CHAPTER 2

Muslim Transnationalism and the Reclaiming of "Balkan Islam"

In spite of its convoluted linkages with national identities in the Balkans discussed in the previous chapter, Islam is, arguably, a transnational and translocal religion. The social and political forms of what has been called Muslim "horizontal transnationalism"[1] have a long history in the region, their origins stretching back to the conquest of the peninsula by the Ottomans in the 14th–15th centuries. The subsequent population resettlement and migration increased the contacts and exchange between different Muslim groups; while Islamic centers of learning attracted believers of various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, Sufi brotherhoods spearheaded the spread of Islam in the region, and individual preachers traversed communal boundaries.

Muslim transnational networks were considerably curtailed in the post-Ottoman nation-states that emerged in the 19th century; they dealt with their Muslim communities at a national level by setting the political boundaries for the activities of those communities, institutionalizing representative Muslim bodies, and promoting state-sanctioned forms of Islamic identity. Until the abolishment of the Caliphate in 1924, however, links with the Ottoman center were sustained through various international treaties arranging the status of Muslim minorities. The nationally elected Muslim leaderships in Bosnia and Bulgaria, for example, were formally approved by the *sheikh ul-Islam* in Istanbul, and the Ottoman sultan was regularly mentioned in the *khutbas* (Friday sermons) of the local muftis. The Ottoman Empire, and later Turkey, perceived itself as a kin-state[2] to all Muslims in the Balkans, even though after the establishment of the secular republic in 1923, protection and support tended to concentrate predominantly on the Turkish populations throughout the region.

During the interwar period,[3] transnational Muslim affinities and networks grew through publications and newspapers arriving from the Islamic world,[4] personal correspondence, and travel in pursuit of religious learning or as a pilgrimage to Mecca. Transnational connections were promoted both by collective actors, such as various Sufi orders and the Lahore Ahmadi movement, and by individual activists like Shakib Arslan.[5] The 1931 World Islamic Congress in Jerusalem and the 1935 European Islamic Congress in Geneva played a key role in building connections and shared feelings. After the Kemalist revolution dismantled Istanbul and Anatolia as transnational Islamic centers, religious links with the Arab world grew in importance, and Cairo rose as the main hub for higher education of the Balkan *ulema*.

The grip of the communist regimes on religious communities after World War II brought transnational exchange to a standstill. Nevertheless, with the liberalization of the Yugoslav government's policies toward religion after the late 1960s, and particularly within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement,[6] Muslims in the Yugoslav Federation enjoyed growing interaction with the wider Muslim world. The traditional *hajj* became increasingly accessible, as did opportunities for education in Islamic places of learning abroad.

These developments were further boosted by the fall of communism and the subsequent reclaiming of Islam by all Muslim communities in Southeast Europe. The *hajj* started to attract an ever growing pool of Balkan pilgrims. In 1961 only 75 Muslims from Bosnia, 52 from Macedonia, and 24 from Kosovo performed the *hajj*, but in 1990 the number of pilgrims soared to 936 from Macedonia, 388 from Bosnia, and 295 from Kosovo and the rest of Serbia.[7] Many Balkan Muslims pursued their studies in major Islamic universities abroad. In 2003, for example, 100 Bosniaks studied in Saudi Arabia, 60 in Syria, 40 in Egypt, 35 in Jordan, 30 in Iran, 10 in Pakistan, 20 in Malaysia, and 10 in Turkey.[8] In Macedonia, by 2007, 150 students had completed their Islamic studies abroad, while 70 students had returned with degrees in various disciplines from universities in Turkey.[9] In Bulgaria, in 2009, according to official data, some 48 students were pursuing Islamic studies abroad, most of them in Turkey.[10] The number of Balkan graduates from Islamic universities abroad is actually much higher, since these statistics represent only recipients of scholarships that are administered by the Chief Muftiates; they don't account for the students who obtained their scholarships privately.

When countries such as Bulgaria and Albania acquired religious freedom in the early 1990s, they had to rebuild the Islamic institutional structures virtually from scratch and with few resources. In other cases, such as Bosnia and Kosovo, Muslim populations were entangled in secessionist

wars, and the destruction of these wars, the population displacement, and the postwar reconstruction added further challenges to those presented by the post-communist transition. Contributions and support by the outside Islamic world proved crucial in the Muslims' struggle to reestablish their institutions and communal life after 1989. Individual and communal links with the wider Muslim world evolved at various levels and took a variety of forms, such as investment, population movement, and educational and cultural interchange. Various Islamic state- and nonstate organizations channeled funds to Muslims throughout the Balkans and competed for influence over local communities.

The increased participation of Balkan Muslims in transnational Islamic circulation of people, money, experiences, and ideas raises a number of important questions. What is the impact of the intensified Muslim trans-nationalism on the transformation of local religious practices and identities related to Islam? How do Balkan Muslims define themselves in the context of the imagined community of the *umma* (the global community of believ-ers) and of their post-communist "reinstatement" in it, on the one hand, and in the context of the building of a "European Islam," on the other? How should we conceptualize the interplay between transnational and national identifications? As a sequel to my discussion of the relationship between Islam and national identities in the previous chapter, I now elaborate on the transnational Islamic dynamics in the region and explore the project of a "European Islam" in the last chapter of the book. I concentrate on the post-communist modes of interaction between Balkan Muslims and the wider Islamic world and discuss the *umma* as an important idiom through which Muslim transnationalism, including that in the Balkans, has often been captured and expressed. I briefly look at the diversification of Islamic discourses and authority, which often evolved into a conflict over differ-ent interpretations of Islam within the Balkan Muslim communities, and argue that in the process of reclaiming Islam after decades of communist oppression and stagnation, local communities came to reimagine and rearticulate their current ways of being Muslim as being historically and culturally anchored, often in response to powerful transnational influences. The arrival of what can be called "universalist" and "deculturized" forms of Islam,[11] facilitated by the charitable and propaganda activities of vari-ous Middle Eastern organizations, as well as by local graduates of foreign Islamic schools, generally failed to win the hearts and minds of the Balkan Muslims. The embracing of such "universalist" Islam by limited sections of the Muslim populations has more often than not been related to locally defined contexts; this is illustrated in the ethnographic study by Ghodsee of a small community of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims in the Central Rhodope

mountains in Bulgaria,[12] as well as in Bougarel's analysis of the reversal of the pan-Islamist trend in Bosnia, a trend that gained some influence during the war in the early 1990s.[13]

Overall, even though increasingly exposed to the global Muslim circulation of images, persons, funds, and ideas, and thus partaking in Islamic transnationalism, Balkan Muslims seem to remain overwhelmingly self-defined along ethnic and national lines.

2.1 DEFINING TRANSNATIONAL ISLAM

Transnational Islam can be defined in terms of its ideological underpinning—the notion of the *umma*—as well as through its various forms of expression: transnational Islamic movements and organizations, migratory dynamics, diaspora networks, pilgrimage, cultural and educational links, and others. According to Bowen, transnational Islam creates and implies the existence of "a global public space of normative reference and debate," which cannot be reduced to a dimension of migration and/or transnational religious movements.[14] Importantly, Muslim transnationalism has a dynamic nature and encompasses a plurality of discourses, actors, funds, and ideological and political interests. This is therefore a global public space where Islam's universal norms and practices are continuously emphasized, negotiated, and redefined across national boundaries by a plethora of individual and collective actors, through diverse and evolving links, interrelations, and networks.

As some authors have noted, transnationalism is based on certain technological prerequisites and exists in reality only when a significant number of people are involved in transnational activities and shared transnational identities that persist over time.[15] In the Balkans, a growing number of Muslims engage in direct interchange of ideas and practices with coreligionists from the wider Muslim world. Both Balkan Muslim immigrants to Western Europe and students in Islamic educational establishments in the Muslim world have played key roles in transmitting transnational Islamic discourses in their countries of origin. Foreign Islamic aid, which is discussed later in this chapter, has been another important source of transnational influence.

Furthermore, Muslims in the Balkans experience Islam beyond the boundaries of the local community through satellite television and the Internet. In Bulgaria, for example, the Turkish minority overwhelmingly watches Turkish TV channels, and this inevitably influences its understanding of world politics and the place of Islam in it. The newscasts in

Turkey often convey a negative image of Israel, and this affects the perceptions of Turks in Bulgaria about developments in the Middle East. The expanding role of the media can explain the agitation among Bulgarian Muslims over the bombings of the Gaza strip in January 2009. For the first time in Bulgaria the escalation of the conflict in the Middle East provoked widespread protests by the local Muslims against Israel and demonstrations of solidarity with the Palestinian people. Smaller-scale protests were also waged in June 2010 after the Israeli raid on the Turkish ship Mavi Marmara.

By contrast, the suffering of the Bosnian Muslims and of the Kosovo Albanians in the 1990s did not spark any demonstrations. At that time, access to various media, including satellite television, was limited in Bulgaria. During one of the interreligious workshops that I organized in Sofia between 2005 and 2009, we watched a film about the war in Bosnia, and the Muslim participants admitted that they had not known much about the wartime suffering of their coreligionists in Bosnia before seeing the documentary.

The plight of Muslims in Gaza provoked the sympathy and solidarity of Muslims in Macedonia too. It has been reported that a few Muslim nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in this country collected over €13,500 for their "brothers and sisters in Gaza." This information was published in the website of the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Organization (IHH),[16] which is involved in various humanitarian aid projects in the Balkans—and which attracted international attention as the organizer of the ill-fated flotilla that attempted to breach the Israeli blockage on Gaza in June 2010. In Bulgaria, for example, this charity regularly arranges Ramazan fast-breaking dinners for Roma Muslims, distributes food packages to needy people, and provides school supplies to children.

It bears emphasizing that nationalism and transnationalism are not two completely distinct forms of social organization. Neither are they two different historical stages, as are nationalism and post-nationalism. As Bowen avers, the "transnational Islamic space of reference and debate" is not "post-national," in the sense of succeeding an earlier space bounded by state borders.[17] National and transnational discourses and identities rather coexist, interact, and compete in intricate ways within each Muslim community. Moreover, transnational factors have often played a crucial role in the building of national identities. A case in point is the process of self-definition of the Turks in Bulgaria, in which various influences originating from Turkey played an important role, as discussed in the previous chapter.

In the Balkans, as elsewhere, while the rhetoric of transnational solidarity and revival has exerted considerable appeal, it has also collided with intra-Islamic differences of outlook and structures of power,[18] which have often been formulated in ethnic and national terms. In the observation of Eickelman and Piscatori, the call for Muslim unity "has masked accommodations in practice and ideas to the overwhelming reality of political decentralization and variety. Over the centuries, Muslims have been able to adjust to the superior power of the infidels, and hence to a territorially demarcated international system; moreover, they have adjusted to the existence of multiple centers of power...within the broad *umma*."[19]

2.2 THE *UMMA*—RHETORIC AND REALITY

The notion of the *umma* has been central to much of the modern Islamic discourse. Moreover, it has been established as the major idiom deployed to define and legitimate Muslim transnationalism.[20] Its indiscriminate use in a variety of contexts and almost without definitional limits, however, has greatly reduced its theoretical and practical weight.[21] Therefore, the *umma* can be seen as an ideational, or discursive, variable. For Piscatori, the *umma* is a "political symbol," which makes it an important component in the modern self-understanding of Islam.[22] Roy describes the *umma* as abstract and deterritorialized, an "imaginary" global community, while Mandaville emphasizes its continuous reimagining, triggered by the proliferation of new technologies of communication; he even speaks of a "virtual *umma*."[23]

It bears mentioning that although the *umma* is an imagined community (in the sense in which Benedict Anderson calls the nation an "imagined community"), it is perceived by Muslims as real.[24] It is often understood both as a localized community and as a meta-community of a symbolic order.[25] According to Bowen, the notion of the *umma* is diffuse but powerful. It is promoted through features in the Islamic religious practice, which remind Muslims of their shared duties and identity across political boundaries.[26]

Certainly, the rhetoric of the global *umma* operates in continual tension with the lived experience of intra-Islamic differences, and particularly of national and ethnic loyalties. As some authors have shown, the importance of the ideology of nationalism and the closely related concept of the territorial nation-state in shaping the modern Muslim world cannot be underestimated. Moreover, the concept of the *umma* has often served to reinforce rather than challenge the nation-states.[27]

Attempts to materialize the *umma* have produced ambiguous results by revealing a profound fragmentation in ideological outlooks and power interests. The history of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), an intergovernmental body founded in 1969 to promote Islamic solidarity and to advance multi-field cooperation between member states, and often perceived as the spearhead of Islamic transnationalism, has revealed a "long-standing ineffectiveness and continued cleavages within the Islamic community."[28]

Events in the Balkans reinforced the conclusion that the political realities in the Muslim world continually depart from the ideology of unity. During the assimilation campaign against the Turks in Bulgaria in 1984–85, for example, most of the Muslim countries remained neutral. Representatives of Syria, Yemen, and Ghana visited Bulgaria and even expressed publicly in the Bulgarian media their support for the "rebirth process" and the totalitarian regime. The first protests came from Western media like the BBC, Radio Free Europe, Deutsche Welle, and the Voice of America. The Yugoslav media repudiated the assimilation campaign, along with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Even though some Arab countries described it as an anti-Islamic act, and the OIC addressed the issue in several of its meetings, a common action never materialized. Predictably, the strongest reactions came from Turkey, which contacted various international agencies, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the United Nations. Not a single state, however, broke diplomatic relations with Bulgaria.[29]

During the war in Bosnia, the Muslim world was far more consistent and outspoken in its response to the plight of its coreligionists. The OIC held several meetings on the Bosnian conflict, and many state and non-state agencies, including those from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, Iran, and Malaysia, provided humanitarian aid, money, ammunitions, and even combatants. Major transnational organizations that involved themselves comprised both governmental and nongovernmental agencies such as the International Islamic Relief Organization (created by the World Islamic League), the Saudi High Committee for Aid to Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Third World Relief Agency (TWRA), the Islamic Relief Agency, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, and Da'wa Islamiyya.[30]

Rhetoric of Islamic unity notwithstanding, an all-Islamic front, or platform, never consolidated. As Bellion-Jourdan points out, most of the Muslim governments remained divided between their pragmatic interests and their Islamic solidarity, although transgressions of solidarity were condemned by the Islamist movements. Moreover, the campaign for Bosnia brought to the surface various types of intra-Islamic competition: between different states (as in the case of Saudi Arabia versus Sudan or

Iran), between individual governments and their domestic opposition (as in the case of Egypt), and between Islamic organizations based in the West, which sought to increase their influence over Muslim minorities (as in the case of Britain).[31]

The lack of unity in the Muslim world was particularly evident during NATO's bombing of Serbia in 1998 in defense of the Kosovo Albanians, some 90 percent of whom are, at least nominally, Muslims. Iraq and Libya described the NATO action as an aggression, and Libya maintained trade relations with Serbia, while Syria and Lebanon did not react at all.[32] The OIC remained mute on the Kosovo issue, and the Turkish ruling elites expressed for the first time solidarity with the Serbian government, whom they described as confronted with "terrorists."[33] Albanian separatism (which was far from welcome among non-Albanian Kosovo Muslims, such as Roma, Gorani, Turks, and Bosniaks) and the Western intervention provoked mixed reactions in Muslim countries, which emphasized the principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity[34]—another example of how local political contexts and considerations take precedence over Islamic bonds. Of course, state vacillations did not prevent several Islamic charities, under the umbrella of the Saudi Joint Committee for the Relief of Kosovo and Chechnya (SJCRKC), from sending missions to deal with the refugees from the conflict.[35]

Generally in the Balkans, the recourse to the *umma* as a form of political identity has been sporadic rather than systematic and has never translated into an ideological program. The war-time endorsement of the image of Bosnia as an outpost of the *umma* by the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action can be seen to a great extent as a tactical move to gain the support of the Islamic world at a time when the West failed to respond effectively to its plight. It was also a response to the Serbs' and Croats' portrayal of their respective communities as ramparts of Christianity.[36] Certainly, the parties with Muslim constituencies that appeared throughout the Balkans after the end of communism had very diverse context-oriented political goals and none of them formulated an explicitly Islamic—let alone pan-Islamist— agenda. For a vast majority of Balkan Muslims, the attachment to their local/national Muslim community overrode identifications with a diffusely defined and abstract global *umma*.

This was also evident in various forms of regional Muslim cooperation, which evolved mostly along ethnical lines. It is hardly surprising that the breakup of Yugoslavia was followed by the collapse of the all-Yugoslav Islamic Community in 1993 into several different communities based in the new independent states. Subsequent transborder Muslim connections, even among ethnic kin, were hindered by financial constraints, on the one hand,

and by political differences and pragmatic considerations, on the other. For example, a 1996 regional cooperation initiative between Muslim Albanians did not materialize precisely for these reasons. In the words of Rexhep Boja, the former chief mufti of the Islamic Community in Kosovo, "We established a Council for Muslim Cooperation between the Albanians in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia in 1996. We have a common ethnic basis and the same tradition. We wanted to discuss cooperation but nothing much happened."[37]

As another leader of Kosovo Muslims, Qemajl Morina, noted,

> We have different problems . . . which prevent us from focusing on broader issues. Also, there is no financial support for such activities. In Kosovo, our confiscated property has still not been returned. Our imams sometimes do not get salaries for five-six months in row. The Islamic world supported humanitarian projects such as the rebuilding of mosques. They may have supported some individuals, particularly in the sphere of education, but did not support us as an Islamic Community.[38]

The Bosnian Muslim transborder links present a different case, since the Islamic Communities in Bosnia, in the Sandjak region in Serbia, in Croatia and in Slovenia retained their close administrative and symbolic connections after the 1993 breakup of the all-Yugoslav Islamic Community, based on a shared language and ethnic identity.[39] The power struggles and internal splits into different factions with rival leaderships of the Islamic Communities in both Sandjak and Slovenia did not erode the unity, as the overwhelming majority of Muslims in those different places remained organized by the local leaderships that aligned with the leadership in Bosnia.[40]

Occasional projects for a pan-Balkan Muslim organization—for instance, a short-lived endeavor by Mustafa Cerić, the influential head of the Islamic Community in Bosnia from 1993 to 2012, to form a Balkan Muslim Association—were more often than not met with skepticism and suspicion by the leaders of the individual Islamic Communities. As Jacub Selimoski emphasized, "This would be very difficult. The different segments of the former Yugoslav Islamic Community started to function separately and their leaderships will not agree, because they are afraid that they can lose some of their authority."[41] Other leaders, particularly of Albanian origin, expressed openly their misgivings about what they saw as an attempt to revive the socialist-time domination of Bosnian Muslims in the all-Yugoslav Islamic Community.[42] Apparently, spatial proximity has often reinforced ethnic and linguistic differences at the expense of abstract religious solidarity, and this complexity has added another touch to the divergent political interests of the different Muslim populations.[43]

2.3 THE WARS OF YUGOSLAV SECESSION: *SHEHIDS* AND *MUJAHIDEEN*

An important aspect of Muslim transnational interaction in the Balkans stems from the wartime experience of the Bosnian Muslims, when the Islamic world supported them with diplomatic initiatives, humanitarian aid, money, weapons, and military instructors. Conspicuously, an estimated 4,000 to 6,000 foreign Muslim combatants (*mujahideen*) arrived from Afghanistan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia to fight for their Bosnian brothers during the war in 1992–95.[44]

Muslim support was often wrapped in, and thus fed into, interpretations of the war for the liberation of Bosnia as *jihad*, or struggle in defense of Islam,[45] and of the suffering of Bosniaks as martyrdom (*shahada*)[46] in the name of faith. In April 1992, the official newspaper of the Islamic Community, *Preporod,* published an article that briefly mentioned *jihad*. Later, during the war, a few *fatwas* appeared, which openly defined the war as *jihad*.[47] Betraying the war effort was thus considered a betrayal of religion.

Such interpretations were utilized by the Bosnian Islamic Community's leaders both to gain support from the Muslim world and to enhance claims to authority at home. Internationally, a religious reading of the conflict "made it possible to impose as a publicly accepted norm the commitment of every Muslim to support the Bosnian Muslims; failures to take this responsibility would be to risk seeing one's own 'Islamic legitimacy' being challenged."[48]

The term *jihad* was powerfully advocated by the Bosnian leader Mustafa Cerić, among others. In September 1992, Cerić, then senior imam in Croatia, organized an international conference in Zagreb on the protection of human rights in Bosnia, attended by representatives of some 30 Muslim countries. He presented the struggle for the liberation of Bosnia as a *jihad*, which has to be supported by the global *umma*.[49] The Party of Democratic Action and the Islamic Community took the interpretation of the conflict further in religious terms. The Muslims who died in the war were called *shehids* (*šehidi* in Bosnian),[50] the Serb and Croat aggression was referred to as a "new Crusade," and special Muslim brigades were introduced in the army.[51] The religious term *šehidi* (martyrs) was used for the Bosniak soldiers who died in the war when they were remembered during funeral services and annual commemorations organized by the Islamic Community, as well as in the state's provision of benefits for the "martyrs'" families. This term inspired some tense public debates since many of those "martyrs" were not practicing believers.[52]

The notion of martyrdom gained some prominence outside Bosnia, too. In various publications, the Macedonian Islamic Community praised the

mujahideen and published the names of the Albanian *shehids* who died in the Bosnian war.[53] In Kosovo, where the Sufi orders were targeted heavily by the regime of Milošević, a number of dervishes from different *tariqas* were killed in the 1990s and were subsequently pronounced "martyrs of democracy."[54] In a similar vein, though in a completely different context, the Islamic Community in Bulgaria made use of the symbol of martyrdom in May 2009, during a memorial service for the Turks who died twenty years earlier while opposing the communist suppression of their identity. They were called the *shehids* who sparked the fire of democracy in Bulgaria."[55]

Yet, even though the terms *jihad* and martyrdom acquired some circulation among Bosnian soldiers during the war, by and large these soldiers' understanding of the goals of the war was profoundly different from that of the Arab-Afghan fighters. While the latter had come to sacrifice their lives defending the *umma* and were deeply convinced that death in battle earns them a place in paradise, the Bosnians fought for the liberation of their country and valued life more than martyrdom in the name of Islam.[56] The clash of those different value systems eventually sobered both sides. The foreign combatants were stunned to discover that "the Bosnians were well away from Islam. . . . They couldn't even say the word 'jihad.' They used to call 'mujahideen' 'muhajideen.' It took them many months to learn the right word."[57] Local Muslims were far from receptive to attempts to indoctrinate them with what they saw as alien Islamic practices and political ideas.[58] One Bosniak officer was particularly outraged by the *mujahideen*'s hope for the establishment of an Islamic state: "The idea that we are going to build a Muslim state here like Libya is ridiculous. . . . I would fight against such a state."[59]

The encounter between the *mujahideen* and the local Muslims revealed their divergent interpretations of the meaning of Islam and its "correct" practices, and triggered reassertion of local nuances. In the insightful metaphor of a local combatant, "Those who came here from the East came ill-[in]formed about the Bosnian Muslims, who are both Easterners and Westerners. Their plan to impose their way of seeing the religion and teach us how to pray has failed. They tried to plant trees here, palm trees, which can't grow in Bosnia."[60]

Not all Bosnian Muslim leaders, however, let alone the command of the Bosnian army, adopted a religious interpretation of the conflict.[61] Sensitive to the contradictory sociopolitical connotations of the term *jihad*, the Bosnian Muslim mainstream remained unreceptive toward using such symbolism. It generally referred to the war as "aggression" or "genocide"—that is to say, in terms of international law, rather than in

strictly theological terms. While the dead were called *šehidi* ("martyrs"), the local fighters were called "*borci*" (the Bosnian word for fighters) and not "*mujahideen*."[62]

Later, during the Kosovo conflict, as Clayer points out, the Albanian Muslim diaspora in Western Europe did not hesitate to employ the language of Islamic solidarity. Sheikh Muhammad Stubla, president of the Albanian Islamic society in London, described the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) as an "Islamic Albanian organization, determined to defend its people, its fatherland and its religion." The response to the conflict of certain groups of Muslims living in the West took different forms. The Kosovo Support Council of Al-Muhajiroun, based in the United Kingdom, issued a call for *jihad*, while other activists set up pressure groups, such as the Kosovo Task Force of the Muslim Communities in North America.[63]

It is important to bear in mind, however, that Al-Muhajiroun was a small extremist group, which was by no means representative of the Muslim actors in the Great Britain, while Sheikh Stubla's description of the KLA was wide of the mark, as the latter neither claimed any link to Islam nor used any religious symbols. Consequently, the *mujahideen* who tried to join the ranks of the KLA, coming either from Bosnia or from farther away, were turned down. The KLA's leadership made special efforts to refute false claims by foreign Islamists that they were fighting for an Islamic state—an allegation that played into the hands of Belgrade propaganda aiming to present the Albanians as religious extremists.[64] The Islamic Community of Kosovo also resisted strongly the *mujahideen*'s offers of help, as Rexhep Boja, the former chief mufti of Kosovo, emphasized.[65]

Interestingly enough, the Kosovo war stirred the minds of Muslims in Tatarstan. It was reported that more than 100 young men volunteered to fight for their Muslim brothers in Kosovo after the media broadcasts about the NATO attacks on Yugoslavia. None actually went, yet this caused consternation for local Islamic authorities who were fearful of radicalization among Tatar Muslims.[66]

As to Muslim solidarity on a regional Balkan level, both during the war in Bosnia and afterward, it happened sporadically rather than systematically. The Albanian Muslims and the Turks in Bulgaria, for example, seemed to be less moved by the fate of their brothers in Bosnia than the Muslims in Egypt, Iran, and Malaysia.[67] An Albanian Muslim in Kosovo explained to me that "many Albanians from Kosovo joined the ranks of the Croatian army during the war, but it was because they wanted to fight the Serbs rather than out of some alleged Muslim solidarity."

While the opinion of my interlocutor was obviously based on a certain amount of misinformation (as some Albanian Muslims from Kosovo and Albania fought in Bosnia, side by side with the foreign *mujahideen*),[68] it nevertheless conveyed poignantly the prevailing attitude among Kosovo Albanians who identified a "common enemy" with the Bosniaks in the Serbian army.

To be sure, the political situation in Kosovo in the early 1990s was hardly conducive to an open expression of Islamic solidarities. While the Albanians in Macedonia were able to lobby for the shelter of Bosnian Muslim refugees in their country and accommodated a number of Bosniak families, Kosovo was a Serb province under the Milošević regime, where the Albanians were marginalized and oppressed.[69]

The presence of the foreign combatants eventually turned into a significant challenge to the Bosnian Islamic leadership because the Salafi[70] ideas and practices they propagated clashed with the ways Islam has been practiced traditionally by local Muslims.[71] Furthermore, their presence fueled stigmatization of Bosnia as a potential terrorist hotbed.[72] The ambiguities related to the role of the jihadists on Bosnian soil were summarized by Alija Izetbegović in a 2002 interview in which he noted that "on the whole, they did more harm than good."[73] The Islamic Community's project for the re-Islamization of Bosniak society, in particular, clashed with the *mujahideen*'s understandings of proper Islamic practices and beliefs. Later, the postwar activities of Salafi-influenced Bosniak ex-combatants brought new challenges. According to provisions of the Dayton peace agreement, the foreign fighters had to leave the country. Only a handful of them remained, mostly by marrying local women or as employees of foreign Islamic NGOs that still operated in the country.[74] Even though a couple of local Salafi-oriented organizations, partly linked to the legacies of the *mujahideen*, gained some following among the younger people after the war (the most active and visible among which were Furqan and the Active Islamic Youth), none of these organizations survived the long-term challenges of the shifting geopolitical context, particularly after the suicide attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001.[75]

Predictably, the very discourse of *jihad* was recalibrated in the aftermath of the war. It was increasingly evoked to describe the re-Islamization project of the Islamic Community in Bosnia. Thus in a 2005 interview, Mustafa Cerić emphasized that after the end of the lesser *jihad* (the war), the Bosniaks "have to fight a bigger, second *jihad*, that is an intellectual and educational one. We need to do our utmost to educate our children and help them gain knowledge about Islam."[76]

2.4 COLLISION OVER THE INTERPRETATION OF ISLAM

After the end of the Cold War, an impressive amount of foreign Islamic aid was channeled to the Balkans for the rebuilding of the Islamic Communities impoverished by the decades-long oppression of the communist regimes. Faith-based support intensified particularly during and after the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo, when numerous Islamic charities stepped in to offer humanitarian relief to their Balkan brothers and sisters. Because of the dearth of official statistics and because most of the money reached the Balkans in private ways outside the banking system, it is impossible to estimate the sum totals; attempts to do so remain in the sphere of speculation.

In Indonesia alone, the National Committee for Solidarity with Bosnian Muslims, established specifically to collect aid, raised almost US$ 2.5 million by May 1994. Part of the money was sent to Bosnia through a representative of the Bosnian government, who visited Indonesia, and the rest was transported by special envoys of the Committee.[77]

According to the Information Office of the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in the United States, the funds that were raised and spent for humanitarian relief services related to the Bosnian crisis amounted to half a billion in US dollars; these funds were spent on medical care, refugee camps, education, and, later, reconstruction projects (among which the restoration and building of mosques and religious schools figure prominently). The money was disbursed under the umbrella of the Saudi Joint Committee for the Collection of Donations for Bosnia. The Saudi aid to Kosovo was US$45 million and was provided under the umbrella of the Saudi Joint Committee for the Relief of Kosovo and Chechnya.[78]

Both the agendas and the origins of the providers of Islamic aid were widely diverse. The providers ranged from state actors to NGOs and networks based both in the Muslim world and in the West, to diaspora communities originating in the Balkans.[79] Importantly, they never consolidated behind a shared platform, and the aid often became a ground for the expression of various intra-Islamic rivalries, such as, for example, the competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran for leadership in the Muslim world. Its importance in a tumultuous time for the Balkan Muslims should not be downplayed, but it bears mentioning that, not unlike other international interventions in the region,[80] it often generated competition over material resources, power struggles, and ideological fragmentation among its recipients. Furthermore, the influence of the Muslim world contributed to the internal restructuring of power positions, especially in the initial stages of the post-communist transition.

Particularly challenging has been the ideological influence of Salafism, whose representatives often strongly criticized local Islamic customs and practices and sought to impose their own interpretation of Islam. The celebration of the Prophet's birthday and the Sufi veneration of saints, for instance, were condemned as "forbidden innovations" (*bid'dah*). In the account of Alibašić, major promoters of Salafism in Bosnia were international relief agencies such as the High Saudi Committee for the Relief of Bosnian Muslims (running the Cultural Center King Fahd in Sarajevo), the Al-Haramain Foundation, and the Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage, while the most active local organizations were Furqan, the Active Islamic Youth, the Balkan Centre in Zenica, and the Center for the Affirmation of Islamic Sciences. Even though the spread of a Salafi discourse in the Bosnian religious scene challenged the traditional interpretations of Islam, it did not overrule their dominance.[81]

In Kosovo, in the account of Blumi, indigenous forms of religious practice clashed with foreign Islamic influences, often described as "Wahhabi" and lumped together in the collective perceptions of the local population, despite their ideological and sectarian diversity. Because of the lack of understanding of the situation and the consequent neglect by the international community, rural areas were largely left to the humanitarian assistance of the Islamic world. Far from monolithic itself, Islamic aid was dominated by the Saudi Joint Committee for the Relief of Kosovo and Chechnya (SJCRKC), which, in addition to providing various relief supplies, built approximately 100 mosques in the rural areas, some of them with adjacent Qur'anic schools, and sent a cohort of 388 foreign teachers to spread their interpretations of Islam.[82] Obviously, in many cases humanitarian aid has been routinely conflated with proselytizing and ideological agendas.[83]

The new forms of patronage introduced by various Islamic charities, and the instrumentalization of the idea of the *umma* for the pragmatic goals of foreign interests did not go unnoticed by the Balkan Muslims. The influx of various Islamic NGOs vying for influence and trying to impose their version of Islam provoked the outrage of the local Muslim leadership. As the former head of the Islamic Community in Kosovo, Rexhep Boja, famously put it:

> There are people who come here and want to tell us how we ought to do things. We have been Muslims for 600 years, and we do not need to be told what Islam is. We have our own history and tradition here, our own Islamic culture and architecture. We would like to rebuild our community and to rebuild our mosques, but we want to do it our way.[84]

When I asked Boja about the help provided to his Community by foreign Islamic agencies, he mentioned that he accepted "Arab money" for the rebuilding of some mosques because the Community was in dire need, yet only with hesitations since foreign donations usually came with specific conditions. He had also blocked the opening of a *medrese* by countries from the Gulf, "because we have our own religious schools, and we do not want people from abroad to come and teach here. We…have developed our unique approach to Islam."[85]

A similar critique of the influences spread by the "shadowy 'humanitarian' agencies," is also voiced by Karić,[86] who emphasizes that each Muslim nation is unique and needs to preserve its specificities:

> Our Muslim identity, along with our Bosnian form of Islam, needs to be carefully preserved—for the sake of our survival…. In attacking the Bosnian way to live Islam, these newly proclaimed Muslims are trying to impose their own interpretation of 'true Islam.'…Thousands of imams and honest ulema and Islamic professors have lived the fullness of Islam here for centuries, and still do.

In Romania, the Muslim leadership complained about the presence of foreign Islamic NGOs that spread "wrong beliefs" through "illegal" activities. In the words of imam Osman Bezir Aziz, "We have here a national tradition in matters of religion, and the local tradition is very good and works very well. These kinds of people are coming from abroad and stirring things up."[87] Chief Mufti Murat Yusuf voiced a similar fear about the potential spread of "radical Islam" by the Islamic NGOs active in Europe, and mentioned his initiative for the creation of a "European Council of the Muftis from the EU countries" with a primary aim to combat such influences. He emphasized that the Islamic Community in Romania is "not dependent on Arab money," as the religious officials are salaried by the state, and the major outside sponsor is the Turkish Diyanet.[88]

Additionally, the structure of the aid by the foreign Islamic charities has sometimes been criticized as inadequate, particularly given the endemic poverty and the widespread need for social assistance. One taxi driver in Sarajevo kept pointing to the huge new mosques on our way, known by the nationalities of their donors—the Indonesian, the Jordanian, the Qatari, the Kuwaiti, the Malaysian mosques—and commented with bitterness that, instead of helping the poor and unemployed, many Islamic countries preferred to build pompous mosques that hardly anyone attended. Indeed, in Bosnia alone, more than 550 new mosques were built between the end of the war in 1995 and 2005. At the same time, the unemployment level has reached nearly 40 percent and the annual per capita income averaged only US$1,800.[89]

The clash between differing interpretations of Islam found a visual expression in the contest over the architectural style of the restored or newly built mosques; in many places throughout the Balkans, Muslims with whom I spoke during my field trips expressed concerns that the foreign donors' funds often came with architectural plans for the mosques, even when the donations were for restoration purposes rather than for new buildings. People grumbled about the Saudi-financed mosques in particular, whose bare style is strikingly different from the traditional, ornate Ottoman-style mosques. According to one expert from the Sarajevo Center for Islamic Architecture, the foreign-sponsored mosques "symbolize the use of religion as an instrument of arrogance and domination."[90]

Balkan Muslims resisted unwelcome encroachment on the rebuilding of their sacred spaces. In the account of Xhabir Hamiti, when Saudis overtook the reconstruction of the 16th-century Hadum mosque in Gjakova (Kosovo), destroyed by the Serbs in the 1998–99 war, and tried to change its style, to wipe out its paintings and to remove the old gravestones in the Ottoman-time graveyard surrounding it, local Albanian Muslims refused to accept their help. "Thanks to the intervention of Andras Riedlmayer,[91] funding arrived from the US and the mosque was reconstructed as it was before."[92]

The building of new, plain-style, externally funded mosques has been an issue of some concern for the Islamic Community in Bulgaria too. They are often perceived as incongruent with the Ottoman style typical for the country's mosque architecture. The construction of these mosques, according to the deputy chief mufti, was possible due to the turbulence and the splits in the Community after 1989. "The new Saudi-style mosques are not well received in Bulgaria," he told me. "They lack aesthetics, lack art. We may in the future gain full control over the building of new mosques, but we are still in transition."[93]

Developments in the Balkans confirmed that transnational Muslim interaction does not necessarily strengthen the assumed Muslim unity in the framework of the *umma*. It often raises the awareness of local religious distinctiveness and can even catalyze a clash over different conceptualizations and practices of Islam. Indeed, the interaction with the wider Islamic world propped up the understanding of the Balkan Muslims that they are Muslims "in their own way"[94] and often mobilized resistance against what was seen as colonization by alien forms of Islam. Moreover, the plurality of Islamic actors and their ideological rivalries advanced fragmentation and division within "Balkan Islam,"[95] in line with Eickelman and Piscatori's conclusion that "the competitiveness and politicization of *da'wa* successively

complicate the general transnational politics of Islam and render the search for pan-Islamic integration all the more difficult." [96]

2.5 THE SPECTER OF ISLAMIC RADICALISM IN THE BALKANS

Because of their financial capacities and ideological sway, foreign Islamic agencies, particularly those coming from the Middle East, have often been perceived as a security threat by the fragile states in the region. The official Islamic Communities, in turn, have found it difficult to compete with the influence of the financially robust transnational Islamic foundations and charities whose assistance often came with various ideological-cum-political strings attached. When the outside sponsors preferred to circumvent the official administrative structures and to set up their branches or establish local Muslim NGOs instead, this was perceived as an attack on the Islamic Communities' monopoly over the religious life of their constituencies. In both cases, foreign interference in the life of the local communities often generated divisions and power struggles or exacerbated existent fault lines.

To be sure, traditional Christian churches in the region struggled with similar challenges introduced by the post–Cold War arrival of a cohort of various neo-Protestant missions from the West, and particularly from North America, even though the scale of the financial resources and the outreach of those can probably be regarded as modest in comparison to the Islamic aid.[97] The arriving Christian missionaries targeted both local Christians and Muslims, obviously assuming that the decades of atheist propaganda had wiped out any faith allegiances within societies throughout the region. In Albania, quite a few people of Muslim background seemed to have converted to various neo-Protestant churches in the 1990s; most of them, however, consequently re-converted to Islam, or opted for no religious commitment at all. In Bulgaria, neo-Protestant missions targeted predominantly Roma Muslims and occasionally Pomaks, even though with rather questionable success in the case of the latter.

Consequently, foreign Islamic agencies often emphasized counter-proselytism measures as an important part of their mission in the region. Furthermore, the local Christian and Muslim communities sought to counter foreign proselytizing among their members by seeking support and legal protection from the state, and claiming a special status of "traditional religions." The post-9/11 context significantly changed the parameters of the discourse on "traditional religion" in the case of Islam, by

adding to it a strong security dimension. Calls for the protection of "traditional Islam" were now backed with references to a potential Muslim radicalization under the influence of imported militant religious tenets.

The notion of "radical Islam" (often incorrectly used interchangeably with "fundamentalist Islam," "Islamism," "Salafism," and "Wahhabism")[98] has subsequently been discursively, and for the most part indiscriminately, employed in the public space of the Balkan countries—including by state governments and Islamic Communities themselves. The notion itself is highly problematic from a substantive point of view, as it ascribes a certain quality, "radical," to a religion, rather than to particular groups of people who self-identify as followers of this religion and who are deemed to hold radical views justified by references to Islam. I use it here because of its currency in the public debates about Islam, which I seek to discuss.

Accusations of Islamic radicalism became an easy way to discredit opponents and to score points; these accusations turned into a favored weapon in power struggles at various levels, employed both within the Muslim communities themselves and by hostile nationalistic political parties. In 2009, for example, a few Muslims from the Pomak village of Ribnovo in Bulgaria publicly charged their mayor with radical Islamism, which led to a police investigation and to a number of sensationalist reports in the media. Researcher Evgenia Ivanova visited the village and, after meeting some of the people who initiated the accusation, found that their grievances were actually related to the mayor's alleged corruption. When asked why they did not raise the issue of corruption, which was documented and serious, instead of charging Islamic radicalism, these accusers explained: "Because in that case nobody would have paid any attention to our complaint."[99]

Unsurprisingly, the so-called threat of radical Islam played into the hands of staunch nationalists regionwide. Serbia's former president Slobodan Milošević and his cronies, for instance, indiscriminately invoked it with regard to the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo. Internationally, the specter of militant Islam taking root in the region and turning it into a staging ground for al-Qaeda and its likes to gain easy access to Western targets has dominated much of the coverage, both in the mass media and in various public policy analyses. In some depictions, Balkan Muslims have long fallen prey to outside Islamic militants, who have indoctrinated them with fanatic outlooks. They have extended a "Green Corridor" connecting Turkey with places with sizable Muslim communities such as Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, and Bulgaria, spreading terrorist cells throughout the peninsula and preparing for radical operations in the West.

Publications with unsettling titles such as "The Coming Balkan Caliphate: The Threat of Radical Islam to Europe and the West,"[100] "Islamic Terror and the Balkans,"[101] "Unholy Terror: Bosnia, al-Qa'ida, and the Rise of Global Jihad,"[102] advanced misrepresentations of the Balkans as a hub for transnational Islamic terrorism.[103]

My aim here is neither to make assertions that the Balkan countries are, for some reason, spared the threat of extremism associated with militant Islamic organizations of the type of Al-Qaeda—which they are not—nor to evaluate how deeply the region is, or can potentially be, affected by the growth of Islamic radicalism in other parts of the world. With Hoare, I insist that while we should not ignore the threat of Islamic extremism, it has to be addressed with objective, well-researched analyses of the activities of the radicals rather than with unsubstantiated allegations.[104] Therefore, by referring to Islamic radicalism in the Balkans as a specter I do not mean to claim that it is only a phantom apparition in the minds of a cohort of scholars, policy makers, and journalists trying to sensationalize their writings. Without claiming that the region is immune to Muslim extremism, I want to outline a few important factors, which, to my mind, seriously confine the opportunities for the spread of such faith-based extremism and therefore make it more of a specter than an immediate reality. I thus seek to particularly oppose distorted and counterproductive representations of Islam in the Balkans as a factor for instability and a potential security threat for the region and beyond.

First, evolving geopolitical development from 1996 onward—the arrival of US troops in Bosnia after the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, the bomb attacks in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam in 1998, and particularly the events of 9/11—dramatically reduced the presence of foreign Islamic charities and organizations in the region.[105] The Balkan states actively engaged in expelling individuals and closing down organizations suspected of promoting Islamic radicalism and seen as a threat to national security. In the observation of Hoare, for example, Bosnia under Izetbegović's Party of Democratic Action "supported the US-led 'War on Terror,' arrested Islamic terrorist suspects and was essentially free of genuine Islamist terrorist outrages on its soil—certainly more free than the US, Britain, Spain or Turkey."[106] This trend was sustained by consequent Bosnian governments, and it is clearly generalizable to the rest of the region, too.[107]

The official Islamic Communities and the governments in the region have cooperated in fighting the potential danger of "radical Islam" and have promoted "local Islam" as a central strategy. The safeguarding of "traditional" Islamic identities, routinely described as moderate and tolerant, has been bolstered by a strict control on the training of imams and other religious

personnel. According to Xhavit Shala, an Albanian expert in security and international affairs,

> after 1990, there were a considerable number of extremist elements who penetrated Albania under the guise of humanitarian work. Their activity was further facilitated by the breakdown of law and order in Albania in 1997 ….. After 9/11, most of these foreign NGOs were forced out of Albania ….. [W]e have worked to lobby in favour of passing a law, which will provide for the government to finance the work of the religious communities, especially the top tier clergy. This will make them independent economically from outside sources of funding ….. We will not have any positive results if our religious officials cannot be trained in the country. Within the state university of Tirana, the government must finance and open a faculty of theology that will provide training for our religious cadre.[108]

Generally, in the aftermath of 9/11, the resources and activities of Islamic organizations were closely scrutinized everywhere in the region. In Bosnia, most of the foreign NGOs closed their offices and handed over the mosques, constructed with their sponsorship, to the Islamic Community.[109] In Bulgaria, since 2002 all the funds received by the Islamic Community from abroad are placed in a special account within the Ministry of Finance until the origin of the money is established; furthermore, the chief mufti announced measures against the infiltration of "fundamentalist Islam," including close monitoring of the activities of the muftis and imams and their contacts with foreign radical Islamists.[110] More drastic steps included the closure of Qur'anic and other religious schools as well as local Muslim NGOs which are not under the direct control of Islamic Communities. In Bulgaria, for example, at least two Qur'anic schools and two local Muslims NGOs (the Union of Bulgarian Muslims and the Union for Islamic Development and Culture) were closed down in the mid-2000s, even though the investigation into the activities of the two organizations did not find any conclusive evidence of unauthorized or criminal activities.

Islamic Communities throughout the region engaged in heated debates about the danger of radical influences and about strategies against them. Various measures were introduced to enforce stricter control of mosques, publications, and educational institutions.[111] The Islamic Community in Bosnia, for example, organized numerous meetings to tackle the issue of militant extremism.[112] An attack on the US Embassy in Sarajevo in October 2011 by an Islamist gunman from Novi Pazar (Serbia) was immediately condemned in strong terms by the Islamic Community in Bosnia. The re'is ul-ulema issued an official statement and dispatched two *khutbas* to

all imams in the country and among the Bosniak diapora, to be read during the upcoming Friday service and the following Kurban bayram (Eid ul-adha) celebration, in which terrorism and violence were described as a flagrant abuse of Islam.

Unfortunately, the elasticity of the term "radical Islam" leaves the door open for targeting and prosecuting Muslims on unconfirmed allegations of spreading such ideas.

Second, besides the political developments in the post-9/11 world, a conspicuous lack of communal and intellectual support for radical ideas among the Balkan Muslims, both at leadership and grassroots levels, counsels against quick allegations about the spread of "militant Islam" on Balkan soil. For example, the discourse on *jihad* in the face of an external aggression in Bosnia, discussed earlier in this chapter, was counterbalanced by messages calling for peace and strongly opposing violence, at least until the warfare engulfed the country. Some of the sermons during the Ramazan bayram (Eid ul-Fitr) of 1992, which coincided with the last days before the country sank into brutal war, attest to a strong internal resistance against violent action. In the opening ceremony of the feast, the then *Re'is ul-ulema* Jacub Selimoski, emphasized:

> We will never tolerate, and we should never tolerate, people and nations hating each other, falling out with each other and fighting in the name of the faith. On the contrary, we never cease calling upon people, in the name of the one and only God, who is the Creator of the world, to live in peace.... The Qur'an has taught us from the outset that, if anyone kills a single man unjustly, it is as if he had killed the whole world, and that if anyone saves the life of a single man, it is as if he had saved the whole world.[113]

In his sermons during the same time, the respected *ulema* Enes Karić powerfully evoked the words of "the great Muslim masters," that "God tolerates unbelief upon earth. If someone says: 'I do not believe', God permits that. But He does not tolerate violence."[114]

I do not mean to stereotype "Balkan Islam" as peaceful and tolerant par excellence; however, it bears mentioning that it has strong intellectual and grassroots traditions that affirm the values of peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society. Indeed, Balkan Muslims' self-definitions are often dominated by a strong awareness of the pluralist environment they inhabit. In Bosnia, a loose circle of Muslim intellectuals sought to outline a "Bosnian paradigm" that emphasized the influence of the local inter-religious environment on Islam.[115] According to this paradigm (associated primarily with the name of Ruzmir Mahmutćehajić),[116] religious pluralism

is an inherent part of Bosnia's uniqueness that can be described as "unity in diversity" and symbolically represented as a bridge between civilizations. While Islam forms the core of the distinctive Bosnian culture, the assumed unity of Islam, Roman Catholicism, Serbian Orthodoxy, and Judaism is its defining feature.

Numerous interviewees have made it clear to me over my years of working with Muslim communities throughout the Balkans that they see sustaining good relations with their non-Muslim neighbors as a paramount necessity. Even in the face of war brutalities, ethnic cleansing, and destruction of the religious and cultural sites of the "others"—extensively reported in the media—there were important cases when people defended their religiously different neighbors or their places of worship. Unfortunately, these cases received much less attention.

In one such case, at a time when the Croat army had already turned against the Bosniaks, Bosniak combatants stopped their Arab co-fighters from dynamiting the 800-year-old Catholic monastery of St. Francis in Guča Gora. As opposed to the foreign jihadists, Bosniaks valued the religious building of their Catholic neighbors, understanding it as part of a shared historical heritage and spatial context. In another case, Bosniak soldiers prevented the abuse of 231 Croat civilian refugees by the *mujahideen* who had taken them hostage and threatened to slaughter them.[117]

In Kosovo, some authors have pointed to a rather low level of control over the aid from the Gulf, as a result both of the international community's short-sightedness[118] and the limited capacities of the local institutions to control the flow of people and ideas in the enclave.[119] While this is certainly a security challenge that needs to be addressed at both state and international levels, Kosovo Albanians have been highly hostile to Islamic NGOs from the Arab world, particularly after 9/11 when their moral support and sympathy for the United States became even stronger.[120] Grassroots intolerance to Islamic radicalism even boiled into violence. In the account of one interviewee in Kosovo, a few "extremists with big beards and short pants" were severely beaten up when they put out candles lit by local people in front of the National Assembly in Prishtina in a show of solidarity with the United States in the days immediately after 9/11.[121]

In Macedonia, where Islam has traditionally played a stronger role in both politics and society, cases of radicalization of local Albanian Muslims allegedly increased due to a spillover of influence of the Gulf networks in the neighboring Kosovo. However, continuous charges of Saudi-promoted "Wahhabi" influences among certain local imams, while not to be dismissed as fully ungrounded, seem to be more often a tool in the power struggles between different factions in the Islamic Community; they are politically

rather than religiously motivated.[122] The widespread pro-American senti-
ments and strong orientation toward the European Union (EU) among the
Albanians are believed to efficiently check the growth of radical Islam in
Albanian communities in the Balkans.[123]

By and large, the rank-and-file Muslims in the Balkans seem to be
quick in discerning and blocking messages which may threaten the peace-
ful relations with their non-Muslim neighbours. Communal aversion to
foreign-bred puritanism is rooted in perceptions about the potential harm
it can do to both traditional beliefs and practices of Islam and to the social
peace more generally. Such environment is far from receptive to imported
mandates for the purification of Islam in the Balkans from "forbidden"
(*bid'dah*) local accretions. In Bulgaria, when a young Muslim imam, just back
from his Islamic studies in Jordan, stated in a public lecture in a small town
in the Central Rhodope Mountains that Muslims in this country needed to
follow the "true" Islam of the Qur'an, which had been corrupted by centu-
ries of contact with Christianity and decades of atheist distortion, several
people in the audience accused him of trying to cause problems with their
Christian neighbors.[124]

In the observation of Schwartz,

> The village Muslim has been going to his Ottoman mosque his whole life and is
> used to the imam being Balkan and maybe his relative and maybe his brother.
> To have someone from Pakistan or Saudi Arabia dressed in a funny outfit with
> a weird beard, threatening manners, and a bad attitude telling people how to be
> Muslims is very unpopular in the villages.[125]

Last but not least, almost invariably, with the notable exception of the
Party of Democratic Action (SDA) in Bosnia, the political parties in the
region, which were set up after 1989 to formally represent Muslim popula-
tions, prefer to embrace a secular identity and to steer away from explicit
religious identifications, agenda, and rhetoric—even though they seek to
control the local Islamic Communities. The paramount examples in this
respect are the Movement for Rights and Freedoms in Bulgaria, already
discussed briefly in chapter 1, and the Albanian parties in Kosovo. In the
account of Krasniqi, from the very beginning the newly formed Albanian
political parties in the province "applied the strategy of rapprochement
with Kosovo's Western allies as an antidote to the politicization of Islam
in Kosovo and to religious fundamentalism. Certainly, both the secular
character of Albanian nationalism and strategic political calculations of the
political elites in Kosovo condition these developments." Moreover, the
politicians' fears of Kosovo being labeled a "Muslim state" kept Islam away

from the public sphere and prevented closer ties with the Islamic world.[126] In this regard, the Bosnian SDA seems to remain an exceptional case, as it was created, and consequently controlled, by pan-Islamist members of the Islamic Community.[127] This led to a considerable overlap between the party representing the Muslim Bosnians and the official Islamic organization. Gradually, however, the party's more secularly oriented circles gravitated toward a secular nationalism.

Accordingly, ideas about the reintroduction of the Shari'a or the establishment of an Islamic state, which would immediately be classified as radical, have never made it to the agenda of the major parties representing Muslims in the region. Importantly, local Muslim intellectuals have made a strong case that Shari'a in the context of the modern secular states has relevance for individual Muslims as a "religio-ethical" code of behavior rather than as an all-embracing religious law. As the prominent Bosniak legal scholar Fikret Karčić emphasizes, the primary demand of Muslims in the Balkans has been greater civil and political rights and freedoms, in accordance with European citizenship standards, rather than any type of recognition or application of the Shari'a in the sphere of positive law.[128]

Occasional statements by individual thinkers—such as Adnan Jahić about the need for the creation of "a sturdy Muslim state" in Bosnia,[129] or controversial pronouncements, such as the one made by Alija Izetbegović during the war that "Serbs and Croats will have in Bosnia-Herzegovina the same rights as Arabs in France"[130]—cannot be seen as representative views of the entire community; the stormy public polemics which such statements provoke attest to their contentious nature for the Muslim mainstream, let alone the secular Muslim public. Furthermore, it is important to consider such assertions contextually and with a view of their authors' intellectual and political evolution. Izetbegović at least put it clearly in his autobiography: "A European policy for Bosnia was my definite choice in spite of all temptations otherwise."[131]

The postwar period was marked by a general decline of Islamism and the emergence of what has been called a "post-Islamist Islam in the Balkans."[132] Even though Bosnia became a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1994, pan-Islamism did not develop into a full-fledged program and was pushed back by geopolitical considerations.[133] Since the end of the post-Yugoslav wars, and particularly after 9/11, Muslim populations moved away from the influence of Arab and Iranian networks[134] and toward a closer cooperation with Turkey. This process went hand in hand with the reclaiming of the specificities of Islam in the Balkans, on the one hand, and the rearticulation of its "Europeanness," on the other.

It seems fair to conclude that Balkan Muslims have significant internal defense mechanisms against potential radicalization. They have remained rooted in their traditional Islamic practices and beliefs and have strongly opposed foreign-instigated re-Islamization projects. Both religious and liberal publics have resisted attempts to spread Islamic ideas that are perceived as extremist or potentially harmful for the social peace. The resistance against imported Islamic radicalism thus operates both within the Islamic Communities and on a larger social level, not to mention on the level of state policies in compliance with the pressures imposed by the post-9/11 security climate. "Radical Islam" in the Balkans therefore lacks both historical roots and a social base. It is more appropriate to discuss it in the larger framework of weak, unconsolidated democracies, national economies plagued by corruption, and endemic poverty in the region. Poverty in particular disproportionately affects Muslims who live as minorities and can potentially turn into a significant destabilizing factor.

2.6 THE ROLE OF TURKEY

The approaches, agendas, and modes of operation of the foreign Islamic actors in the Balkans vary significantly, and their presence and role fluctuates with the shifting geopolitical realities. Among a great variety of state and nonstate Muslim agencies involved in the post-communist Balkans, the influence of Turkey stands out in several important ways. Its geographic proximity, historical links, and religious and cultural affinities with the local Muslims allowed it to exert strong impact on them. After the Cold War, it was able to access many of these populations more easily than ever before. In the last decade in particular, Turkey has become, in the words of Öktem, "a most influential Muslim actor in Southeast Europe, both in terms of formal foreign policy and the low politics of religious networks and brotherhoods."[135]

The religious assertiveness of Turkey in the region is rooted in domestic ideological and political developments that generated new foreign policy paradigms. The revalorization of Islam as a key reference point in Turkish national identity is a particularly important development. It helps explain, for example, the gradual re-formulation of Turkey's traditional kin-state positioning vis-à-vis Turkish minorities into a more comprehensive role of a neo-Ottoman metropolis for Muslim populations in the Balkans, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. The reintroduction of a pronounced Islamic dimension in the meaning of "Turkishness" can be traced back to the beginning of the "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" ideology,

which appeared in the 1970s and grew exponentially in the 1980s.[136] In line with the shifting references of national identity, the Ottoman legacy, sitting somewhat uneasily with the secularist ideological paradigm of the Kemalist republic, was rearticulated and turned into a discursive tool for the reevaluation of regional history and the reclaiming of Turkey's central role in it. The Ottoman Empire was reconceptualized into a model of a tolerant pluralistic polity. This image was propelled into domestic and regional public discourses to serve new political exigencies. As one author notes, the post-communist conflicts in Southeast Europe catalyzed arguments about the responsibility of Turkey as an heir to the Ottoman Empire; "romantic notions of a Golden era of order and harmony in the Balkans under the Ottomans" backed up "appeals for a new era of pax-Ottomanica."[137]

After the fall of communism, the role of Turkey in the Balkans expanded impressively, both through its formal governmental agencies such as the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA), the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the Ministry of National Education, and through Turkish Islamic networks, comprising both faith-based charities and neo-Sufi movements (such as the Gülen movement, the Süleymançis, and the Nurçus).[138] State-level agreements, advanced by governmental actors, introduced some limitations on religion-related projects (with the notable exception of the Diyanet and, to some extent, TIKA), but the religious organizations and networks retained considerable flexibility in their humanitarian, educational, and cultural activities among Muslims in the Balkans.

The shifts in Turkey's domestic political and religious scene, which generated new modes of engagement with the Muslim communities in the Balkans, dovetailed with the transformed geopolitical situation and security climate after 9/11. The heightened state scrutiny of Islamic activities restricted the flow of funds and actors from the Arab world to the region, thus leaving a space for Turkish agencies to step in.[139] Additionally, policy-level security considerations about the counterweight of Turkey's "moderate" Islam against potential "radical" influences from the Arab world and Iran facilitated the spread of Turkish Islamic actors in the region.[140]

To be sure, the competition between certain Arab countries and Turkey for the hearts and minds of Balkan Muslims had already become obvious in the early 1990s, with the launching of two separate international organizations for the local Muslims: the Islamic Council for Eastern Europe, established in 1991 by Saudi Arabia and the World Islamic League, and the Eurasian Council (*Shura*), initiated by Turkey in 1995. The Turkish initiative brought together the official religious institutions of Muslims from the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.[141] While the Islamic Council

proved to be a short-lived body, which disappeared a couple of years later,[142] the Eurasian Council became an important forum for exchange and net-working, and in 2007 created a branch focusing specifically on the Muslims from the Balkan area.

Turkish agencies in the Balkans funded a wide range of activities and projects. They provided grants for local students to attend Turkish universities and sponsored local schools and universities. They boosted cultural cooperation, restoring and reconstructing mosques and other sites related to the Ottoman rule in the region. The reconstruction projects included the famous Old Bridge in Mostar (which was destroyed during the recent Bosnian war), Hafiz Ahmed Pasha Library in Greece, Sheikh Mustafa tomb in Serbia, Mustafa Pasha Mosque in Macedonia, and Sinan Pasha mosque in Kosovo, to name but a few. It has been reported recently that the amount of aid provided by Turkey to the so-called Greater Turkic world (an ambiguous metaphor, put forward as a "unifying concept between the Turkic republics, Turkey and the nations formerly ruled under Ottoman administration") increased over the last decade from $US85 million in 2002 to $US967 million in 2010; the total amount of aid for this period was almost $US5 billion. Additionally, as part of a massive exchange program, some 30,270 students from 57 countries and communities studied at Turkish universities.[143]

While the Arab agencies were often perceived as imposing an alien ethos on the Balkans, the Turkish governmental and nongovernmental actors were seen as having historically shared religious and cultural bonds. This perception was additionally reinforced by the contrasting operational strategies employed by the Middle Eastern and the Turkish religious agents. In the observation of Öktem, the Middle Eastern agents challenged local Islamic institutions and traditional practices, while the Turkish efforts were "geared towards the preservation of existing institutional structures, religious practices and the rediscovery of the Ottoman-Islamic heritage."[144]

Unsurprisingly, local Islamic leaderships were quick to notice the difference. The head of the Islamic Community in Albania, Selim Muça, expressed strong unwillingness to send students to study Islam "abroad"; Turkey, however, was singled out as a favored destination. Even though exchange agreements were signed with Egypt, Libya, and Turkey, students had strong preference for Turkish universities "because the teaching is transparent, objective, and the quality of learning is excellent. We are not planning to have agreements with other Islamic countries. The model of religion they bring here is not suitable for our tolerant environment."[145] In Macedonia, after the banning of the International Islamic Relief

Organization and the expulsion of 17 members of Al-Haramain and Al-Waqf al-Islami in 1995, relations with Turkey intensified.[146] The secretary general of the Islamic Community of Macedonia, Afrim Tairi, emphasized the importance of the funds provided by Turkey for reconstructing several mosques and for scholarships allowing local students to attend Turkish universities.[147]

Turkey's state-level relations with the local Islamic institutions have been brokered and managed by its Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). Through its consultants, staffed at the local embassies in the region, the Diyanet has been able to tailor Turkish aid in direct dialogue with local leadership and thus to attend closer to local exigencies. Major aspects of its involvement have included scholarships for the study of Islamic theology at Turkish universities, sponsorship of local religious schools, and translation and distribution of religious literature.[148] In Bulgaria, for example, a 1998 state agreement with Turkey formalized the Turkish aid for the Islamic Community, with a particular focus on the sphere of religious education. Consequently, all Islamic schools in Bulgaria (three secondary schools and a Higher Islamic Institute) are sponsored by the Diyanet through its outreach foundation, Diyanet Vakfı, which also supplies textbooks for the students and provides or approves the lecturers for the theological subjects. Two *imam-hatip* schools, established in the early 2000s with funds from the Diyanet Vakfı, were closed down a few years later because there were not enough students.[149]

Among the diverse non-state Turkish Islamic actors in the Balkans, the Gülen movement features prominently with its impressive transnational network of private schools (over 20 primary and secondary secular-oriented schools throughout the region in addition to three *medreses* in Albania) and media outlets (local editions of its Turkish daily *Zaman* are published in Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Romania).[150] Other networks, such as Süleymançis, are promoting Sunni-Hanafi normativity, aiming to counter Salafi influences from the Arab countries.[151]

The multiple and extensive engagement of Turkish state and nonstate agents in the Balkans has strengthened the bonds between Turkey and the Islamic Communities in the region and has cultivated a closer identification between "Turkish Islam" and "Balkan Islam."[152] This trend has developed on at least three levels.

First, ideas associated with the discourse of the "Ottoman legacy" have been cautiously transmitted through the numerous Turkish-sponsored schools and universities throughout the region; this happens even when the education offered is officially secular-oriented, as in the Gülen-sponsored schools. While spreading neo-Ottomanist ideas may not have been the

underlying political agenda of all those diverse educational institutions, it is fairly safe to contend that these schools effectively advance an ethos of shared history, culture, and religious tradition.

Second, as there is not a common language of communication between Muslim elites in the region, Turkish may well become this language, especially with the considerable—and growing—number of imams and leaders of the Islamic Communities in the Balkans who have studied in Turkish schools and universities. As Öktem has noted, Muslim elites in the region were fluent in Turkish and partly in Arabic in the interwar period; all Muslims in former Yugoslavia spoke Serbo-Croatian until the 1990s. Afterward, however, there was no lingua franca, a lack that today has been tentatively bridged at the level of Muslim elites through educational and other projects provided by Turkish actors.[153] Furthermore, in the Diyanet-financed educational establishments in the region, a number of the subjects are routinely taught in Turkish, as many of the teachers (and textbooks) arrive from Turkey. At least this is the situation in the Islamic Institute in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian-speaking Muslim students in this Institute are left with little choice but to learn Turkish so that they can follow the teaching.[154]

Third, the ever more frequent meetings of Balkan leaders, sponsored by Turkish organizations, and particularly those associated with the Eurasian *Shura* and the Humanitarian Relief Organization (IHH), serve to reinforce feelings of solidarity and historical bonds between regional Islamic Communities under the patronage of Turkey. The kinship language, dramatically describing Turkey as a "mother" and the Balkan Muslims as "orphans," has often resurfaced during those meetings.[155]

Regional reactions to perceptions and receptions of Turkey's self-assigned role of patron of the Balkan Muslims have been highly contextual.[156] On a structural level, the variegated Turkish actors seem to have been most successful in the Western Balkans, where the states are weaker and the Muslim populations are larger, even though in Bosnia their success has been much more moderate than in the Albanian-speaking communities of Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania.[157] The Islamic Communities in Romania and Bulgaria, where the stronger nation-states keep a closer grip on religious institutions, have worked exclusively with the Diyanet and other state-level Turkish agencies, through government-endorsed channels of cooperation.

On a discursive level, despite feelings of affinity and solidarity, ambiguous images of Turkey as a "mother" of the Balkan Muslims have sometimes provoked strong criticisms by Muslim intellectuals, particularly in Bosnia. As the former ambassador of Bosnia-Herzegovina to Turkey, Hajrudin

Somun, emphasized, the question "Is Turkey Bosnia's mother?" has a straightforward answer. "No, it is not, because Turkey does not need to be a mother to anyone other than its citizens."[158] In other words, important as they may be, common roots in Ottoman Islam are hardly able to override national identities and commitments.[159]

No doubt, the outcome of Turkey's bid for EU membership will be a major factor in the future reshaping of the trajectories of Turkey's involvement in the Balkans, religiously and otherwise. And while the role of ideological considerations in international relations is not to be overlooked or dismissed as irrelevant, the primary driving force in the region's politics will remain Turkey's and other Balkan states' economic, political, and security interests.