socialism and Capitalism. And an important theme in *El-Hidaje* was Palestine and texts by the Jerusalem mufti.¹¹⁸

The Young Muslims were explicitly anti-communists and sceptic towards the Ustasha movement, which regarded the Muslims as Croats. They did not openly fight the regime, but hoped, like the people around *El-Hidaje* for some kind of autonomy under German protection. For that reason they enthusiastically greeted the visit to Sarajevo in 1943 by the mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini.

It has been argued that the Young Muslims, among them Alija Izetbegovic, participated in the recruitment or were even enrolled in the SS-division, but there is no evidence that this is true of Izetbegovic. What we do know is that members of the Young Muslims were fighting on the Eastern front as volunteers, and that three imams were attached to the SS-division.¹¹⁹

After the Communist take-over, the Young Muslims continued their activities clandestinely in Sarajevo and other Bosnian cities, as well as at the universities in Belgrade and Zagreb, but the organization was betrayed and many members and sympathizers were sentenced to prison in trials after 1946. In 1949 four leaders were executed and according to some data 5,000 individuals were victims of legal interventions or persecution.¹²⁰ Alija Izetbegović was sentenced to prison for three years in 1946. After his prison term he became a lawyer and lived a quiet life, devoted to studying Islam and writing. Some of the members of the organization fled abroad or emigrated after prison.

Although there were other anti-communist movements in Yugoslavia, whose members suffered by the actions of the Secret Police¹²¹ the Young Muslims were one of the most important adversaries of the regime. Despite the harsh measures it is remarkable that the organization returned in the 1960s and 1970s. The political changes within Yugoslavia as well as its role in the Nonalignment movement, altered the position of the Muslims. As part of the cultural mobilization following the formation of a Muslim nationality, what was left of the Young Muslims, or their relatives, had the opportunity to gather and discuss religious and social problems.

¹¹⁸ Karić 2004:421–458.

¹¹⁹ Bougarel 2018:67.

¹²⁰ Džunuzović 2019e.

¹²¹ Nikolić 2016.

In 1983 Izetbegović and 12 other Muslim intellectuals were tried for plans to create an Islamic state in Bosnia.¹²² Much of the evidence was based on the *Islamic Declaration* by Izetbegović, which had not been published in Bosnian and did not explicitly refer to Bosnia. Several of the accused got very long prison sentences but were released in 1988. Two years later, the Party of Democratic Action (SDA, Stranka demokratske akcije) was formed to represent the Muslims of Yugoslavia, in particular, the Muslims of Bosnia. The nucleus of the party, and the most trusted collaborators in Izetbegović government during the war were members of the Young Muslims, or their relatives.

¹²² Sarajevski Proces 1987; Danilović 2006.

The Thinking of Mustafa Busuladžić

In the following we will explore the main ideas of Mustafa Busuladžić. A comprehensive analysis of his opus will have to wait, however, since it requires a research project of its own. In Šaćir Filandra's collection there are 21 texts, while the editor mentions 73 articles or longer texts published in magazines or as booklets. In view of the controversies around Busuladžić it would be essential to analyse all his publications using methods of qualitative and quantitative textual analysis.¹²³

In the edition from 1997 there are four major themes: The character of Islam and its relations to other religions, the crisis of modern society, the position of Jews, the war, and the predicament of Muslims. Some of the texts

¹²³ In late 2018, Mevludin Dizdarević, now mufti of Zenica, published a defense of Mustafa Busuladžić under the title *Islam and the West in the Thought of Mustafa Busuladžić*. [Islam i Zapad u mišljenju Mustafe Busuladžića] The Publisher was the Ulema Association of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Hercegovina, and the Faculty of Islamic Education in Zenica; Dizdarević 2018.

The book was presented at discussions throughout Bosnia, with contributions by well-known scholars. Cf. the whole discussion in Zenica in December 2018: *Islam i zapad u mišljenju Mustafe Busuladžića. Promocija u Zenici 2018*. IML TV, or the individual contributions by the authors, Hafiz Mevludin Dizdarević, professors Mustafa Spahić, Nusret Isanović, and Enes Durmišević in *Hafiz Mevludin ef. Dizdarević: "Islam i zapad u mišljenju Mustafe Busuladžića"*.

In Sarajevo, the presentation took place on June 3, 2018, in the Gazi Husrev Beg Library. Speakers were, besides the author, the former director of the Institute of History, prof. Senja Milišić, as well as professors Mustafa Spahić and Enes Durmišević. Cf. Kadrić 2018. (A video is no longer available.)

Unfortunately, the content of the book cannot be discussed here. It has not been on sale in any bookstore in Bosnia, and the publisher has not answered several inquiries about the book. So we have to be content with the articles published by dr Mevludin Dizdarević.

concern strictly theological matters or deal with historical issues which will not be discussed in this context.

On a more general level Busuladžić is preoccupied with the encounter between Islam and the Western world, especially the social and cultural changes which have affected Muslim societies. He belongs to those who want to restore an original Islamic society, and is convinced that Islam is the only true religion: "Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism are [...] just distorted teachings of the Islamic faith." This conclusion is based on his understanding that Christianity is a religion of ascetism, an answer to the materialism and preoccupation with earthly life of Judaism, which are both superseded by the positive philosophy of Islam. Judaism is a religion of hope without moral foundation, while Christianity is based on fear, and both have "moved away from the true monotheistic faith."¹²⁴

The Moral Crisis of the West

The crisis of the West plays a crucial role in Busuladžić thinking. In "Thoughts about God and Religion", 1938, he points out that 20th century Europe is characterised by social and political conflicts, the rise of extreme ideologies, and a neglect of true values:

Extreme ideologies, leftist, and rightist, based on their one-sided views of nations or economic classes, question the idea of humanity, individuality, and freedom. Values that make man a man are lost. Denial of God and spiritual reality, brutal attacks on religion, are considered signs of learning and enlightenment.¹²⁵

At the same time, the deep societal and moral crisis must be resolved and the crisis itself carries the hope of a more humane future, which will overcome the current materialism by returning to God:

Humanity will take new paths, avoid a materialistic atmosphere, bring about spirituality and life. How to find zeal and creativity in a tired world? How to build a new man, who will be free from modern prejudices and capable

¹²⁴ "Islam and Socialism" 1938; Busuladžić 1977:40; "The Quran and the Comparative Study of Religion"; Busuladžić 1977:65–67.

¹²⁵ "Thoughts about God and Religion" 1938; Busuladžić 1977:19.

of new efforts and spiritual creations? How to bridge the gap between social classes and harmonize relations in society? Is it possible for modern man and humanity to take new, safe paths, paths of salvation and spiritual rebirth, turning away from the paths of inhumanity and prejudice? Thinkers and specialists in ethics give a positive answer, it is the path of religion, the path that leads to eternal truths, to God.¹²⁶

What is interesting in the text is, above all, the idea that the crisis of modernity may be neutralized by a worldview emphasising “harmonious relations in society” and that a new “vitality” will be restored, characterized by “zeal and creativity.” Also, according to Busuladžić, there is an inherent conflict between Islam and Marxism, due to the latter’s materialist philosophy. In this context, he mentions the conservative Italian philosopher and writer Giorgio Papini as someone who has understood the need for spirituality in his book on Christ.¹²⁷

In the Bosnian discussion about Busuladžić, the text “Islam and Socialism” from 1938, has been regarded as a proof that the author had no real sympathies for Fascism. Busuladžić starts by criticising Marxist Communism, which claimed to create a classless society where everyone would prosper. He concludes that reality is very different, and that Communism has no answer to the societal crisis, nor has Fascism:

Life has refuted Communism as incompetent and unattainable; showed its cruelty and one-sidedness. Communism and its antipode Fascism are not enough. They have not resolved the social issue. But not only that! As dynamic forces, Communism and Fascism have split the world into two opposite poles.¹²⁸

In principle, Islam has nothing against Socialism, i.e. if understood as social justice and brotherhood. In fact, due to the religious principles and social doctrine of Islam, one may speak of an Islamic Socialism:

Islam strives to create a universal brotherhood of people on earth, build a complete man and train him for higher, supernatural goals. That is why Islam in principle has nothing against the kind of Socialism which fights for a higher truth and social justice, which brings people help, not dominance,

¹²⁶ “Thoughts about God and Religion” 1938; Busuladžić 1977:20.

¹²⁷ “Thoughts about God and Religion” 1938; Busuladžić 1977:29.

¹²⁸ “Islam and Socialism” 1938; Busuladžić 1977:31.

promotes brotherhood, not class hatred, represent philanthropy, not brutality, freedom, not dictatorship, equality, and not violence – a Socialism which preaches the creation of man on the basis of moral and ethical qualities, and not on the basis of exclusively economic reforms and class hatred.¹²⁹

Busuladžić then points to similarities and differences with Marxist Socialism. While Islam, like Socialism, is against Fascism and racism, it rejects the idea of class struggle and an undemocratic dictatorship in the name of workers:

As to democracy, Islam differs from Marxism. While Communism aspires to the dictatorship of the proletariat, Islam is democratic and views all people as equal excluding any class and racial difference. On the issue of universality, they are similar, because Islam, like Marxism, rejects fascist-racist conceptions and national chauvinism. However, contrary to the class-hatred that Marxists emphasize, Islam embraces all people as a universal brotherhood.¹³⁰

In the end, there is to Busuladžić no real difference between the ideologies of Communism, Fascism, and National Socialism. They are functioning as pseudoreligions, and their solutions to the severe crisis of contemporary society are not sufficient, since they have avoided the crucial issue of humanity and spiritual needs:

To avoid catastrophe and create a new order, states have resorted to extreme ideologies such as Communism, Fascism, and National Socialism. Class struggle, racial superiority and the state have become new religions. It was thought that economic reforms would create a new social order. Here is the fallacy, the failure of all these ideologies. They had everything in mind, but not man, the needs of the human soul. Instead of social justice, Communism brought social injustice, disorder. To make the tragedy worse, Communism impoverished the human soul, deprived man of the virtues of heart and character, and taught him to know only hatred. Various Fascisms, in order to enchant the crowds and cover up the inner ferment and discontent, threw themselves into war adventures.¹³¹

In both the articles from 1938 Busuladžić with admiration mentions the German philosopher Oswald Spengler¹³² and is visibly impressed by his ide-

¹²⁹ "Islam and Socialism" 1938; Busuladžić 1977:37.

¹³⁰ "Islam and Socialism" 1938; Busuladžić 1977:41.

¹³¹ "Islam and Socialism" 1938; Busuladžić 1977:10.

¹³² In his Afterword to Filandra's edition, Ismet Kasumagić says: "Professor Hazim Šabanović would enthusiastically talk about Mustafa Busuladžić: He was able

as about the decline of the West, which he feels are an implicit support for an Islamic world order. In both texts there is a fascination with vitality and strength – in contrast to a “tired Europe.” In other words, Busuladžić has a very high opinion of a philosopher who belongs to the conservative spectrum of German culture, which inspired Heidegger¹³³ and preceded National Socialism. Similarly, he has a positive view of Giovanni Papini, the Italian writer and philosopher who became a Fascist. In other words, already in these texts we may see a tendency which is becoming more pronounced in the writings from 1943 and 1944. In any case, the article “Islam and Socialism”, which has been extensively used to absolve Busuladžić of antisemitic and pro-Nazi views cannot refute the message of later texts.

Muslims and non-Muslims

It is obvious that Busuladžić's stay in Rome 1940–1942 meant a change in his world-view.¹³⁴ On the one hand, he is more critical towards the traditional tolerance of Ottoman society, which allowed non-Muslims to keep their culture and religion, and in 1944 he argues that there is a definite limit to tolerance:

We must re-examine our traditional values of religious tolerance, determine its meaning today and draw the boundaries within which we will apply them to our enemy, who equally destroys the living organism of the people and makes stronger interventions in a living space where we have established ourselves over centuries. and which we, defending ourselves, soaked with our own blood.¹³⁵

On the other hand, there is a visible contempt when Busuladžić is speaking about the Slavs belonging to the Orthodox Church (Serbs) whom he considers culturally and morally inferior, echoing the attitudes of the Memorandum to Hitler:

to quote by heart pages after pages of Spengler's work in German”; Kasumagić 1977:279–280.

¹³³ Fritsche 1999; Fritsche 2012.

¹³⁴ This is also pointed out by Omerika 2014:62.

¹³⁵ “Relations of Muslims to non-Muslims” 1944; Busuladžić 1977:138.

We would disappear if we sentimentally gave in to the Balkan hajduk [bandit] mentality. In this regard, we consider it necessary to note that there are profound psychological differences between a man of Balkan-Byzantine orientation and a man who was formed in the ethical circle of Islam, either in the East or in the West. The latter type of man has always been the bearer of higher cultural and moral values, which created an atmosphere of inter-religious tolerance.¹³⁶

These views reappear in another text “Our Tolerance.” It is time to wake up, says Busuladžić, and urges his fellow Muslims not to live in illusions about an enemy that shows no remorse.

Our enemy may change his appearance but never his nature. Between the murders in the past and those committed today among the Muslims there is an apparent continuity, which would end in complete physical extinction if we as a collective do not wake up and face the danger threatening us today and tomorrow.¹³⁷

He also argues that the Communist partisans and the Royalist Chetniks – who are fighting each other – actually represent the same enemy, the Serbs:

We must not be deceived by empty delusions, but realize that the same enemy, for purely tactical reasons embodied in two seemingly opposing fronts, is mercilessly attacking our lives. History, this *magistra vitae*, tells us, without any circumvention, that in times of battle and destruction, such as ours, nations are not saved by mere sentimentality, but only by the concentration of all spiritual and material forces, directed towards common defense.¹³⁸

Western Influence

Another theme found in texts from 1944 is the disappointment with European culture. Despite economic progress and modern education, the adverse effects of westernization are obvious and constitute a danger to Bosnian Muslims:

We have accepted the weakest aspects (materialism, interest rates in banking, fashion, European family life, unnatural emancipation of women, alcoholism, gambling, sexual extravagance, fornication, selfishness, aversion to tra-

¹³⁶ “Relations of Muslims to non-Muslims” 1944; Busuladžić 1977:142.

¹³⁷ “Our Tolerance” 1944; Busuladžić 1977:142.

¹³⁸ “Our Tolerance” 1944; Busuladžić 1977:142.

dition, indifference to faith and moral virtues) which plunged Europe itself into ruin. Contemporary materialism, which has been flooding Europe since the nineteenth century, has taken hold of us as well.¹³⁹

This negative development is primarily an urban phenomenon. In the villages there is still vitality and resilience:

The population of our cities as well as the religious and secular intelligentsia have failed terribly. On the other hand, we were able to see that our vitality and resilience was most evident in our villages and suburban settlements, which were not largely infected by the civilization of modern cities. Our peasantry, which at its core is Muslim and healthy, led in most cases by petty religious ministers, imams and mualims has shown its religious awareness and ability to live.¹⁴⁰

The general conclusion is that there can never be full coexistence with European society:

But in our opinion, full coexistence with Europe, especially with the European way of spiritual, family, and social life as it occurs today, would be dangerous for us if we want to maintain ourselves as Muslims, if we want to preserve our spiritual identity (faith, religious-family life, traditions, Islamic culture).¹⁴¹

Incidentally, the view of the incompatibility of an Islamic society with a non-Islamic social order reoccurs three decades later, 1970, in Izetbegović's famous *Islamic Declaration*:

The first and most important conclusion is certainly the proposition about the incompatibility of Islam and non-Islamic systems. There is no peace or coexistence between the "Islamic faith" and non-Islamic social and political institutions.¹⁴²

The distrust of modern European culture is perhaps most clearly seen in the text "The Cult of Nudity" (1944/45). It deals with the moral aspects of modern

¹³⁹ "Thoughts on the Fate of Peoples and Communities in History" 1944; Busuladžić 1977:187–188.

¹⁴⁰ "Thoughts on the Fate of Peoples and Communities in History" 1944; Busuladžić 1977:188.

¹⁴¹ "Thoughts on the Fate of Peoples and Communities in History" 1944; Busuladžić 1977:188–189.

¹⁴² Izetbegović 1996:25.

civilization and the position of women in society. According to Busuladžić, “the cult of matter and body” has led to a situation symbolized by “Freud’s theory of pansexualism” proclaiming shamelessness, indulgence in passions and sexual debauchery that “suits animals more than beings called human.” A dangerous “cult of nudity” is constantly growing, manifest in mixed beaches, cosmetics, half-naked women, and transparent clothes:

The moral and sexual decay of women is taking its terrible revenge on society. The foundation of society is the family. A family based on marriage is a biological necessity. The foundation of the family is the woman – mother. Motherhood is the essence of a woman’s being. Accordingly, a woman is the bearer of continuity in life. Motherhood is the most sublime and natural calling of a woman, her main role on earth.¹⁴³

Modern behaviour has far-reaching effects not only on family life, but on the whole character of society, including its political and military capability:

The debauchery of women in Europe, especially in France, where women, with their excessive demands for full equality with men, began to leave home and neglect the upbringing of children, led to the decline of family life and low birth rates in many European countries. The excessive and unnatural emancipation of the French woman, who neglected the vocation of mother and educator, the diminishing population, the biological dying of France, and ultimately her military and political defeat stand in a close causal relationship.¹⁴⁴

However, in Germany and Italy, there are positive developments:

The fight against childlessness became part of the political and social program of Germany and Italy.¹⁴⁵

The situation represents a special threat to Muslims. For centuries women in the Ottoman empire maintained their integrity, which was changed by contacts with Western Europe:

The Muslim woman in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sandžak and all European parts of the Ottoman Empire during five-centuries in the spiritual and cul-

¹⁴³ “The Cult of Nudity” 1944/45; Busuladžić 1977:192.

¹⁴⁴ “The Cult of Nudity” 1944/45; Busuladžić 1977:194.

¹⁴⁵ “The Cult of Nudity” 1944/45; Busuladžić 1977:194.

tural climate of Islam maintained herself at a decent moral level, preserving all the qualities of integrity and human pride. Now, our direct contact with the West and the complex social life that led to general impoverishment of Muslims brought about changes in that regard as well.¹⁴⁶

This has had fatal consequences at a time when Bosnian Muslimas are faced with a war threatening their existence, and Busuladžić calls for a return to tradition, where women know what role they have to play, i.e. being mothers bringing up their children:

May the Muslim woman return to her natural calling as mother and educator. Our preservation will also depend on the strength and purity of our family life. We, like all nations, need more women who are mothers raising children, than working as doctors or teachers.¹⁴⁷

The Jews

We have seen earlier that Busuladžić was using an antisemitic rhetoric about the Jews who “disappeared” from the marketplace of Sarajevo. The quote was taken from “Trade and Business in the Light of Islamic Religious Law” (1944) a text which situates the stereotypes in a larger context.

At first Busuladžić extensively discusses the banking system. He dwells on the anti-capitalist character of Islam and mentions the institution of *Zakat* [alms] as well as the negative position of Islam towards interest:

In particular, by banning even the lowest interest rates, the Islamic Legislator wanted to enable unhindered economic development of society, enable the fairest distribution of material goods among people, and eliminate all causes of socio-economic shocks due to excessive accumulation of money and material goods in the hands of a very limited number of people, whose commercial-monetary operations are based on interest rates.¹⁴⁸

The banking and interest system poisoned economic life in the modern world and significantly contributed to the emergence of World War II. That is why we cannot speak of a more just and permanent economic order in the world,

¹⁴⁶ “The Cult of Nudity” 1944/45; Busuladžić 1977:195.

¹⁴⁷ “The Cult of Nudity” 1944/45; Busuladžić 1977:196.

¹⁴⁸ “Trade and Business in the Light of Islamic Religious Law” 1944; Busuladžić 1977:148.

especially in Europe and America, until the system of banking and interest is abolished.¹⁴⁹

He goes on to discuss Giovanni Papini, mentioned earlier, and his views on the contemporary banking system.

Giovanni Papini, one of the most penetrating Western minds, whose works constantly arouse lively interest in educated circles of modern Europe, writes, when referring to the evil that interests and banking bring to humanity: Everything related to banks, exchange operations, interest rates, is shameful and filthy and has always instilled horror in simple, that is, virtuous souls. A peasant who sows grain, a tailor who sews clothes, a weaver who weaves cloth or linen, they all have, to a certain extent, the full right to some profit, because by their work they give something that does not yet exist in the world, in cloth, in cotton. But for one pile of money to bring another pile of money, without effort and work, without producing something that might be seen, used, and enjoyed – is a scandal that goes beyond everything and is simply impossible to imagine. He who trades in money, who collects gold and silver, is a true slave of demonic magic. And the demon, to receive their gratitude, gives the bankers and moneylenders, the right to rule over land. To this day, they control the nations, provoke wars, starve the world, and take the lives of the poor with a hellish system of exploitation, turning them into gold from which sweat, and blood is dripping.¹⁵⁰

Busuladžić then returns to the Bosnian situation and reminds his readers of the highly regarded Bosnian merchants, well-known in Europe. They were honest, followed Sharia prescriptions, and used neither false oaths, nor wrong measurement. However, things are changing. There are waves of speculation, usury, corruption, and other negative phenomena. Then follow three inter-related passages:

Often, when walking through Sarajevo or the streets of another town, you are immediately struck by the deliberately closed stores of many retailers, mostly those that have textiles, ready-made suits, etc. in stock. Their stores are closed down for weeks, to sell as little as possible. Prices are rising every day, only to be offset at once by sellers at terribly soaring prices. Many traders are today obviously swindling, cheating by goods, or measuring incorrectly on their scales.

¹⁴⁹ "Trade and Business in the Light of Islamic Religious Law" 1944; Busuladžić 1977:149.

¹⁵⁰ "Trade and Business in the Light of Islamic Religious Law" 1944; Busuladžić 1977:149.

In our country, people were fighting against the Jews and their speculations, against their deceptions and exploitation. They disappeared from the bazaar, but the Jewish spirit of speculation, hoaxing, price-fixing, hiding and hoarding, smuggling and usury remained in the bazaar, to such an extent that the corruption of certain merchants, regardless of religion, overshadowed the behaviour of the absent Jews.

While today the Muslim world is forced into a struggle, which for us has no other meaning than defending ourselves and our endangered rights, and while our best sons shed their blood for Muslim self-defence, in the other camp many individuals through smuggling and speculation overnight earn huge sums of money at the expense of those who are weakest.¹⁵¹

In other words, the arguments about Jews and a “Jewish spirit”¹⁵² are framed in a discussion on banking, business, and exploitation, which has a typically antisemitic tone. Busuladžić is adding one negative phenomenon after another, and then concludes that in Bosnia people were fighting against the Jews. No introduction is needed, what he has earlier referred to becomes, for purely linguistic reasons, examples of Jewish behavior. He is using a discursive frame which belongs to a distinct antisemitic discourse when describing both large scale Capitalism and the merchants of the Sarajevo market. The idea of the bankers – read the Jews – as controlling not just economic affairs, but peace and war, are reminiscent of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and the antisemitic philosophy of German Nazism.

Muslims and Hitler’s Germany

In Bosnia, those who defend Busuladžić argue that he was primarily a man of Islam, who equally criticized Communism and Fascism, which, as we have seen, is hardly true. And those who agree that he sided with the Nazis stress that this was due to the fact that he was against Britain and the Soviet Union. That he never actually voiced any Nazi convictions.

¹⁵¹ “Trade and Business in the Light of Islamic Religious Law” 1944; Busuladžić 1977:153–154.

¹⁵² The antisemitic idea of a “Jewish spirit”, permeating society and influencing the behaviour of non-Jews, has been discussed in detail by Nirenberg 2014.

We may start with taking a look at his pro-Axis ideas. This is a passage from “Cultural and Political Relations between the Islamic World and Italy”, 1943:

After World War I, from which almost all Islamic countries emerged politically unfree, there was a reaction of the Italian and German people against the Treaty of Versailles, which strengthened English positions in Europe, especially in the Mediterranean, and on the African and Asian continents. Now, immediately after the war, Fascism came to power in Italy, led by Mussolini, who later, with the nationalists in Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, proclaimed a struggle against English imperialism, which had oppressed so many nations in the world. Right from the start, the sympathies of the Islamic world are on the side of Britain’s opponents. [...] Mussolini’s Islamophilic policy in Libya, Somalia, and Abyssinia [...], as well as the great understanding of Italian and German diplomacy [...] for the vital problems of modern Islam further emphasized the Italian-German orientation of the Islamic peoples.¹⁵³

The major themes are the disaster of the Versailles, the rise of the Italian and German peoples and their struggle against British imperialism. Not only have Muslims a natural affinity with Germany and Italy, but the two countries have shown understanding for the Muslim cause.

Let us return to the quote from *Muslims in Soviet Russia*: It began like this

The gigantic struggle that Germany and its allies are waging against Bolshevism is not a war between two imperialisms. Today’s conflict is above all a battle between two worlds, it is the struggle between an old world, which under the pressure of the forces of renewal, is turned into ashes, and a new world being born: a combat between “Das Kapital” and “Mein Kampf”. After this battle, a new economic, social, and political world order will be created, which will enable a peaceful and dignified life for both individuals and all peoples on earth.

The author continues by pointing out the similarities in outlook and interests between Islam and the Axis powers. Both are opposed to Communism and both are fighting British colonialism. The ideological differences between Islam and Communism makes any coexistence impossible.

¹⁵³ “Cultural and Political Relations between the Islamic World and Italy” 1943; Busuladžić 1977:83–84.

Hence the great interest of the oppressed Islamic world in the outcome of the contemporary conflict. This great interest is not at all unexpected or unnatural, if we bear in mind that it concerns the destruction of Soviet Russia and the Bolshevik danger which has haunted Europe and the world for twenty years, threatening a world cataclysm and destruction of all values. And Islam is a natural opponent of Communism. The principles of Islam are incompatible with the spirit of Communism. [...] They are eternal adversaries, and where one rules, there is no place for the other. Where Islamic social teachings are applied, the roads to Communism are blocked. Precisely due to this fact every propaganda broke down.

The outcome of the battle against Great Britain and Soviet Russia is linked to the hopes of the entire Islamic world, especially the hopes of millions of Muslims who live or die under the fear of Great Britain and Soviet Russia, as colonial oppressors. These hopes and desires are common to all Muslims of the globe and are expressed not only orally but in the entire journalism of Islamic countries.¹⁵⁴

The last paragraph may indicate that the main issue is, after all, the precarious position of Muslim peoples, not sympathies with Nazism as such. However, Busuladžić continues:

As we have said before, today's war is not a conflict of two imperialisms, a clash of opposing armies, but has a deeper meaning, a historical and civilizational significance. That is why the disintegration of Soviet Russia will result in the collapse of Bolshevism, which will create the conditions for unhindered international economic, political and civilisational collaboration and the birth of freedom to millions of people of different faiths and nationalities in the Soviet Union, which is rightly called the prison of peoples.¹⁵⁵

It is very hard not to interpret this as support for Nazi ideology. A struggle between two civilizations is taking place, and a victory for Germany will bring about a return of freedom and harmonious relations between people on earth.

¹⁵⁴ Busuladžić 1977:231.

¹⁵⁵ Busuladžić 1977:232.

Controversies

As mentioned earlier, the media conflict concerning Busuladžić was not really a discussion, but a series of disagreements between newspapers and internet portals close to the SDA or the Islamic Community, and magazines or web sites where members of the opposition and independent intellectuals were active.

In fact, already before the school changed its name, Busuladžić had been promoted in articles by e.g. Safvet Halilović, Mersada Agović and Hatidža Muratović.¹⁵⁶ Beginning in 2014 a number of original texts by Busuladžić were also published by *AKOS*, taken from the selection made by Filandra in 1997.¹⁵⁷

The admirers of Mustafa Busuladžić at first stress the fact that he was one of the most important Bosniaks during the 20th century. A second approach has been to argue that his critics are simply wrong, and essentially hostile to the Bosniak people, while a third is not to mention the most controversial aspects of his message.

The tone was set by professor Šaćir Filandra in his preface to *Muslims in Europe* in 1997. According to Filandra, Busuladžić is, although young, an astonishingly mature scholar, whose main focus is on the crisis Europe is facing and what it means to Muslims.

Busuladžić's work is surprisingly comprehensive and diverse for a 30-year-old. It raises so many questions that it is almost inappropriate to list them, with the risk of overlooking something. In his work, philosophers and orientlists, sociologists and historians, everyone may find something valuable and new. However, in that diversity, which arose as a need to respond to the questions posed by the turbulent reality of his life, the issue of the survival of Muslims

¹⁵⁶ Halilović 2010, 2013b, 2014; Agović 2014; Muratović 2015.

¹⁵⁷ Busuladžić 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015, 2016; Lisica 2017.

in Europe may be singled out as the common thread in all his deliberations. At that level, Busuladžić, from the principle of Islamic thought, on the one hand considers the crisis of Europe as a crisis of the modern Judeo-Christian world, and on the other, the attitude of a Europe, mentally sanitized and hostile to Islam.¹⁵⁸

Similar views are reappearing a decade later. In a contribution to the 2010 yearbook of the Islamic Faculty in Novi Pazar (Serbia) dr Safvet Halilović, a graduate from Al Azhar, writes:

Although he was only 31 at the time of his death, Mustafa Busuladžić had become a prominent intellectual. It may rightly be said that he was one of the greatest protectors of Islam and Muslims in the Balkans in modern times. During his short life, he did more for Islam and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina than many who lived much longer. He was a writer and translator, a critic and commentator, an orator and thinker, a polyglot and, above all, a true defender and advocate of Islam. He ended his life as a martyr, that is, one who laid down his life on the path of God.¹⁵⁹

Three years later Halilović writes in *AKOS* about Busuladžić idea that the Muslims of Bosnia must concentrate on their own destiny:

Busuladžić insisted that Muslims should turn to themselves and not leave their destiny in the hands of others. The idea of an urgent focus on oneself, as a means of survival, he constantly varies and emphasizes, referring to numerous Islamic sources. This notion is very important for the spiritual constitution and biological survival of Bosniaks today when they have largely left their existence in the hands of others.¹⁶⁰

Under the heading “Remembering Great Bosniaks,” dr Mersada Agović draws attention to his patriotism and Hatidža Muratović mentions his considerable gifts as a public speaker and preacher:

He proudly expressed Islamic, Bosniak and patriotic values, explored them and creatively affirmed them to a large number of listeners who attended his lectures. He said, “Science and philosophy could not discover the meaning of life, it was revealed by faith.” He pointed out: “Atheism is a mark of shame

¹⁵⁸ Filandra 1997:9.

¹⁵⁹ Halilović 2010.

¹⁶⁰ Halilović 2013.

imprinted on human reason.” And claimed: “The West has lost its religion, and therefore its morals.”¹⁶¹

All those who knew the late Mustafa Busuladžić mention that he was also a great vaiz (Turkish for preacher). Hafiz Mahmud Traljić says about his sermons: “Wherever he preached or taught, the halls were filled to the last seat. He also published some of his sermons. They still have the weight and value they had fifty years ago when they were given.”¹⁶²

This way of reasoning has continued to this day and may be illustrated by Mevludin Dizdarević and Džemaludin Latić:

I can say that he is an excellent intellectual who in his time and within his competencies tried to get the Bosniak people out of a serious spiritual and existential crisis. He was a person of open spirit, strong intellect, ready to look the world in the eye without complexes. Busuladžić did not end his engagement in comfortable offices but lived with his people and actively tried to help the neediest. That is why he gained enormous influence in the community, which some could not forgive him. He can be seen as one of the most influential Muslim authors of his time.¹⁶³

The late Mustafa was such a great writer and thinker that the modern history of the Bosniak people – if he had not been killed, if he had continued to write and fight for our freedom – would surely have been different, less painful, perhaps even without the last genocide, and that is why we should return to his works even today.¹⁶⁴

One interesting point is that Safvet Halilović compares Mustafa Busuladžić to Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood, who inspired contemporary antisemitic Islamists and was executed by the Egyptian government for plotting against Nasser.¹⁶⁵ This says something about the influence of the Brotherhood in Bosnian Islam, to which we will return later. The passage has been re-published in texts from 2010, 2013, 2014, and 2016.

¹⁶¹ Agović 2014.

¹⁶² Muratović 2015.

¹⁶³ Dizdarević 2016.

¹⁶⁴ Latić 2017.

¹⁶⁵ Ismail 2022.

The closest contemporary Islamic thinker and worker with whom Mustafa Busuladžić might be compared is the Egyptian writer Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966). Although they were contemporaries, the two of them were not in contact nor, to our knowledge, did they know about each other. However, their life paths as well as the goals they advocated were the same: both were concerned about the conditions of Muslims and sought to improve those conditions. Also, both were victims of totalitarian regimes: Busuladžić – Communist, and Qutb – Arab nationalist.

In their writings, Busuladžić, as well as Qutb, discuss the state of the human spirit, which is going through a deep crisis in the contemporary world. According to Busuladžić, in the modern age man becomes essence, he – not God – is the subject of history; matter replaces spirit, slavery freedom, profanity holiness, nihilism hope. Such is the state of modernity and these are the indicators of a crisis of the human spirit. In such a vision of the world, man cannot find his position, his support or the guide, principle and point that will enable him to understand the world and to direct and find himself in it. In modern times, transcendence has been declared a fiction and a ghost of insane metaphysicians.¹⁶⁶

The dispute concerning Busuladžić started with a book published in 2016 before the scandal around the school broke out. It was written by Tarik Haverić, professor at the University of Zenica. Its title *Kritika bosanskog uma* [Critique of Bosnian Reason] was reminiscent of Kant, and the content provocative. One point of departure was István Bibó's book on the small East European nations,¹⁶⁷ with their ambivalent cultural identities and complex history of nation-building. Haverić speaks of an ideal-typical collective referred to as the *Bosnian Muslim Subject* which manifests itself in the humanities and social sciences, as well as in cultural and political life. His main criticism concerns what he sees as a provincial mentality exaggerating its own greatness and being caught in a distortion of historical reality. One important example is Mustafa Busuladžić, who in Haverić's opinion is vastly overrated. He asks how it is possible that an antisemite who referred to himself as a Croat, who had close relations with the Mufti of Jerusalem, and was hoping for a victory of Nazi Germany could become an ideal of the Bosniak people?

The scandal was worse, since Haverić is himself a Bosniak, which to those who criticized him meant that he was a Communist for whom everything

¹⁶⁶ Halilović 2016.

¹⁶⁷ Bibó 1993; Bibó 1996.

Bosniak was negative. He was sharply attacked in the magazine *Stav* by Mustafa Drnišić¹⁶⁸ for excusing Communist terror and spreading hatred. The political party he belongs to, the liberal “Our Party” (*Naša stranka*) is described as a fifth column and the author himself is judged in this manner:

As an author, Haverić is more or less insignificant, because although he is a producer of chauvinistic ammunition, which is so gladly used by Bosniak-phobic and Islamophobic commentators, he is only one of many in that field who wrote and published works like that on the other side of the Drina. Although as a politician he is relatively harmless and unpopular, even among supporters and voters of his own party, and in the last local elections he did not get enough votes to enter the Municipal Council of Stari Grad, which shows his capacities and achievements, Haverić as the ideologue of Our Party is an extremely problematic phenomenon. What ideas and programs can a man who expresses so much chauvinism towards the Bosniak people represent?¹⁶⁹

The main aspects of Haverić critique centred around the antisemitic dimensions of Busuladžić writing, especially the tendency not to take them seriously:

Busuladžić did write in 1944 that “the Jews had disappeared from the bazaar”; and mentioned, on the same occasion, in the best manner of Nazi propaganda, “the Jewish spirit of speculation, fraud, price-fixing, concealment and hoarding of goods, smuggling and usury” – but from this, if *Stav* is to be believed, we should not conclude that he was an antisemite. Nor should we, from his calls to the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina to join the occupying military formations to help the victory of the Third Reich (from which will emerge a “new economic, social and political world-order”), conclude that he was a Fascist.¹⁷⁰

Dženan Smajić has a similar view, but he also stresses what he calls the confusion of Busuladžić. In the article *Garbage of Confusion* he writes:

The elementary school “Dobroševići” should not have been given the name it received, not only because Mustafa Busuladžić hoped that the very new world of *Mein Kampf* would win but also because of the symbolic confusion he represented. His pre-war writings about Islam and social justice looks as if

¹⁶⁸ Drnišić 2017a, 2017b.

¹⁶⁹ Drnišić 2017b.

¹⁷⁰ Haverić 2018a.

he has read manuscripts of the Muslim Brothers on internet forums [...] his inability to discuss marriage and marital relations from a conservative point of view, comes across in a strangely confused text in *El-Hidaje*, which caricatures the position of women, reducing it to the static and immutable role of bringing up children.¹⁷¹

In the *Last Entry on Mustafa Busuladžić* Smajić returns to the theme of confusion, but also points out that the public is supposed to uncritically accept a version of the Islamic scholar which is impossible to criticize since Busuladžić represents a true Bosniak-Islamic identity

In the context of the controversy, Mustafa Busuladžić, must be understood within a more complex frame, presenting his character and work, if we want to give a more concrete assessment. It is already clear from media attacks directed at the critics of Busuladžić, that his character is primarily interpreted through the identitarian imagery of Bosniakism and Muslimism. Problematising Mustafa Busuladžić, *this šehid on the path of truth* [...] simply implies an attack on the sacred institutions of the Islamic tradition. That is one aspect of this story. The other is the identity crisis of Bosniaks [...] for many years, Mustafa Busuladžić's character and work has been presented to the public as a source of preserving our tradition and identity.¹⁷²

Most serious is that Bosniaks are asked to believe in a mythical persona whose life and work does not correspond to what he actually wrote or did:

A more detailed view of how Busuladžić is represented in public does not in general correlate with what he actually wrote. His person is described with terms like, *the most beautiful example of an intellectual, a lucid intellectual, a brilliant mind, one of the most prolific authors*. This is best illustrated by how his thoughts are presented by Šaćir Filandra. In the foreword to the book *Muslims in Europe*, the reader is expected to accept that Busuladžić is aware of the smallest details and seemingly inconspicuous phenomena. He thinks Bosnia in an Islamic manner, he is the *embodiment of the individual spirit towards the Perfect Man*?! Epithets like this have led to a completely mythomaniac picture of his character and work. Busuladžić, an author who generally offers dogmatic notions of an Islam present between the two world wars and later in Islamic anti-colonial thought, is presented as an example of an effort to become a Perfect Man.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Smajić 2016.

¹⁷² Smajić 2018.

¹⁷³ Smajić 2018.

A more ironic contribution to the discussion was given by Nenad Velicković. He writes that after an investigation the school with the new name was ranked lowest according to certain criteria: He concludes:

Instead of devising a modern strategy for educational development and undertaking serious reforms, by first realistically and objectively analysing the current situation, this government starts with a revision of Nazism, recklessly drawing children into the process.

He then quotes a passage from a text by Busuladžić, “Cultural and Political relations between the Islamic world and Italy”:

Immediately after the war, Fascism came to power in Italy, led by Mussolini, who later, with the nationalists in Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, proclaimed a struggle against English imperialism, which had oppressed so many nations in the world. Right from the start, the sympathies of the Islamic world are on the side of Britain's opponents [...].

The questions at the exam, for children who will know after whom their school is named, could be like this: “For whom did the Islamic world have no sympathy during WW II?”:

- 1 Mussolini
- 2 Hitler
- 3 Churchill

[...]

Those who tell the children in Dobroševići after whom the school is named, will have to explain why in Sarajevo today Islamic sympathies for Hitler and Mussolini are so valuable and vital that their school must be adorned with them.¹⁷⁴

The positive opinion of Busuladžić makes it difficult for his supporters to address his political views. How could a man who is regarded a devote Muslim and great scholar, a man of high moral standards, be a Fascist sympathizer? In a situation of cognitive dissonance certain social psychological mechanisms will automatically take over. For example, the highly problematic text by Busuladžić on the Jewish spirit permeating modern business ethics, has been

¹⁷⁴ Velicković 2016.

tackled in various ways. One has been to argue that Busuladžić was only criticizing Jewish economic behavior, not arguing, like the Nazis, that Jews should be killed:

Mustafa Busuladžić talks about struggle, not thinking about armed struggle, or the genocidal strategy of the Nazis to deport Jews to concentration camps. The struggle “against [...] their speculations, against their frauds and exploitation” is not a struggle against the right of Jews to freedom and life but refers to their way of trading.

This might, according to the author, today be regarded as politically incorrect:

It could also be debated whether the Jews really initiated the trend of exploitative trade and were its bearers. Consequently, Busuladžić may be charged with misjudgements and, possibly, unfounded accusations.

On the other hand, what if he was right?

However, if it is established that he accurately diagnosed the causes of trade chaos and high prices, it can be proven and argued that Busuladžić was not only not antisemitic but gave an accurate picture of unacceptable trade in Sarajevo during World War II.¹⁷⁵

This way of reasoning is very similar to that of the Sarajevo schoolboard, which defended itself in a letter to the Israeli Embassy. That is, the views of Busuladžić are not antisemitism, since they only refer to a reality everyone is familiar with. This was the argument of Sead Zubanović. The behavior is known all over the world and an accurate description cannot be regarded as antisemitism.¹⁷⁶

A somewhat different angle is encountered in an article by the journalist Enes Ratkušić (2017) who quotes Marx *On the Jewish Question*, saying that one might think that the passage was written by Busuladžić. No, the author is Karl Marx, himself a Jew, who, consequently, cannot be accused of antisemitism:

In other words, he says that true freedom for man or humanity, cannot be established by the enthronement of money as supreme deity, to whom all

¹⁷⁵ “Mustafa Busuladžić bio je antifašista” 2017.

¹⁷⁶ Zubanović 2020.

prayers should be subordinated, thus prophetically foreseeing the arrival of a world-wide and manipulative totalitarianism represented by financial oligarchies which govern our lives, fooling us with various freedoms and rights.¹⁷⁷

That is, Marx was basically correct, there is a Jewish “spirit” which is expressed as a deification of money. Another variation, concentrating on Jewish manipulation is this:

He wrote about Jews as people who flatter us, with whom we want good relations, but to whom we want to point out that we are also educated, that we do not practice usury, that we do not cheat, that we do not steal, because we are Muslims.¹⁷⁸

Like Marx, the author, is convinced that Jews are worshipping money, and that their attitude stands in the way of human freedom.

Finally, there is the indirect way of suggesting that Jews are insincere, by simply pointing out that people who for some reasons are considered negative, also happen to be Jews. Džemaludin Latić refers to the “the manipulations of a Third International agent of Jewish descent, named Josip Broz aka Tito”.¹⁷⁹

Several authors argue that Busuladžić was sentenced to death, not because of Fascism, but since his book *Muslims in Soviet Russia* was a problem vis-a-vis the regime in Moscow.¹⁸⁰

This view is not shared by Haverić, who argues that according to the verdict, the decisive reasons were his collaboration with the occupier, his activities in mobilizing people for the Ustasha regime and the Germans, as well as his close relations to the Mufti of Jerusalem.

¹⁷⁷ Ratkušić 2017.

¹⁷⁸ Ibreljić 2016.

¹⁷⁹ Latić 2017. Since Tito’s mother according to Latić was a Slovene housekeeper, Tito is not, by Jewish law, a Jew. Such a person is Jewish only according to the Nuremberg laws or racial ideologies unless he/she has converted to Judaism. On these allegations, see footnote 15.

¹⁸⁰ See e.g. Halilović 2013, Ridžal 2016, Džemaludin Latić 2015, and Nedžad Latić 2020. Some argue that had he written the text in 1949, after the break with Stalin, nothing would have happened. They are obviously forgetting the pro-Nazi beginning of the text.

The most important count of the indictment was that Busuladžić “helped the occupiers to stir up a fratricidal war, mobilize people for the military units of the occupier, and for units in the service of the occupiers.” As late as 1944, when the outcome of the war was more or less certain, Mustafa Busuladžić movingly encouraged Muslims to get involved in the defense of the Ustasha parastate. [...] We will never know how many poor souls obeyed him and joined the SS divisions and Ustasha battalions, but in any case there were not enough of them, at least in the opinion of the old *Young Muslim* Ismet Kasumagić, who regrets that Busuladžić’s brochure *Muslims in Soviet Russia* did not “open the eyes of Bosniaks already in 1943, so they would not have followed the Communists, but would in time have taken all measures to organize themselves properly, so that we would not have been affected by what is happening in our country now”.¹⁸¹

The most serious count of the indictment against Busuladžić is that as an associate of the Jerusalem Mufti Muhammad Amin el-Husseini, he helped this “famous servant of Fascism” to “use the political situation among Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina to form an SS division.” By abusing his position as a *vaiz* [preacher] and acting in a chauvinistic spirit, Busuladžić “helped the occupier to mobilize a part of the masses for himself with the help of El-Hussein and others like him with the slogan ‘*din* [faith] is in danger’”.¹⁸²

It cannot be denied, of course, that at the time, the relations to the Soviet Union were very important. This, however, does not excuse Busuladžić for his antisemitism and sympathy for Hitler. We will return to the issue of the court sentence.

In general, the defenders of Busuladžić have tended to minimize his political views and contacts. For example, according to Mustafa Drnišić¹⁸³, Busuladžić did not support Nazi policies, nor the persecution of Sarajevo Jews, while Filip Mursel Begović¹⁸⁴ argues that Busuladžić and others could not at the time have known the full extent of the “solution to the Jewish question”. Or, in an interview dr Sanja Milišić, the Institute of History, maintains that there was nothing strange about the relations with the Nazis:

¹⁸¹ Haverić 2018a.

¹⁸² Haverić 2018a.

¹⁸³ Drnišić 2020.

¹⁸⁴ Begović 2018b.

People are questioned, although there is no evidence that they were Fascists, that they killed. They simply fought for their people, for their faith [...] when trying to internationalize¹⁸⁵, their situation, familiarize the world with the crimes committed against their people, secular and religious intellectuals are accused of being Fascists.¹⁸⁶

A different approach is that of Mevludin Dizdarević, now Mufti of Zenica. He agrees that Busuladžić was on the side of Nazi Germany during the Second World War. However, there was a reason for this. Busuladžić was not so much pro-German as he was anti-British and anti-communist. As a Muslim it was natural to be on the side of Germany in a war that threatened the very the existence of Islam.

It is true that Busuladžić, like many writers, was on the side of Nazi Germany during WW II. But this statement is in need of contextualization if we are to avoid the danger of simplified and ideological reduction [...]. Thus he claims that the Islamic world “even before the outbreak of today’s conflicts waged a difficult liberation struggle against Great Britain and its allies” [...]. We see, in this short statement, that Busuladžić is not for Germany, but “against” Great Britain, which did not play an honorable role in the Muslim world.¹⁸⁷

In fact, Busuladžić has, according to Dizdarević, never shown any sympathy with Nazi ideology, and even if he was more critical of Socialism than of Fascism, he nevertheless “always mentions Fascism” which is “regularly criticized” when Socialism is being discussed.

Without doubt, the anti-British attitude is conditioned by the geopolitical constellation of relations and not by ideological reasons. Busuladžić does not in any way affirm or defend the German state ideology. Fascism is regularly criticized in his works as a great danger [...]. It is also true that Busuladžić mostly criticizes Socialism or Bolshevism, but he always mentions Fascism in that context, which means that he expressed negative opinions about both.¹⁸⁸

In his famous work “Islam and Socialism,” he clearly states that Islam is “a natural opponent of both Communism and *communist-racist views*” (*italics*

¹⁸⁵ That is, asking Hitler for autonomy, cooperating with Amin el-Husseini and participating in the formation of an SS division.

¹⁸⁶ Ridžal 2020a.

¹⁸⁷ Dizdarević 2016:23.

¹⁸⁸ Dizdarević 2016:24.

KMJ¹⁸⁹ and that Muslims must turn to their own spiritual roots in order to suppress any “communist-fascist influence among Muslims.”¹⁹⁰

The statement that Busuladžić was pro-German but had no sympathies for Nazi ideology is difficult to accept, when reading *Muslims in Soviet Russia*. He is after all referring to the coming victory of *Mein Kampf* over *Das Kapital* and is convinced that this will start a new era of freedom and dignified life for millions of people on earth. He actually says it twice. In fact, Dizdarević does not directly quote this part of the text. No supporter of Busuladžić does and the passage is missing from the wiki-quotes of Busuladžić.¹⁹¹

Dizdarević further argues that although Busuladžić is more critical of the negative aspects of Socialism, “Fascism is regularly criticized in his works as a great danger.” This is, in fact, not the case. Socialism/Communism is mentioned in three works, Fascism, or Nazism in four. Both Socialism and Fascism are criticized in only one article,¹⁹² whereas Socialism is criticized in two¹⁹³ and Fascism is mentioned as a positive phenomenon in three.¹⁹⁴ This is hardly proof of an anti-fascist posture, especially since the only critical article was written five-six years before those that are positive of Fascism.

Besides, Dizdarević does not provide any sources that would corroborate his claim. In fact, it seems likely that, had there been such evidence, it would have been produced, after so many years. There are other remarkable formulations, when, as stated by Dizdarević, Busuladžić answers his interrogator why he travelled to Berlin in 1944 to visit the Mufti of Jerusalem. He was, according to his own story¹⁹⁵, sent by Mehmed Handžić with a letter containing three points: 1) To prevent the organization of the SS division, and thus,

¹⁸⁹ This is obviously a mistake. It should be “a natural opponent of both Communism and fascist-racist views”. Cf. Busuladžić 1977:45: “prirodni protivnik i komunizma i fašističko-rasističkih shvatanja”.

¹⁹⁰ Dizdarević 2016:24.

¹⁹¹ Mustafa Busuladžić. *Wikicitat*.

¹⁹² “Islam and Socialism”; Busuladžić 1977:31–46.

¹⁹³ “Thoughts about God and Religion; Qur’an and the Comparative Study of Religion”; Busuladžić 1977:19–30; 55–70.

¹⁹⁴ “Cultural and Political Relations between the Islamic World and Italy”; “The Cult of Nudity”; *Muslims in Soviet Russia*; Busuladžić 1977:71–88; 191–196; 231–278.

¹⁹⁵ The author refers to the transcripts of the interrogation and trial, published separately: “Iz tajnih arhiva OZNA-e: Dosje Mustafe Busuladžić” *Stav*, br. 18, 2018.

avoid renewed slaughter among the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
 2) to find a solution to the position of the Islamic Community after the war;
 3) that the Ustasha persecutions and their abuses directed against Muslims had reached a peak and constituted a threat to Muslim survival.

At first, the SS division was established in 1943 and it is known that Mehmed Handžić, chairman of the Council for National Salvation, was in favour, since it was in line with the Muslim autonomy of which he was a leading spokesman.¹⁹⁶ As to the last point, we are talking about 1944, when the partisans are victorious. And Busuladžić discusses with his interrogator the increasing enrolment of Muslims in partisan units. The three points do not make sense, and the whole issue of the interrogation transcripts is questionable.¹⁹⁷

In general, we must as Dizdarević says, not forget the context. We have a person, who in his writing is using antisemitic stereotypes in a situation when innocent people have died on a massive scale, who is an admirer of the Mufti of Jerusalem, who subscribes to the view that women should stay at home taking care of the family, and who on several occasions has expressed his sympathies with Nazi policies. It is apparent that for Busuladžić, the ideology and social order of Germany is compatible with Islam as he understands it.

Moreover, he is not the only one. He is an esteemed member of a group which is described by Šaćir Filandra¹⁹⁸ as the major political force in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war, the El-Hidaje. Leading members of the organization expressed their loyalty to the new Ustasha government in 1941, and when frustrated, they turned to Germany for help in 1942, in a document which has been described as “racist and pro-Nazi”¹⁹⁹ and which, *inter alia*, accuses the Ustasha government of having prevented Hitler’s solution to the Jewish question.

¹⁹⁶ Motadel 2014:202–204.

¹⁹⁷ Haverić 2018a writes that Nenad Veličković (Open Society Foundation) asked permission to make photocopies of the interrogation and sentence, part of the Archive of the Yugoslav Secret Police, now belonging to the Bosnian secret service. He was granted a “partial view” of the texts, but not allowed to make copies. Shortly after that the magazine *Stav* publishes its article “From the secret archives of OZNA: The dossier of Mustafa Busuladžić”.

¹⁹⁸ Filandra 1998:164.

¹⁹⁹ Kasapović 2021a.



8. Imams of the Handžar division. To the left Husein Dozo, Head Imam. Source: p. 8.

The same people are receiving the mufti of Jerusalem with great honours, and one of the most prominent Islamic scholars in Bosnia, Husein Dozo, becomes Imam of the 28th regiment, sometimes serving as Chief Imam of the SS-division, with the rank of *Sturmbannführer* (major in SS). In that capacity he is openly propagating antisemitic and pro-Nazi views.

When one looks at how these Islamic scholars express themselves and compares this with statements by the Mufti and Busuladžić's own writings, it is obvious that he lived in a milieu where antisemitic discourse was common and that he was influenced by this type of prejudice:

Excerpt 1. Abdulah Muhasilović, Head Imam of the 13 SS Division
At the Bajram Feast of the SS division 1943

The world's Muslims are engaged in a terrible life-or-death struggle. Today, a war of enormous magnitude is being waged; a war as humanity has never before experienced. The entire world has divided itself into two camps. One stands under the leadership of the Jews, about whom God says in the Quran,



9. Members of Handžar division praying. Source: p. 8.

They are your enemy and God's enemy. That is, the English, Americans, and Bolsheviks, who fight against faith, against God, against morality, and a just order. On the other side stands National Socialist Germany with its allies, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, who fight for God, faith, morality, and a fairer and more righteous order in the world, as well as for a fairer distribution of all goods that God has produced for all people.²⁰⁰

Excerpt 2. Husein Đozo, Head Imam of the 13 SS Division
The Anti-Capitalist Directives of Islam. Article in *Hrvat* 1943

Throughout the history of mankind the Jews present the greatest danger to the human race. All underground and dark forces that were destroying society and civilization had their best advocates in Jewry. Higher spiritual examples remained forever unknown to the Jews. The greed for possessions, enrichment by any means, selfishness, malice, and insincerity are the main characteristics of this people "chosen" by Jehovah [...]. Islam very early warned

²⁰⁰ Lepre 1997:121–123.

mankind about this nature of Jewry. Millenia had to pass to convince the world that the enmity of Islam toward Jewry is based on the wish to assure mankind of a better life by excluding from public life the Jews as carriers of materialism and Capitalism, for they have no other laws but the laws of robbery and exploitation. The Koran says about them: “God has cursed them for their infidelity”. They believe very little; they are condemned to humiliation and scorn, and God’s wrath has poured on them for they denied God’s signs and killed God’s innocent emissaries. This happened to them for they were disobedient and exceeded the limits of what was permitted.²⁰¹

Excerpt 3. Husein Đozo The Task of the Soldier.

Article in *Handžar*, organ of the 13th SS division

Never in history has a warrior been given a greater responsibility than an SS combatant today. It is not easy to tear down and destroy an old world and create a new one from its ruins, with new understandings instead of those which were only a result of negative and destructive forces, Today the SS soldier has two tasks: 1. To banish from life all negative forces that stand in the way of a better and happier future for Europe and all of humanity. 2. To create a new world order in which everyone in society will be valued in accordance with his achievements.

In connection with the first task, Germany and its allies decided four years ago to liberate Europe from all enemies [...]. Communism, Capitalism, and Judaism were standing side by side against the European continent. After the bitter suffering in our homeland Croatia, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we learned what the rule of the enemies of Europe means. This must not be allowed and that is why the best sons of Bosnia serve in the SS.²⁰²

Excerpt 4. Amin el-Husseini *Islam and Jewry*

It is unworthy of us Muslims to utter the word Islam at the same time as Judaism since Islam stands so high above its insidious adversary. Therefore, it would be wrong to compare these fundamentally different opponents. (5)

²⁰¹ Lebel 2007:231–232.

²⁰² Kostić 2021:75.

Unfortunately, too many are unaware that the enmity between Islam and Judaism is not of a recent date but goes far back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad. (5)

History knows the Jews only as a subordinate people. Their vulgar nature and unbearable attitude towards nations which show them hospitality, as well as neighboring peoples, explains why others had to take measures to suppress Jewish efforts to achieve their goals by force. (5)

The Romans, however, soon realized the danger posed to the country by the Jews and imposed harsh measures against them. One reason was that a severe plague broke out, which according to general opinion was brought to the country by the Jews [...]. That is why the Jews in Arabia are still referred to as "microbes." (6)

The Arabs have a particular understanding of why Germany has undertaken energetic measures against the Jews and have deported them from the country. (6)

The struggle between the Jews and Islam began when Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina, where he created the basis for the development of Islam. Already then, the Jews were cunning traders, and immediately noticed that Muhammad's influence in both the spiritual and business realms might be dangerous to them. That is why they were overcome by a deep hatred against Islam, and that hatred grew deeper, as Islam became stronger and more powerful. (6-7)

Even then, the Jewish methods were the same as today. Their weapons were, as always, false accusations and slander, so they tried to humiliate Muhammad in the eyes of his supporters. (7)

We Muslims must constantly bear in mind the Khaybar feast. When the Jews betrayed Muhamed then, why would they not today persecute us with their slyness and wish to destroy us! (10)

In a saying by Muhamed, this thought is perhaps even stronger expressed: "Without homeland, the Jews are scattered around the whole world, and nowhere will they find real help or support." (14)²⁰³

²⁰³ Veliki Muftija Jeruzalemski. *Islam i židovstvo*. Zagreb 1943.



10. Haj Amin el-Husseini. In the background Mustafa Busuladžić. Source: p. 8.

Excerpt 5. Mustafa Busuladžić. interview with Haj Amin el-Husseini in *Osvit* 1942

Can you tell me something about the attitude of the Islamic peoples in the current conflict?

The attitude of Muslims is definite and clear. The Islamic world, especially the countries under the yoke of Great Britain and Bolshevik Russia, are eagerly awaiting the outcome of the current war. In their struggle for political freedom, Muslim nations are on the side of Germany and Japan as well as their allies. The fight against Great Britain, that prison of peoples, should be ruthlessly continued until the complete collapse of the British Empire. The same is true of Bolshevik Russia, that century-old enemy of Muslims.

Your Excellency, do Islamic peoples face the danger of Bolshevism?

Bolshevism is a danger in itself, because it denies God and all the values on which humanity and civilization are based. You know yourself that Islam is a natural opponent of Communist teachings. The spirit of Islam is incompatible with Communism, they are mutually exclusive

Do you believe in the liberation of Islamic peoples?

Yes. The victory of the Axis Powers will also be our victory. The whole Islamic world is in turmoil. Especially young people, as bearers of life and hope for the future, wake up and work. The Islamic world is determined to shake off slavery. The struggle must be waged. That is the law of life. Every nation pays for its freedom with blood.²⁰⁴

Excerpt 6. Haj Amin el-Husseini, January 1944, to the soldiers of Waffen SS Division New Turkestan

As you know, the world is today divided into two camps, one is the camp of the Allies, led by world Jewry, which means by forces that were always enemies of Islam and oppressed Moslems, conquered our lands, fought against our religion and were preparing the worst for our future. The other camp is headed by Germany, a state that never was the enemy of Islam, never attacked any Islamic country and has no intention of occupying them.²⁰⁵

Excerpt 7. Speech by Amin el-Husseini to the imams of the Bosnian SS-division, October 4, 1944

The entire Muslim world is united in the struggle against Britain and Soviet Russia. This I have assured the Führer. [...] The Muslim world stands united with Germany, which deserves and will achieve victory. The attitude of the Muslim world is clear. Those lands suffering under the British and Bolshevik yoke impatiently await the moment when the Axis [powers] will emerge victorious. We must dedicate ourselves to unceasing struggle against Britain – that dungeon of peoples – and to the complete destruction of the British Empire. We must dedicate ourselves to unceasing struggle against Bolshevik Russia because Communism is incompatible with Islam.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Busuladžić 1942/2020. "Intervju Mustafe Busuladžića sa Jerusalimskim muftijom iz 1942: "Hitler je veliki prijatelj muslimana"." *Preokret*. Beograd/Sarajevo.

²⁰⁵ Lebel 2007:221.

²⁰⁶ Fishman 2016.

Excerpt 8. Amin el-Husseini: Address in Berlin, November 2, 1943, on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration

The Treaty of Versailles was a disaster for the Germans as well as the Arabs. But the Germans know how to get rid of the Jews. That which brings us close to the Germans and sets us in their camp is that up to today, the Germans have never harmed any Moslem, and they are again fighting our common enemy (applause) who persecuted Arabs and Moslems. But most of all they have definitely solved the Jewish problem. These ties, especially the last, make our friendship with Germany not a provisional one, dependent on conditions, but a permanent and lasting friendship based on mutual interests.²⁰⁷

Excerpt 9. Mustafa Busuladžić: Italy, Germany, and Islam

After World War I, from which almost all Islamic countries emerged politically unfree, there was a reaction of the Italian and German people against the Treaty of Versailles, which strengthened English positions in Europe, especially in the Mediterranean, and on the African and Asian continents. Now, immediately after the war, Fascism came to power in Italy, led by Mussolini, who later, with the nationalists in Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, proclaimed a struggle against English imperialism, which had oppressed so many nations in the world. Right from the start, the sympathies of the Islamic world are on the side of Britain's opponents. [...] Mussolini's Islamophilic policy in Libya, Somalia, and Abyssinia [...], as well as the great understanding of Italian and German diplomacy [...] for the vital problems of modern Islam further strengthened the Italian-German orientation of the Islamic peoples.²⁰⁸

Excerpt 10: Mustafa Busuladžić: The Jewish Spirit

In our country, people were fighting against the Jews and their speculations, against their deceptions and exploitation. They disappeared from the bazaar, but the Jewish spirit of speculation, hoaxing, price-fixing, hiding and hoarding, smuggling and usury remained in the bazaar, to such an extent that

²⁰⁷ Fishman 2016.

²⁰⁸ "Cultural and Political Relations between the Islamic World and Italy" 1943; Busuladžić 1997:83–84.

the corruption of certain merchants, regardless of religion, overshadowed the behaviour of the absent Jews.²⁰⁹

Excerpt 11. Mustafa Busuladžić: The Struggle between “Mein Kampf” and “Das Kapital”

The gigantic struggle that Germany and its allies are waging against Bolshevism is not a war between two imperialisms. Today’s conflict is above all a battle between two worlds, it is the struggle between an old world, which under the pressure of the forces of renewal, is turned into ashes, and a new world being born: a combat between “Das Kapital” and “Mein Kampf”. After this battle, a new economic, social, and political world order will be created, which will enable a peaceful and dignified life for both individuals and all peoples on earth.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ “Trade and Business in the Light of Islamic Religious Law” 1944; Busuladžić 1997:154.

²¹⁰ *Muslims in Soviet Russia* 1943; Busuladžić 1996:7.

The Presence of History

What is remarkable about Bosnia and Herzegovina is a specific continuity between cultural and ideological motifs of the 1940s and today.²¹¹ At the same time, the present functions as a filter where only parts of history are within reach. This phenomenon is related to a division within the Bosniak community, where a secular, socialist, or liberal attitude is opposed to a religious or national outlook.

The *Young Muslims*, which must be considered as one of the strongest anti-Communist movements in former Yugoslavia, not only survived but came to power. Although the members of the organization were persecuted, imprisoned, some even executed, their ideas lived on in certain families in Bosnia and abroad. It is a paradox that in the 1960s, the Communists contributed to the revival of Islam and the ideals of the Young Muslims. Besides internal developments in Yugoslavia, this was a result of the increasing importance of the non-aligned movement, Tito's break with Israel in 1967,²¹² and the recognition of a Muslim nationality in Bosnia and Herzegovina²¹³ when the idea of a Yugoslav identity was finally discarded.²¹⁴

The Islamic community was tightly controlled by the Tito regime²¹⁵ but during Socialism an institutional framework was created which in a given situation might be controlled by others. So, despite the spectacular trial against Islamists in 1983, the ideas of the original movement persisted and official Islamic institutions were able to prosper.

²¹¹ This tendency exists in other Balkan countries but is probably more pronounced in a multiethnic and conflictual state.

²¹² Sekelj 2019.

²¹³ Lučić 2016.

²¹⁴ Shoup 1968.

²¹⁵ Radić 2002a, 2002b.



11. Husein Dozo, Head Imam of the Handžar division (second left) and the Mufti of Jerusalem (right). Source: p. 8.

An almost unbelievable case in point is Husein Dozo, the al Azhar graduate who became an *SS Sturmbannführer* and openly advocated antisemitism and Nazism in the 1940s. He was sentenced to only five years in prison and was soon rehabilitated. In 1964 he was elected chairman of the Ulema Association, and in 1977 became professor at the newly established Islamic Faculty of Theology. In addition, Dozo served as President Tito's personal interpreter in Arabic. He also encouraged the organization of seminars in Sarajevo mosques which served as an infrastructure for the Young Muslims.²¹⁶ In 1968 he participated in the Muslim world congress in Kairo, where he met again with Amin el-Husseini. The congress decided on a holy war against "the tribe of Israel." Dozo agreed and promised that "the Muslims in Yugoslavia were fully prepared to enter into Jihad as volunteers".²¹⁷ In 1972 Dozo published the text "Jewish Justice" by Lutvo Kurić in *Preporod* which according to Laslo

²¹⁶ Behmen 1990:283–287.

²¹⁷ Dizdar 2021.

Sekelj was reminiscent of his own texts in 1943: "It is difficult to count all the savageries of the Jewish people [...]. The world's supreme forces of reaction and darkness have risen to help and defend the Jews".²¹⁸ He had to step down as editor and in 1979 was removed as chairman of the Islamic Council. In 1990 he was fully rehabilitated by the Council and is, despite his past, considered the most important Islamic scholar in Bosnia.²¹⁹

In view of Đozo's career, one may ask why Mustafa Busuladžić was punished by death, and Kasim Dobrača sentenced to 15 years of prison of which he served 10. It is true that Dobrača had succeeded Handžić as chairman of the El-Hidaje, but it is hard to find examples of the radical antisemitism typical of Đozo. Instead, after his death, a text on nationalism was published which is different in content and tone from some of his contemporaries:

When egoism and cult of the nation are established, and the nation is seen as an autonomous being, as did Nazi-fascism (Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy, and other minor Fascist movements on the same model), before and during World War II; then the nation is perceived as a higher goal, the ultimate meaning of every social and cultural endeavour. Such a nationalism leads to a reckless, savage, and harmful struggle to conquer others, destroy all that is good, even the lives of other peoples, and often one's own, directly, or indirectly. The conquest may be the seizure of someone's territory and property, or to deny or destroy another people's culture, economy, political or national independence, in order to impose one's own culture, economy, and politics, or even to absorb a people into one's own nationality.²²⁰

This only shows the lack of logic, or unpredictability, of the justice system and the policy towards religious communities during the first decades of socialist Yugoslavia.

The constitution of a Muslim nationality was of utmost importance. In a situation where religion was the major ethnic marker among South Slav peoples speaking the same language, it was very difficult to make a meaningful

²¹⁸ Sekelj 2019.

²¹⁹ Dizdarević 2005; Karić 2012; Halilović 2013.

²²⁰ Dobrača 2005. Dobrača's view on nationalism and Fascism was confirmed in a letter written in 1964 by dr Zaim Šarac, a lawyer who had been minister in the first post-war government in Bosnia. He was a member of the Serb-oriented Muslim association Gajret, and although not a Communist, he had contacts with the partisans during the war. Šarac was, like Dobrača, member of the Council for national salvation in 1942. Cf. Jahić 2015.

distinction between *Muslimani* in the national sense [with capital M], and *muslimani* as adherents of Islam [lowercase m]. Without Islam there would be no Muslims, so in a sense, the real Muslims were the *muslimani* with a small m. If Muslim culture was promoted, so was Islam, since in Bosnia there was no majority people and cultural institutions, like the academy, were common to Muslims, Serbs, Croats, and Yugoslavs.

It is not argued that the Muslim nationality is “artificial,” or that Muslims are former Croats or Serbs, nor is it argued that Muslims are primarily descendants of the Patharenes (Bogumil) thus being the *Urvolk* of Bosnia. The point is simply that the process of nation-building in the Balkans was very complex due to centuries of foreign domination. If history had turned out differently, we might have had one nation – whatever the name – speaking the same language – like in Germany and Italy. Or, again, a Nordic situation, where some nations were independent in the early 16th century, others becoming nationally aware in the 19th and forming states in the beginning of the 20th. In the absence of such developments it is natural that a Muslim/Bosniak nation was finally established. It was difficult for a Muslim who had left Islam to become a Croat or Serb, since these identities were closely linked to a specific religious heritage. On this point Ernest Gellner is right.²²¹

As Yugoslavia was breaking up, the only major politician who had not been a member of the Communist Party was Alija Izetbegović, which gave him a certain dignity and moral standing. When the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) consolidated its power, especially after April 1992, a small group of trusted Young Muslims, or their relatives, were running important affairs, serving as an inner cabinet.²²² In addition, there was an amalgam of politics and religion which was more pronounced than in other parts of Yugoslavia, which is illustrated by the fact that the future *reisu-l-ulema*, Mustafa Cerić, was a founder of SDA, and in 1990–1992 worked in the leadership together

²²¹ “In Bosnia, the ex-Muslim population secured at long last, and not without arduous efforts, the right to describe themselves as Muslims, when filling in the ‘nationality’ slot on the census [...]. They were Serbo-Croat speakers of Slav ancestry and Muslim cultural background. What they meant was that they could not describe themselves as Serb or as Croat (despite sharing a language with Serbs and Croats), because these identifications carried the implications of having been Orthodox or Catholic”; Gellner 1983:71–72.

²²² Latić, N. 2003; Avdić 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Bougarel 2018:103–109.

with Hasan Čengić.²²³ Similarly the president of the *Sabor*, or Council, of the Islamic Community used to be a high-ranking member of SDA.

It has persuasively been argued by Ivan Ejub Kostić²²⁴ in his doctoral thesis on the Young Muslims, that the movement did not take power in Bosnia in 1990. In his view there is a clear break with the traditional ideology of the Young Muslims during and after the Second world war, as expressed 1970 in Izetbegović's *Islamic Declaration*.²²⁵ The original goal was to create a universal Islamic order, an alternative to the colonial and postcolonial societies influenced by the West. Instead, when released from prison in 1988 after the political trial five years earlier, they decided to form a party characterized by ethno-religious populism.²²⁶

Kostić has a point if one compares the party program of 1990 with the writings of the Young Muslims,²²⁷ but the question is whether it might have been otherwise, simply because Bosnia and Herzegovina is a European state where the principle of nationalism is a basis of political life – even if it is not a nation-state.

Although Bosnian Muslims, as belonging to Islam, shared important characteristics with Muslims in Turkey or the Arab world, there was a fundamental difference which is easily forgotten. A secularized Muslim in the Middle East has a self-evident identity even when leaving Islam. He is part of a society shaped by a common culture, and might identify as an Arab (or Iraqi, respectively Egyptian), speaking a language which is the mother tongue of a majority of the population. The same is true of Turkey. These options did not exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina since there was no secular equivalent of being Arab or Egyptian. A Bosnian identity did not exist, which was an ironic consequence of the Ottoman millet system. Nor was a common South Slav identity universally accepted.

In a European perspective Islam was a *religion*, and the concept was understood in a distinctly *European* way, taking for granted the separation between state and church existing in the Christian world, but not in traditional

²²³ Šoštanić 2002.

²²⁴ Kostić 2021.

²²⁵ Kostić 2021:60–101, 164–227.

²²⁶ Kostić 2021:228–251.

²²⁷ Kostić 2021:276–286.

Judaism or Islam. This was the view of both the Austrians in 1878 and the Yugoslav Communists in 1945. As we have seen, the idea of making everyone a Bosniak failed. Therefore, a Bosnian Muslim leaving Islam was expected to become a Croat or Serb, or maybe a Yugoslav, and it is characteristic that when the latter option was dismissed in the 1960s, the identity of the Muslims in Bosnia becomes a political issue. The solution was to upgrade the *socio-religious* identity of Muslims to a *national* identity.

The Bosnian example shows that a “pan-Islamic” solution is easier to sustain in a setting where almost everyone is a Muslim and has an undisputed cultural identity. The Young Muslims were part of a world-wide Muslim society and culture but forming a minority in their own country. The idea of a pan-Islamic identity made no sense to more than half of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was Orthodox or Catholic. What was typical of Bosnia was not Islam, but the co-existence of several religious traditions. And given the situation in 1990, the SDA would have to be a nationally oriented party.

On the other hand, even if the SDA, as shown by Kostić,²²⁸ made compromises with secular intellectuals and Communists in order to gain power, on a surface level, during the election campaign in 1990, it was the most religious party in Bosnia and Yugoslavia, with green banners, Islamic dress, and recitals of the Quran.²²⁹ And tangibly, the very people who had been bearers of the Young Muslim ideology in the 1940s did come to power in 1990. Key personalities of the SDA had been part of the original struggle and served prison sentences.

One interesting aspect of public life after the 1990s is the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Islamic Community and among certain politicians.²³⁰ *Reisu-l-ulema* Mustafa Cerić was very active in Brotherhood institutions on a European level, such as the *European Council for Fatwa and Research*, as well as the British *The Radical Middle Way*. In 2006 he published a *Declaration of European Muslims*²³¹ advocating special rights for Muslims living in Europe, reminiscent of the *millet*-system in the Ottoman Empire.

²²⁸ Kostić 2021:248–250.

²²⁹ Čengić 2015:110–112.

²³⁰ Čengić 2015:299–316; Lebl 2014.

²³¹ Cerić 2006a, 2006b.

European Muslims would be represented by an all-European Islamic institution responsible for their education and religious needs,²³² in other words: integration but not cultural assimilation. There were those who thought Cerić would become the successor of Yusuf Qaradawi, which did not happen, but the presence of the Brotherhood in Bosnia has been obvious. The major works of Sayyid Qutb and Yusuf Qaradawi have been translated into Bosnian,²³³ and Qaradawi has visited Sarajevo several times, meeting both religious and political dignitaries,²³⁴ whereas religious leaders from Bosnia have regularly participated in meetings of the Fatwa Council abroad. The attitude is in general positive and there were protests when Qaradawi was declared a security risk.²³⁵

It is in this kind of Bosniak society, that the cult of Busuladžić started. It was part of a view of history that concentrated on the precarious position of the Bosniaks, and in a sense tended to view the Second World War in terms of the conflicts between Muslims, Serbs, and Croats during the war 1992–1995. This, however, might lead to an ideological view of history which is different from what happened at the time. When we look at Muslim participation in Ustasha's crimes, the Resolutions of 1941, the Memorandum to Hitler, and the creation of the Handžar division, it is obvious that historical research gives another picture than the views prevalent among those who defend Mustafa Busuladžić. At first, Muslims were active collaborators with the Ustasha regime, and took part in the very violence others are accused of. Second, the alleged protests were cautious and the resolutions 1941 did not represent a break with the Ustasha regime. Third, those who are now looked upon as bearers of a Bosniak identity and regarded as role models did not hesitate to turn to Hitler for help and they cooperated with the pro-Nazi Mufti of Jerusalem in forming the 13th SS division, which when returning to Bosnia after training was guilty of serious massacres.

²³² Cerić 2007.

²³³ According to COBISS.BH there are 14 translated titles by Qutb, among them several parts of *In the Shade of the Qur'an*. Between 1995 and 2018 there are 31 translated titles by Qaradawi. To this should be added Arabic originals.

²³⁴ Islamska zajednica 2007, 2013; Kavazović 2013; Halilović 2013; Pehar 2021. For photos of meetings, see Islamska zajednica 2013 and Voloder 2022.

²³⁵ Halilović 2014a, 2014b.

A common thread in all this is the silence about the Jews,²³⁶ or, alternatively, an antisemitic discourse among those who are today regarded as positive examples of Bosniak culture. We have seen that the major Imams of the Handžar division, Abdulah Muhasilović and Husein Đozo, expressed a radical antisemitism and glorified Hitler. The same is true of Amin el-Husseini, and it is clear when you study the texts, that Mustafa Busuladžić was part of a milieu where the Nazi cult of violence, its racial theories, and above all, its persecution of “non-Aryans” was not enough to deter people from co-operation with Hitler or hope for his victory.

One may argue that the Muslim leaders of Bosnia were caught in a trap, that they supported the Germans only in order to defend their own people. Their pledge of loyalty to Pavelić and Hitler, even the extreme antisemitic discourse, was not meant in earnest. If that is the case, why not say so, instead of trying to defend, conceal or change historical reality? In effect, if anything, it is worse, because such an explanation means that it was consciously decided – for the sake of higher interest – not to protest against the killing of the Jews.

It is confusing to read about the courage shown in protests which allegedly are unique in war-time Europe, but on inspection did not speak up for those who were systematically targeted, and beyond rescue. It is equally hard to believe that a leader of the Islamic community, like Mustafa Cerić, was not aware of the Holocaust, had never heard of it, or thought it was a fake, until *the same* happened to his own people, meaning that Srebrenica is the same phenomenon as Auschwitz.²³⁷ His narrative does not dwell on how the Bosnian Jews perished, as if the Holocaust had nothing to do with Bosnia. In general, people seem to be oblivious of the fact that most Jews in Bosnia were victims of Croat or Muslim perpetrators, and that those who survived as refugees in Italian-controlled areas, or as partisans, left for Israel as soon

²³⁶ Little or nothing is said about this topic in school textbooks or in the overall historiography of Bosnia and Herzegovina. An even larger “barrier” is erected around the issue of responsibility for the crimes committed. It is commonly believed that the Holocaust was perpetrated by some “others,” in some “other” state. When the Holocaust is spoken of or mentioned in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it usually refers to what happened “elsewhere,” in Auschwitz, Germany, or Jasenovac; Subašić-Galijatović 2020:59.

²³⁷ The title of Cerić 2019 is “The Holocaust in Auschwitz is like the Genocide in Srebrenica”.

as they could. Instead we are told the story of how Jews were saved by their Muslim neighbours, only to desert them in 1993.

In the texts on Busuladžić and World War II the focus is on the suffering of the Muslims and it is of course legitimate to mourn ones dead. However, it is problematic if a distorted picture of the Second World War is being nurtured. In the NDH 75 percent of the Jews, 16–17 percent of the Serbs, 8,5–9 percent of the Muslims, and 5,5–6 percent of the Croats lost their lives.²³⁸ If we look at those who died in camps, prisons, during deportations, in forced labour or direct terror, i.e. civilian victims of violence, the Muslim figures are less than their share of the population, whereas Serbs and especially Roma and Jews are highly overrepresented.²³⁹ Cvetković found that of the civilian victims in the NDH 66,5 percent were Serbs, 10,2 percent Croats, 7,8 percent Muslims, 5,8 Jews, and 4,9 percent Roma.²⁴⁰

Despite important differences, the attitudes towards World War II, especially the fate of the Jews, is similar to the historical amnesia existing in Poland,²⁴¹ the Ukraine,²⁴² or Croatia.²⁴³ With examples from Poland, Slawomir Kapralski describes the general mechanism in this manner:

It is argued here that in post-war history Jews and the Holocaust have largely been absent in Poland's memoryscape, either because they have not been present in the individual remembrance (and the memoryscape has not served as a 'model of' them), or because there has not been any institutional, public commemoration of the Jewish past in Poland and its tragic end (so that the memoryscape has not served as a 'model for' them), or both.²⁴⁴

Besides similarities with other Socialist countries, in multiethnic Yugoslavia it was officially stated that all citizens had participated in the struggle against the "occupier and his domestic collaborators," which precluded an open confrontation with the past. In addition, Yugoslavia's position in the non-aligned

²³⁸ Cf. Dulić 2006:271–273; and Dulić 2005:312–324. Dulić 2005:316–317 points out that Serb losses in NDH are "among the highest death tolls in Europe during World War II".

²³⁹ Kasapović 2021b:15.

²⁴⁰ Kasapović 2021b:15.

²⁴¹ Kapralski 2017.

²⁴² Rudling 2011.

²⁴³ Milekić 2020.

²⁴⁴ Kapralski 2017:172.

movement and the strong antizionist policy after 1967, meant a conscious neglect of Jewish history and culture.

It should be pointed out that the views discussed here are promoted by politicians belonging to a national-religious party with islamist roots, as well as by groups in the Islamic Community of Bosnia. Their attitudes towards Busuladžić and Bosnian history are disseminated in certain newspapers and internet portals. However, among secular Bosniaks there is a vocal opposition to the heritage of Alija Izetbegović, questioning the Bosnian leader's political program, especially the idea of Islam as a necessary dimension of a modern Bosniak identity.

A few years ago, the last Yugoslav minister of information, the Bosniak Mustafa Čengić in his book *Alija Izetbegović: Rider of the Apocalypse or Angel of Peace*²⁴⁵ voiced a devastating critique of the fusion of religion and politics in the SDA, which in his view made Izetbegović unsuitable as a credible leader for all Bosnians. And it is true that Izetbegović often behaved as the leader of the Bosniaks, not the Bosnians. He frequently used the Islamic term *šehid*, martyr, for those who died in the war, which excluded all non-Bosniaks, and on one occasion he made the statement:

Our people will either mature through this suffering or disappear [...] it is a fact that our “confrontation with history” could not be avoided. At last we are becoming a people, creating our own state. All peoples have achieved this through bloodshed, history does not give anything for free, nothing is served on a plate, and our people is no exception.²⁴⁶

This shows the ambivalence of the project of Alija Izetbegović and how it differs from the view of a multiethnic Bosnia projected by the International Community. If Bosnia is “our own state” it belongs to the Bosniak people. This view is similar to those behind the Memorandum to Germany in 1942. Or to those who today argue, like the former reis, Mustafa Cerić, that Bosnia should be a Bosniak nation-state.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Čengić 2015.

²⁴⁶ *Izetbegović. Govori, pisma, intervjui* 95. Šahinpašić. Sarajevo 1996:10.

²⁴⁷ At the Assembly of the Association of Ulema, on April 15, 2009, Cerić made the following statement: “But the Islamic Community also appears as a surrogate for what our ancestors should have achieved, a national state of Bosniaks. This is what I resent about the Bosniak intelligentsia, that they did not sufficiently develop the national

A primary accusation made by the supporters of Busuladžić is that he was killed by the Communists in a trial which was a travesty of justice. It is true, that the death penalty can never be defended, but it is also true that Busuladžić's death cannot excuse his antisemitism or glorification of Hitler.

A leading Bosniak historian, Husnija Kamberović, in an article on the case of Busuladžić, says the following:

The main problem is that he is looked upon outside the context of his time, but also that his example is an excellent illustration of a wave of revisionism which is apparent in Bosnian Herzegovinian historiography, even though it is promoted only by individual historians.

He then goes on:

During the campaign it was first argued that he was not sentenced. However Busuladžić was like thousands of others brought to court and sentenced after the war. We have to look at the proceedings as well as the punishment in the perspective of the time in which the process took place, in view of the laws and context of the time, when a new political order was organised and legitimated. From today's perspective we may say that the punishments were too severe but in the context of the time, when the processes were conducted and the sentences formulated, it was standard. In an extensive research project I had the opportunity to look at several hundred sentences in which individuals during 1945–1949 were condemned to death, and where the prosecution was related to their role during the war. Many were charged with lesser crimes than those Busuladžić were accused of, but no one speaks about these people. Why? How could we explain that we want to rehabilitate some but not others? How could we defend Busuladžić's closeness to the NDH, and not justify other things that happened in the NDH?²⁴⁸

Let us finish with the question posed by the Bosniak publicist Danijal Hadžović "So how, after all, could Busuladžić happen to us in the 21st century?" His answer is

The reason probably lies in the fact that Busuladžić after the liberation of Sarajevo in 1945 was convicted and executed as a collaborator of the Ustasha and Nazi regimes. The forces that overthrew Communism and sought to replace

component among the Bosniaks, which generate the need for a nation-state." *Dnevni Avaz* 16.04.2009, quoted from Filandra 2012:288. See also International Crisis Group 2013. "Bosnia's Dangerous Tango. Islam and Nationalism."

²⁴⁸ Kamberović 2018:130.

it with a national awakening by returning to religious values needed their own Jesus (Isa) – a leader, genius and righteous man who was crucified for our ideas and our people by a hateful and hostile power. Thus, in the absence of a better example, we got the mythological being Mustafa Busuladžić, a genius intellectual who thinks Islamic, feels Bosniak, and at the same time acts anti-fascist and anti-Communist. But this has nothing to do with the real Mustafa Busuladžić. The Busuladžić of history is an obscure author who from radical religious and ultraconservative positions is the faithful servant of a Fascist regime. He was certainly no great Bosniak and definitely not a man who, according to any reasonable criterion, deserves that schools, or streets are named after him.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ Hadžović 2018.

Epilogue?

On January 11, 2021, the House of Representatives of the Bosnian Parliament voted on an initiative of Damir Arnaut from “Our Party” [*Naša stranka*] that no official building, institution or public space in Bosnia and Herzegovina should bear the name of anyone who had cooperated with Fascists during World War II. All members of the House except those from the Croatian HDZ voted yes or abstained. However, it turned out that the members of SDA had not been aware that among those regarded inappropriate were Mustafa Busuladžić, Muhamed Pandža and Husein Đozo. Particularly awkward was that one of those who had obviously not read the proposal was Safet Softić, vice-president of the SDA and chairman of the important *Council of the Islamic Community*.

At first there was official silence, although some papers expressed their outrage²⁵⁰ but on January 15 the SDA parliamentary group made a statement to the effect that although the principle was correct, the list of names was not. It would have to be suggested by historians and others.²⁵¹ The same day the Islamic Community²⁵² strongly condemned the attempt to equate a man like Husein Đozo and the instigator of the “chetnik genocide” on the Bosniaks during the World War II.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Skandalozno: Poslanici SDA u Parlamentu BiH glasali da su Đozo i Busuladžić fašisti. *Saff* 14.01.2021; Drnišlić 2021.

²⁵¹ FENA 2021: Klub SDA. Principi inicijative o nazivima ulica i škola dobri, sporna su imena.

²⁵² Islamska zajednica u BiH. “Saopćenje Ureda za odnose s javnošću.” 15.01.2021.

²⁵³ Refers to general Dragoljub Mihailović, commander of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland, at first supported by the Allies. After the war sentenced to death by the Communists. Rehabilitated in 2015 by the Supreme court in Serbia.

This was followed by protests in other media, stating that Busuladžić, Pandža, and Đozo had nothing in common with Croat and Serb war criminals, that Husein Đozo was after all rehabilitated by Tito.²⁵⁴ Safet Softić asked to be forgiven (cf. “Softić poručio”) and Mufti Dizdarević again dealt with the trial of Busuladžić.²⁵⁵ However, other authors like Matea Jerković in *Oslobođenje*,²⁵⁶ asked if Đozo’s and others’ merits could really excuse their pro-Nazi views. Others were blunter. Adnan Terzić said it was impossible to defend someone like Đozo, who had written; “We are ready to give our lives in the struggle for our great leader Adolf Hitler, and a new Europe”.²⁵⁷

On January 19th the US Embassy in Sarajevo published a Tweet:

We welcome the #BiH HoR’s adoption of the initiative to finally change street names honoring war criminals and Fascists as a crucial step towards reconciliation and mutual respect. Municipal authorities should implement the changes without delay to advance BiH on its EU path.²⁵⁸

The message showed that the US government had a different view than both the SDA and the Islamic Community. Actually, the State Department had, since 2016, in its annual *Reports on religious freedom* shown deep concern that a school in Sarajevo was named after Mustafa Busuladžić, referred to by Washington as an antisemite and Fascist, glorifying Hitler (See Appendix).

Two days later Bakir Izetbegović commented on the issue in an interview.²⁵⁹ At first he repeated that the initiative was laudable, but that no names should have been mentioned. He then both criticized and defended Busuladžić, Pandža and Đozo. While admitting that they were wrong, he said they had paid for their ignorance and commitment to defend the Muslims. Besides, they were in good company, as many European intellectuals had acted like them:

²⁵⁴ Ahbabović 2021; S.H. 2021, “Saopćenje Saveza bošnjačkih nevaldinih organizacija” 21.01.2021.

²⁵⁵ Dizdarević 2021.

²⁵⁶ Jerković 2021a, 2021b.

²⁵⁷ Terzić 2021.

²⁵⁸ A.Ž. 2021.

²⁵⁹ Begović 2021a.

In the global and historical context of the time, Busuladžić, Đozo, and Pandža, like millions of other people, among them thousands of prominent intellectuals, made wrong choices. For example people like Martin Heidegger, Ezra Pound, or Ivo Andrić, but streets, universities, and awards are nevertheless named after them.²⁶⁰

After some questionable historical comments, Izetbegović finally absolved Đozo (and Pandža) in a way similar to the Islamic Community:

At the time, Great Britain, engaged in the Islamic world by creating a rift between Arabs and Turks, provoking conflicts, and strongly supporting the foundation of Israel on the territory of Palestine. Hitler was an opponent of the English and the crimes his regime committed against the Jews were not yet known. Hitler was also an opponent of Stalin, and the crimes of Stalin's regime against the Muslims in the USSR were unquestionable. So they made the wrong choices out of ignorance and a desire to fight against the forces which at the time did injustice to and inflicted suffering on Muslims and Muslim peoples. Busuladžić paid for his youthful mistake with his life, Đozo and Pandža with their freedom. The latter two served their sentences, were given amnesty, and after that made major contributions to the Islamic Community and Yugoslav society. Our people rightly remember them as Muslim dignitaries and leaders who cannot by any means be equated with war criminals and killers.²⁶¹

It is worth noting that Izetbegović, in contrast to the intelligentsia of SDA and the Islamic Community, admits that Busuladžić and others were wrong. This had not been done earlier, and it differs somewhat from the statement in 2018 when Izetbegović declared that Busuladžić was no antisemite. However, to argue that people did not know of Hitler's crimes in 1943 or 1944, is not convincing. If nothing else, the inhabitants of Bosnia and Croatia must have been aware of what happened in their own country in 1941 and 1942. Busuladžić did notice, after all, that the Jews had "disappeared" from the marketplace, and Đozo claimed that Jews should be "banished from life." (see Excerpts 2 and 5).

To compare Heidegger and Đozo, which after Izetbegović's interview was done by others,²⁶² is misleading and imprudent. Even before the publication of Heidegger's black notebooks in 2014 and 2015, he was seriously questioned

²⁶⁰ Begović 2021a.

²⁶¹ Begović 2021a.

²⁶² Kovač 2021; Begović 2021b.

as a philosopher, and today it is clear that his philosophy is related to his Nazism.²⁶³ Above all, he never regretted. To say that Đozo is like Heidegger will inevitably cast a shadow on his role as Islamic scholar and only shows a lack of awareness of the cultural climate in Western Europe.

Izetbegović also refers to the Nobel prize winner Ivo Andrić as a Nazi collaborator. Andrić lived quietly in occupied Belgrade, writing his most famous novels, and had nothing to do with the Quisling administration or the Germans. To argue, which is being done by others as well, that Andrić between 1939 and 1941 was cooperating with Hitler's Germany is a strange way of saying that he served as Yugoslavia's ambassador in Berlin. Especially since he was not trusted by his government to negotiate the accommodation with Germany in 1940/41.²⁶⁴ Above all, he never made any antisemitic statements or hoped for a German victory, like Mustafa Busuladžić, Husein Đozo, and others. Therefore, Ivo Andrić has nothing in common with Heidegger or Ezra Pound. The only explanation for the attack against him is the prejudice within the Bosniak establishment that Andrić hated Bosnia and the Muslims.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Magnusson 2015. The text is in Swedish, but the literature is relevant to a discussion of Heidegger and Nazism.

²⁶⁴ Karaulac 2005; Milutinović 2015.

²⁶⁵ The standard work on Andrić's view on Bosnia and Muslims is Rizvić 1995. Michael Martens 2020 in his book on Ivo Andrić comments: "Rizvić's book about Andrić's alleged hatred of Islam (since then several books by other authors have been published) has to this day had a considerable influence on the reception of Andrić in Bosnia. But, apart from certain interesting passages, the book is not convincing for the simple reason that the author has exactly the ideological one-sidedness and philistine passion, for which he accuses Andrić"; Martens 2020:169. A more thorough and comprehensive analysis of anti-Andrić sentiments in Bosniak culture, addressing both literary and historical-sociological aspects, is found in the book *Struggle for the Past. Ivo Andrić and Bosniak Nationalism*, 2018 (in Serbian), by Professor Zoran Milutinović, London, as well as in his articles and essays, e.g. Milutinović 2008, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c. Milutinović points out the elementary fact that one cannot identify the views or behavior of a character in a novel with the author's attitudes or worldview, showing that the critique of Andrić is not founded on historical sources. In his review of Marten's book he criticizes the view that Andrić's Yugoslavism was due to opportunism; Milutinović 2020b. He also describes in detail how translators have manipulated texts by Bosniak authors, among them those who attack Andrić, to make them seem more cosmopolitan and democratic, or less Islamist and authoritarian, than they actually are in the original; Milutinović 2020c.

Finally, the Islamic Community argued that the Bosniaks in World War II were victims of a genocide perpetrated by the Serbs. This is a consequence of a mindset which has developed in Bosnia during the last decades. It is seriously argued that Bosniaks have been victims of ten genocides,²⁶⁶ beginning with the Turkish-Austrian war 1683–1699. Every war, any violence, becomes a genocide. Even the agrarian reform in inter-war Yugoslavia, when land was taken from feudal landowners and distributed among poor peasants, is labelled an “economic genocide.” This view is unique, and hardly based on historical research or a reasonable definition of genocide.²⁶⁷

Since more Serbs than Muslims were killed in Bosnia during WW II, both in total numbers and as share of the population, while the percentage of murdered Jews was extremely high, a legitimate question is who was responsible for these atrocities? As we have already noted the losses of Serbs in Bosnia 1941–1945 are the highest in Europe, after Jewish victims. None of this is mentioned by the Islamic Community, nor in official versions of Bosniak history.

Even though Bosniak losses in 1992–1995 were significantly higher than those of Serbs or Croats, the only possible conclusion is that what happened is not comparable to the Holocaust. In one massacre, Babij Jar, on September 29–30, 1941, more Jews were killed in two days than were civilian Bosniaks during almost four years of war. 33,711 Jews were shot in Babij Jar,²⁶⁸ only a part of the 5–6 million who perished, whereas all civilian victims of Bosniak nationality in 1992–1995 amounted to 25,609 according to the demographers of the Hague Tribunal²⁶⁹ or to 33,070 in the investigation made by Mirsad Tokača.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ Kasapović 2021b:2–18.

²⁶⁷ As far as the war in 1992–1995 is concerned, Smail Čekić and other Bosniak historians have developed their own classification of genocides: those occurring in villages, towns, and regionally. According to this view Serbs have committed 14 genocides, including Srebrenica, whereas Croats are guilty of thirteen. This differs from the verdicts of the Hague Tribunal, which has repeatedly concluded that massacres in the so-called municipalities, cannot be regarded as genocide. To be able to speak about 27 genocides, the threshold is lower than that of the Tribunal, but still no Bosniak genocide on Serbs or Croats has occurred. Not even by the foreign Mujahideen in the war between Muslims and Croats. See Kasapović 2021b:17.

²⁶⁸ Yad Vashem 2023.

²⁶⁹ Zwierchowski & Tabeau 2010.

²⁷⁰ Tokača 2012.

Despite this, the following is argued by a leading Bosniak historian, Mustafa Imamović:

Barely half a century after the trial of Nazi criminals in Nuremberg, the world faced massacres against Bosniaks, which in their cruelty surpassed everything seen between 1939 and 1945.²⁷¹

If you subscribe to such a view it is perhaps natural to excuse antisemitic language during the Second World War or tolerate such a rhetoric today. Parts of the elite in Sarajevo seem to be unaware that speaking like Busuladžić or Dozo, is not accepted in Western Europe.

The protests against the Americans – whether they are explicitly mentioned or not – were bitter. One example is Mustafa Spahić who, in an interview with Hamza Ridžal, argues that the Nobel Prize laureate Ivo Andrić was a worse Fascist than any Bosniak, and that the insistence on what happened in World War II was only a way to divert attention from the aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. He reiterated that the Bosniaks, alone in Europe, protested against the killings of Jews, Serbs, and Roma. Further, the strategy to criticize people like Busuladžić or Dozo was ultimately directed against the heritage of Alija Izetbegović and the integrity of the Bosniak people.²⁷²

In another text, Hamza Ridžal²⁷³ is outraged by the idea that any Bosniak might qualify as a Fascist collaborator. The only purpose is to present

Bosniaks as Fascists, equating the responsibility for crimes. Not the ones committed during 1992–1995, but those of the period 1941–1945.

Since it was impossible to find a single Bosniak Muslim, who, as a criminal or military person, had given his name to streets, they started looking for culprits among

prominent scholars, responsible for publishing texts in regime media and working in institutions of the Independent State of Croatia. Such people were, in general, directly involved in writing the resolutions of “El-Hidaje,” which condemned all forms of Fascism and the killing of the Roma, Serbian

²⁷¹ Imamović 1997:571.

²⁷² Ridžal 2021a.

²⁷³ Ridžal 2021b.

and Jewish people [...]. Among the signatories, whose Main Board included Mustafa Busuladžić, were Hussein Đozo and Hafiz Muhamed Pandža.²⁷⁴

Ridžal goes on to argue that texts written in regime media in 1941–1945 may be legitimately problematized “even if they did not promote pro-fascist views in their texts”.²⁷⁵ He concludes by saying that anyone who claims that Mustafa, a member of the Main Board of El-Hidaje²⁷⁶ was a Nazi-fascist, can only be thoroughly ignorant, or a genuinely evil person.²⁷⁷

The author complains that the legal consequences of Mustafa’s, Đozo’s, and Pandža’s responsibility never ends, which is a difference between the Communists and those who call themselves liberals:

The Communists, let us remind you, allowed Husein ef. Đozo to serve his prison sentence for having been attached to an SS division, and after that he became one of the most prominent representatives of the Islamic community.²⁷⁸

The pattern is familiar. On the one hand it is denied that prominent Bosniaks during World War II sympathized with Nazi Germany; on the other, it is argued that since some of them were rehabilitated by the Communist regime, they cannot be blamed. Moreover, why single out Bosniak intellectuals, when they are in the good company of personalities like Heidegger and Ezra Pound.

²⁷⁴ The Sarajevo resolution was signed on October 12, 1941. At that time Mustafa Busuladžić was living in Rome and did not sign the resolution. Hafiz Muhamed Pandža did so, but not Husein Đozo. Further, the text does not “condemn all forms of Fascism and the killing of the Roma, Serbian and Jewish people”; Karić & Spahić 2019:75–80.

²⁷⁵ The point of departure is that people like Mustafa Busuladžić, although he had worked for the Italian state propaganda, were not guilty of disseminating pro-fascist texts. This is a strange view, bearing in mind that Busuladžić in 1942 published an interview with the Mufti of Jerusalem in an Ustasha magazine, which was very positive towards Hitler. Or that he, on several occasions, actually did promote “pro-fascist views” in his texts. The same is true of other personalities, in particular Husein Đozo.

²⁷⁶ Busuladžić, who did not live in Bosnia at the time, was not a member of the board of El-Hidaje.

²⁷⁷ The author is forgetting the very texts written by Busuladžić, being re-published after the war in 1996 and 1997 where he, *inter alia*, welcomes Nazi victory as the beginning of an era of freedom.

²⁷⁸ Riždal 2021b.

And why, at all, bring up the Second World War? To insist on what happened to the Jews, which was largely unknown at the time, in contrast to Soviet persecution of Muslims, is only a way to relativize Bosniak suffering in 1992–1995 and delegitimize the ideas of Alija Izetbegović. According to his son Bakir, people were on the side of the Germans by mistake, out of ignorance, or with the noble motive to save their fellow Muslims.

After the heated debate in January things calmed down. An article in the major Sarajevo daily *Oslobođenje* reported on June 21²⁷⁹ that the initiative by Damir Arnaut to change names of streets, squares, and institutions, after five months had not been discussed in the Parliament of the Sarajevo Canton, nor in the municipal councils. Igor Stojanović, member of the Social Democratic Party, said that if nothing happened they would try to implement the decision in Sarajevo.

A major problem is, according to the article, who would classify people as collaborators or Fascists, when no institution or politician is trusted by all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. If a general agreement is impossible, Stojanović mentions a potential compromise, meaning that anyone whom representatives of the constituent nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina regard as unsuitable would be banned. As he himself, admits, such a solution is hardly realistic.

In 2022, the controversy on Mustafa Busuladžić had all but disappeared, although the issues were not resolved, especially not the relations with the US. Apart from a few articles on the anniversaries of the birth and death of Busuladžić,²⁸⁰ public debate was dominated by the character of the Bosnian state. In June 2022, however, the role played by Muslim dignitaries during WW II was again brought to the fore, when the State Department published its annual report on religious freedom in Bosnia.²⁸¹

In a slightly more neutral tone than earlier, the report, nevertheless, pointed out that streets, squares, and institutions were named after people considered Nazi collaborators, and it made clear that Bakir Izetbegović had insisted

²⁷⁹ Jerković 2021c.

²⁸⁰ A.D. 2022; Kadić 2022.

²⁸¹ Excerpts 12. United States Department of State: *Bosnia and Herzegovina. 2021 International Religious Freedom Report*. See also F.H. 2022.

that their behaviour must be seen in a historical context. The report concludes that no action had been taken to alter the situation.

This led to demands for change, that Banjaluka and Sarajevo should follow the example of Mostar, where streets were no longer bearing names of Ustasha leaders²⁸² It was also pointed out in the Bosnian press that the US report indicated a development were Bosniak politicians, notably Bakir Izetbegović, increasingly were part of a “grey” zone which eventually might become “black”.²⁸³

This turned out to be the case. In September 2022 elections were to be held on all levels, and Bosnian Croats again demanded the right to elect the Croat representative in the state presidency. The issue²⁸⁴ is beyond the scope of this essay, but the views on World War II criticized by the US were part of the general national-religious ideology of SDA, proposing a unitary Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The US tried, in vain, to persuade the Bosniaks to accept changes in the electoral law. Instead, Bakir Izetbegović argued that the Bosniak people played a primary role in the country,²⁸⁵ which lead to an irritated response²⁸⁶

²⁸² *Oslobođenje* 14.07.2022; US Embassy in Sarajevo. 14.07.2022. *Statement of the United States Embassy on the Decision to change Mostar Street Names.*

²⁸³ Lakić 2022.

²⁸⁴ Bosnia and Herzegovina has three constituent peoples. The constitution thus stipulates a State Presidency with three members: a Bosniak, Croat, and Serb. However, since there are two electoral units, the Serb Republic and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is possible for the more numerous Bosniaks in the Federation to split their votes and defeat a Croat candidate preferred by most Croats. The anomaly is due to the fact that in the Dayton Accords, the existing Serb Republic, and the Bosniak-Croat Federation, initiated by the US in March 1994, were simply joined into *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, disregarding earlier peace proposals of three federal or confederal entities.

²⁸⁵ “Bosniaks constitute the connective tissue in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If there were no Bosniaks I don’t know how long Bosnia would last, and the connective tissue within the Bosniak community is faith. As long as the mosques are full of young people, and as long as hundreds of thousands of people fast voluntarily, and rise during night [...]. I am not worried about this country”; Zbog izjave: Američka Ambasada kritikovala Izetbehovića Tanjug 23.04.2022.

²⁸⁶ “BiH’s connective tissue are the people living in this country, struggling to build a better future for themselves and their families. They’re Bosniaks. They’re Croats. They’re Serbs. They’re others. They are all BiH citizens”. Cf. Zbog izjava: Američka Ambasada kritikovala Izetbegovića 23.04.2022.

from the American Embassy in Sarajevo. The conflict was further aggravated when Bosniak politicians refused to implement reforms to curb corruption,²⁸⁷ and it culminated when the US Embassy in harsh word reacted to a militant speech by Izetbegović. The president of the SDA said:

How will we achieve strength, how will we become militarily strong? We do have an answer, even to a – God forbid – worst case scenario. We have counted ourselves. How many hunters we have, how many young people, how many drone instructors, and so on. I will not go further, just that you know.²⁸⁸

The US response was swift and blunt, expressing shock and rejection.²⁸⁹ Finally, Bakir Izetbegović lost the presidential elections. Apparently, the idea of Dozo and Busuladžić as major symbols of Bosniak identity was not universally accepted in the Bosniak community, and was hardly an alternative in a multiethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the meantime, the *Elementary School Mustafa Busuladžić* was prospering. According to the monthly reports on its homepage, the school had throughout 2021 been functioning normally. In February there was no report, which might perhaps be an indication of a certain insecurity, but in March 2021 the Deputy minister for War Veterans visited the school, as did the Turkish Military Mission in Bosnia and Hercegovina.²⁹⁰

In April, the Day of the Army was celebrated at the school²⁹¹ and in November an exhibition on Alija Izetbegović's diplomatic missions was visit-

²⁸⁷ Američka Ambasada kritikovala stranke u BiH 17.05.2022; Američka ambasada kritikovala SDA 09.06.2022.

²⁸⁸ Cf. D.Be. 2022. "Burne reakcije nakon izjave Bakira Izetbegović o "prebrojavanju"." *Klix.ba* 26.07.2022.

²⁸⁹ "We are shocked and appalled by yesterday's inflammatory comments by Bakir Izetbegović, who [sic] predictably led to Milorad Dodik's irresponsible response. Thirty years ago, the citizens of this country lived through a brutal war. In 2022, they deserve better than leaders who appeal to ethnic divisions and encourage ethnic tensions. BiH citizens deserve leaders who will work on the common good and make the difficult decisions necessary for BiH to secure its place in the Euro-Atlantic community of peoples. A true commitment to co-operation and compromise, not an implicit threat of violence, is needed to solve this country's problems, which are deteriorating." H.J.I. 2022. "Američka ambasada u Sarajevu: Šokirani smo i zgroženi zapaljivim izjavama Bakira Izetbegovića." *Dnevni Avaz* 12.07.2022.

²⁹⁰ Kadrić 2021a.

²⁹¹ Kadrić 2021b.

ed.²⁹² Another aspect of remembering Bosniak history was an excursion in September to the centre of Sarajevo, including a visit to the Museum and the bridge where the Austrian Crown Prince was assassinated by Gavrilo Princip in 1914. Also, the school commemorated the 29th anniversary of the formation of the *Second Knightly Brigade of Novi Grad* in Sarajevo, and undertook a march, following the tracks of the Brigade.²⁹³ Finally, an excursion to Turkey was undertaken in May 2022.²⁹⁴

It is obvious that Islam is important to the school. Not only does it commemorate the death of Mustafa Busuladžić in June²⁹⁵ and that of Alija Izetbegović in October.²⁹⁶ In December there was an official promotion of the book about Busuladžić by Mevlud Dizdarević, *Against Evil*²⁹⁷ and in May it was announced that the school had won the Sarajevo cantonal competition in Islamic religious studies.²⁹⁸

When looking at these reports it is clear that *the Mustafa Busuladžić Elementary School* is representing the blend of Islam and Nationalism characteristic of *The Party for Democratic Action (SDA)*.

In a wider perspective the traditional constellation of political power in Bosniak-dominated areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina seems unable to come to grips with the issue of open or latent antisemitism. Professor Kamberović referred to individual examples of revisionism among historians.²⁹⁹ That may be so, but they seem to be more influential in certain institutional environments, both in the academic world and in the Islamic Community. Above all, revisionist ideas are cultivated in specific media, sometimes close to interests outside Bosnia.

There are several reasons for the present cultural and political climate. Of major importance is nationalism, which ultimately is a result of a delayed process of nation-building due to prolonged foreign domination. Consequently, there is in all Balkan states a preoccupation with historical continuity. The

²⁹² Kadrić 2021c.

²⁹³ Kadrić 2021d.

²⁹⁴ Kadrić 2022.

²⁹⁵ Kadrić 2021e.

²⁹⁶ Kadrić 2021f.

²⁹⁷ Kadrić 2021g.

²⁹⁸ Kadrić 2021h.

²⁹⁹ Kamberović 2018; Magnusson 2019.

problem may be to integrate a historical heritage from the Middle Ages, where state consolidation was disrupted by centuries of imperial dominance. Or it might be a question of creating a national history out of a largely oral culture where earlier state formations may be disputed by others in a similar predicament. A special case is where a folk culture coexisted with a religious high culture based on Arabic, Turkish and Persian.

An aggravating factor is that Ottoman and Habsburg rule led to large-scale migrations, which made it difficult to create homogeneous nation-states in the 20th century. Since geographical and ethnic borders did not coincide, legitimate demands of one group would often affect equally legitimate interests of another.

This is especially true of Bosnia, with no majority-people and no common identity. In addition, the Bosniaks constitute the youngest of the nations in former Yugoslavia and the general tendency to search for historical continuity might have serious consequences when three ethnic groups have different images of history.

The paradox is that despite conflicts about what territory belongs to whom – on ethnic or/and historical grounds – the *character* of Croat, Serb, and Bosniak nationalism is very similar. If nationalism is considered a multi-dimensional phenomenon, sociological studies based on survey data, analysed by *structural equation modelling*, show the existence of a factor or dimension which may be called *perception of history and self*.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents in Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia regardless of religious tradition will give an affirmative answer to three statements: My people has only conducted defensive wars; My people has suffered more throughout history than others; My people is not perfect but its cultural tradition is superior.³⁰⁰

In all groups³⁰¹ the results are interrelated and form a factor which denotes a distinct dimension of nationalism. It correlates with, but is different from, other dimensions of nationalism. That is, although explicit national goals might differ, the attitude towards the qualities and fate of one's nation is the same. Moreover, this mindset is typically ambivalent towards self and other.

³⁰⁰ Magnusson 2019.

³⁰¹ There were five categories: Croats in Croatia, Serbs in Serbia, Croats, Serbs, and Bosniaks in Bosnia. Representing Catholics, Muslims, and Orthodox Christians.

This complex of emotions is found in much of the writings concerning the Yugoslav wars of succession or World War II. For example, even though Bosniaks are overrepresented among civilian victims during the war 1992–1995, Croats and Serbs will stress Muslim/Bosniak violence in Central Bosnia (Croats targeted by foreign Mujahideen) or Eastern Bosnia (where Serb vil-lagers were repeatedly attacked).

The same is true of the Second World War. The Bosniaks are preoccupied with the Serb killings of Muslims, overlooking that they were provoked by Muslim Ustasha atrocities. As we have seen the *Chetnik Genocide on Muslims* is regarded by the Islamic Community as the worst crime in Bosnia during 1941–1945. However, Serb losses were both numerically and proportionally larger, and the killings of Jews were on a level of its own, being part of the prototypical genocide committed in 20th century Europe.

It should be remembered that mental models of this kind are based on universal social psychological mechanisms appearing in all cultural and social context. Research based on Tajfel's *Social Identity Theory* has shown that the constitution of a specific identity produces distance towards others, and that there is a strong tendency to simplify reality by diminishing differences within one's own group and augmenting differences vis-a-vis other groups.³⁰² When these tendencies are repeatedly expressed in social life, becoming part of a tradition, or giving rise to social movements, phenomena such as European antisemitism may become salient and politically manipulated.³⁰³

Antisemitism in Bosnia has been related to specific aspects of Central European culture and ideological currents in the Middle East. The Jews were not an ordinary adversary, a political competitor like Slavic neighbours, and did not constitute a military threat.

However, if you believe that your people has suffered more than others, has only fought defensive wars, and possesses a superior culture, you will see the wrongdoings of others but not your own. Idealizing your own culture you will exaggerate your positive qualities as well as your suffering. In this perspective the words by Busuladžić and others acquire a disturbing meaning.

What happened to the Jews in the real world, is perceived as an ideological abstraction. They "disappeared from the marketplace", which was unavoid-

³⁰² Tajfel 1982; Turner 1982; Brewer 2001; Reicher 2004.

³⁰³ Carrol 2001; Aly 2017.

able (according to the letter to Hitler) and there was no room for them in the new era of freedom that would follow Hitler's victory. Most remarkable, however, is that parts of the Bosniak elite today tend to excuse antisemitic ideas and active collaboration with the Nazis, at the same time as they stress the humanity and traditional hospitality of Muslim culture in the Balkans.

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The saddest part is that it is true that Jews for hundreds of years were protected in the Ottoman Empire, while in Christian Europe they were persecuted and from time to time killed on a massive scale. As Elie Kedourie argued,³⁰⁴ the cultural autonomy of the *millet*-system was a model of a multiethnic society, which, however, was no longer possible once the concept of nation was invented. Indeed, towards the very end of Ottoman Rule, when the Empire became more like the West, the genocide on the Armenians was committed in the spirit of modern nationalism. The traditional tolerance was gone, as it was in Bosnia during the Holocaust.

³⁰⁴ Kedourie 1993:112.

Appendix

US Department of State. International Reports on Religious Freedom
Bosnia and Herzegovina 2016. Religious Freedom Report, p. 7

In October, the Sarajevo Canton Assembly named a street and an elementary school after Mustafa Busuladzic, a World War II-era antisemite who glorified Hitler. The president of the Jewish Community strongly condemned the act. As of the end of the year, the school had not officially changed its name.

Bosnia and Herzegovina 2017. Religious Freedom Report, p. 7

In October 2016 the Bosniak-dominated Sarajevo Canton Assembly renamed a street and an elementary school after Mustafa Busuladzic, a World War II-era anti Semite who glorified Hitler. The president of the Jewish Community strongly condemned the act. At year's end, the school had not officially changed back its name to its previous title. Proponents of the Canton Assembly decision in Sarajevo to rename the school after Busuladzic defended it following criticism from the Jewish community, politicians from opposition parties, and Israeli and other foreign governments. Proponents claimed Busuladzic was not an antisemite despite his public support for the Fascist Ustasha Movement.

Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018. Religious Freedom Report, p. 8

On March 6, the Sarajevo Canton Assembly annulled its 2016 decision to name an elementary school and a street in the town of Dobrosevici in the canton's Municipality of Novi Grad after Mustafa Busuladzic, a World War II-era Ustasha figure who glorified Hitler and was known for his antisemitism. As of the end of the year, the decision remained unimplemented. The school's website continued to list the school name as Mustafa Busuladzic, and the street was still named after him. During the year, the president of the Jewish Community strongly condemned the continued use of the name

Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019. Religious Freedom Report, p. 9

The Sarajevo Canton Assembly again failed to implement its 2018 decision to change the name of an elementary school and street in the town of Dobrosevici in the canton's Municipality of Novi Grad named after Mustafa Busuladzic. Busuladzic was a World War II-era Ustasha figure who glorified Hitler and was known for his antisemitism. Both school and street retained the Busuladzic name. On September 16, Dino Konakovic, Speaker of the Sarajevo Canton Assembly, said in an interview that he did not mind that the Dobrosevici School continued to be named for Busuladzic.

Bosnia and Herzegovina 2020. Religious Freedom Report, p. 11

The Sarajevo Canton Assembly again failed to implement its 2018 decision to change the name of an elementary school and street in the town of Dobrosevici in the canton's Municipality of Novi Grad named after Mustafa Busuladzic. Busuladzic was a World War II-era Ustasha figure who glorified Hitler and was known for his antisemitism. Both the school and street retained the Busuladzic name.

Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021. Religious Freedom Report, p. 13–141

On January 11, the House of Representatives (lower chamber) of the BiH parliament adopted a nonbinding resolution sponsored by parliamentarian Damir Arnaut of Nasa Stranka (Our Party) to rename streets, squares, parks, schools, and other places that honored World War II Nazi collaborators with the names of persons from the country recognized by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Remembrance Center. The resolution was nonbinding, as local municipalities, not parliament, would have the authority to implement it. Shortly after the resolution passed, the Bosniak-majority Stranka Demokratske Akcije (Party of Democratic Action, or SDA) party, which had voted for it, reversed its position, and criticized the initiative for including Bosniaks among the list of Nazi collaborators. SDA leader Bakir Izetbegovic stated that the choices made by Bosniak Nazi collaborators Husein Dozo, Mustafa Busuladzic, and Hafiz Muhamed Pandza should be evaluated in their "global and historical context." SDA-aligned press labeled Arnaut a traitor and defended Bosniaks who worked with the Nazis. The BiH House of Peoples (upper chamber) had not acted on the resolution by year's end.

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