

## ISLAM IN "ISLAM BETWEEN EAST AND WEST"

Enes KARIĆ\*

E-mail: eneskaric@yahoo.com

**Citation/©: Karić, E., (2013).** Islam in Islam between East and West. *Journal of Intercultural and Religious Studies*. (4). 7-62.

### Abstract

*Islam between East and West* is a good example of a text written by an intellectual under siege who (while writing it) thought that the empires of Socialism and Communism would last at least for another several decades. The structure of Izetbegović's *Islam between East and West* does not permit a simple walk through its pages because on the pages of this work the author tries to do many things, with varying degrees of success. First, occasionally - or, better to say, rarely - he confronts what he considers to be "Islam" or "true Islam" with the state of Muslims in the 19th and 20th centuries. Second, in this work Izetbegović confronts his views about Islam with the then prevailing Socialist and Communist systems in the world, particularly in the hemisphere in which the USSR had a leading word. Third, Izetbegović confronts his understanding and interpretation of Islam with the current, ideologically aided trends in natural and social science such as Evolutionism, Darwinism, Biologism, etc. Fourth, his *Islam Between East and West* contains also many successful pages on, tentatively speaking, philosophy and theory of culture, science, law, aesthetics and ethics. Based on those facts this paper aims to provide the reader with a detailed analysis on *Islam between East and West*.

**Keywords:** Balkans, Islam, Bosnia, Alija Izetbegović, Islam between East and West, Islam in the Balkans

---

\* Professor at the Faculty of Islamic Studies of Sarajevo University, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

## Introduction

*Islam between East and West*<sup>1</sup> is a work that occupies a special place, not only in relation to Islamic, but also political and politico-philosophical thought of Alija Izetbegović (1925–2003). The work is a good example of a text written by an intellectual under siege who (while writing it) thought that the empires of Socialism and Communism would last at least for another several decades. Indeed, at the time of writing *Islam Between East and West* Izetbegović regarded Communism as “one of two indestructible forces.” Let us quote that passage:

After settling all accounts and confronting all the arguments, they all gradually disappear or ebb away and what remains on the turbulent scene are two powers set against one another, one can freely say two indestructible powers. On the surface they are Christian democracy and Communism, but viewed deeper, these are religion and materialism (Izetbegović, 1996, 340).<sup>2</sup>

In the middle of that “turbulent scene” Izetbegović decided to write *Islam between East and West*, an expression of his intellectual courage. Giving it a robust title it also represents his ambition to address a “global” topic and to place it on a big canvas, from “from East to West.”

In terms of his behavior and existential witness, Izetbegović remained faithful to most of the ideas and views expressed in this work. However, with time he discarded some, which one can find out by comparing this with his other works. The dictum that one cannot expect from man to stay faithful to his views during stormy and fragile times applies to Izetbegović, too.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Islam Between East and West* is Izetbegović's most published and translated book. With regard to Serbo-Croat and Bosnian editions one should mention the 1988 edition (published by Biblioteka „Nova“), Izetbegović's samizdat from 1990, while the next, Bosnian edition was published by Svjetlost in Sarajevo in 1995. Svjetlost also published the book in 1996. By 1996 the work was translated into English (American Trust Publications, 1984), Turkish (Nehir Yayinlari, 1987), one of Indonesian languages (Penerbit Nizan, 1992) and in Arabic (in Germany by Bavaria Verlag & Handel GmbH, 1994) and in Albanian (by TWRA in Macedonia, in 1994). Let us mention that the author received the „Thinker of the Year“ prize in 1995 from Saudi Arabia.

<sup>2</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all the quotations are taken from the 1996 Bosnian edition of the work and rendered into English anew.

Moreover, with his enthusiasm for Spengler's *Decline of the West*, Alija Izetbegović introduces into his *Islam between East and West* a distant echo of messianism and an indication of an Islamic renaissance. It cannot be a coincidence that Izetbegović chose verses<sup>3</sup> by Muhammad Iqbal (2011, 56) from his *Javid-nama* as the motto of his work which serves the same or at least a similar purpose for which Spengler (1926, 140) chose Goethe's verses.<sup>4</sup>

On many pages of *Islam between East and West* we can detect quite a strong wish by Izetbegović to make room for distant echoes of Spengler's ideas from *Decline of the West*.

The structure of Izetbegović's *Islam between East and West* does not permit a simple walk through its pages because on the pages of this work the author tries to do many things, with varying degrees of success. First, occasionally -or, better to say, rarely- he confronts what he considers to be "Islam" or "true Islam" with the state of Muslims in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. There is no need to stress that Izetbegović saw the state of Muslims as despicable, wretched, and miserable. Second, in this work Izetbegović confronts his views about Islam with the then prevailing Socialist and Communist systems in the world, particularly in the hemisphere in which the USSR had a leading word. Third, Izetbegović confronts his understanding and interpretation of Islam with the current, ideologically aided trends in natural and social science (or what used to be considered valid scientific methods, trends and findings) such as Evolutionism, Darwinism, Biologism, etc. Izetbegović offers his, often powerful, but in many places also a simplified critique of Darwinism and Evolutionism (in the field of natural sciences) and of Marxism (in the field of social sciences and theories). Fourth, his *Islam Between East and*

---

<sup>3</sup> The verses by Muhammad Iqbal are: "Though it is out of the East that the sun rises showing itself bold and bright, without a veil, only then it burns and blazes with inward fire when it escapes from the shackles of East and West; drunk with splendour it springs up out of its East that it may subject all horizons to its mastery; its nature is innocent of both East and West, though relationship-wise, true, it is an Easterner."

<sup>4</sup> The verses borrowed by Oswald Spengler from Goethe are: "In the Endless, self-repeating flows for evermore The Same. Myriad arches, springing, meeting, hold at rest the mighty frame. Streams from all things love of living, grandest star and humblest clod. All the straining, all the striving is eternal peace in God."

*West* contains also many successful pages on, tentatively speaking, philosophy and theory of culture, science, law, aesthetics and ethics. One should particularly highlight the passages dedicated to culture and civilization, morals and utopia, society and community, morals and religion, drill and upbringing, art and religion, art and science, religion and revolution, and so on.

There are tens of pages in the book on which there is not a single mention of *Islam, Muslims, the Qur'an* and such like. The link between those pages with the main topic of the book (and its topic is the same as title, *Islam Between East and West*) needs to be deduced from Izetbegović's allusions, headwords, views, in fact from his overall philosophy with which *Islam Between East and West* as well as his other works are infused.

As a follower of functional dualism (as we have seen, most of his essays bear "dualist" titles or subtitles: Culture and Civilization, Moral and Utopia, Society and Community, Morals and Religion, Drill and Upbringing, Art and Religion, Art and Science, Religion and Revolution, etc), even when he writes about these "secular" themes, in the back of Izetbegović's mind there is an intention to offer the reader "Islam as the solution", "Islam as the middle path", or at least to offer what he regards to be the "Islamic view", or the "Islamic outlook" of things from his contemporariness. Thus, Izetbegović's dualism in these places has only functional nature. However, sometimes this "dualist method" takes better of the author and the very essence of what he wants to present in the book, resulting in affectation and a reductionist observation of Islamic topics.

## **II - An ideological discourse about Islam**

*Islam Between East and West* enjoys exceptional importance in Izetbegović's oeuvre and thought in general, and in his Islamic thought, especially within the framework and context of his views on the "political philosophy of Islam".

In this work Izetbegović displays a degree of knowledge about the Muslim literature of reformist and modernist provenance written at the

end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially of Muslim schools of thought in Europe, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey, Algeria, Morocco, as well as of local reformers in the Balkans. Izetbegović did not know the Arabic language. He derived reformist and modernist ideas and theories of Muslim schools of thought from Egypt and other Arab countries indirectly, through sources in English and French. He gained his insights into Arab, Turkish and Indo-Pakistani currents in contemporary Islam mainly via English and French, and by way of translations from Turkish, German and Arabic into Bosnian.

*Islam Between East and West* is a good and even a useful proof that it has always been possible in Islamic history to offer a provocative, an effective and an intellectual answer to the call of Islamic universalism even when the author in question is not familiar with traditional Islamic sciences. Of course, this method exposes its authors to various risks, the biggest of which is what Edward Said calls "essentializing" the subject under consideration. On the pages of *Islam Between East and West* one often comes across an "Islam" which is completely essentialized, ahistorical, general, experientially elusive. Besides, such an Islam is emotional, too.

The reason for this is that Alija Izetbegović's Islamic thought was formed during ideologically fragile times and around the cluster of modernist and reformist ideas which were conceived among Muslim and Islamic thinkers of different hues and who were among the first to become dedicated to studying the consequences of the arrival of the mighty West into Islamic world in the shape of colonial and neocolonial powers: England, France, Holland, Portugal, Spain, etc. Those Muslim thinkers (who, but in different ways, were all concerned with questions such as: What has happened to us, Muslims? Why did the Western powers conquer us? What is to be done? What is the place of Islam today?, etc<sup>5</sup>) were by origin from Europe, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey, Algeria, Morocco, etc. These thinkers, reformers, modernists, revivalists from

---

<sup>5</sup> It is sufficient to open any Islamic or Muslim magazine or newspaper to find texts which are still entitled with *What is to be done?* See, for example, Muzafar Iqbal, "Challenges to Islam and Muslims: What is to be done?", in *Islamic Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4, Islamabad, 2003, p. 595 and further).

India, later Pakistan, persons like Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928), Muhammad Iqbal (1870-1979), Abu Ala al-Maududi (1903-1979), then the thinkers, reformers, modernists and revivalists from Egypt such as: Muhammad Abduhu (1849-1905), Rashid Rida,<sup>6</sup> Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), and many others, produced rich literature on the topic of *der Islam in der Gegenwart* (Islam in the contemporary age), as Germans would say, i.e. with profiling a Muslim concept of the present, as Nerkez Smailagić would say (1927-1987).

Just as the geographical origins of the above-mentioned thinkers of contemporary Islam are different, so are their views on the role of Islam in the modern age.<sup>7</sup> But, their intellectual and theoretical efforts may be synthesized into several postulates and summarized into several points, which they offered with the aim of liberating Muslims from their own inertia (internally) and West's dominance (in the shape of Capitalism and Socialism externally) as follows:

- The Islamic belief needs to be rationalized.
- It is necessary to liberalize Sharia law.
- Islamic social institutions (khalifa, khilafat, ijma', etc.) need to be substituted with something else, eg. an all-Islamic league of nations, a council of scholars, a council of people's representatives, and such like.
- Muslim societies must become emancipated and it is particularly necessary to initiate emancipation of the Muslim woman.
- It is necessary to view classical theological systems not as eternally binding interpretations of Islam, but as examples of interpretations from the past. Classical interpretations have only

---

<sup>6</sup> Besides Muhammad 'Abduhu and Rashid Rida (died 1935) one should add their teacher Jamal al-din al-Afghani (1838 -1897), who was active in Persia, Ottoman Empire, France, England, Russia and especially in Egypt within the school of thought known as *al-Manar* (the Lighthouse).

<sup>7</sup> A good and systematic review of teachings and theories expounded by these authors may be found in: Fikret Karčić, *Društveno-pravni aspekt islamskog reformizma* [Social and Legal Aspect of Islamic Reformism], Fakultet islamskih nauka, Sarajevo, 1990.

secondary importance for providing fresh and contemporary interpretations of Islam through the methodology of *ijtihad*.

- Ulama have become priest-like and there is no priesthood in Islam. Thus, it is necessary to deny ulama the monopoly over the "symbolic treasure of Islam".<sup>8</sup>

All these postulates have brought about a new kind of discourse which may be designated as an "ideologized Islam." There are many examples and passages of Alija Izetbegović's discourse showing an ideologized form of Islam.

In forming his Islamic thought Alija Izetbegović refers not only to the ideas and opinions of Muslim reformist, modernist and revivalist authors, but in the same measure, and even more than that, to European existentialist philosophers and Western theoreticians, philosophers of culture and history, and often to Soviet scientists and theoreticians, as well as to writers of various ideological and scholarly persuasions and from various scholarly disciplines. His referring to scientific discoveries was the fashionable with many Islamic theoreticians during the 19th and 20th centuries, but interpretation of sacred texts in the context of fashionable scientific discoveries proved, sooner or later, forced and unsuccessful. This is seen in the huge production that belongs to modernist and reformist Islamic thinking and there is no doubt that Izetbegović's *Islam between East and West* belongs to this type of thinking, too.

### **III - When did Izetbegović write *Islam between East and West*?**

This question is important and it is good to raise it and to try to answer it based on facts. Besides, it is particularly significant to give documented answers, because the time in which Alija Izetbegović wrote *Islam between East and West* will help us understand better the ideas and the thought structure of the work. It will enable us to review critically his views and to understand the context in which he wrote it.

---

<sup>8</sup> The expression "monopoly over the symbolic treasure of Islam" is taken from Muhammad Arkoun.

After considering a number of facts which mutually support and confirm each other one can affirm with certainty that Izetbegović wrote most chapters of this work in the late 1960s, during the 1970s and early 1980s, and that he then amended and polished them. If we use the method of "textual evidence" (or evidence from the author's text itself) one can conclude that Izetbegović wrote its main themes and completed and updated its units mainly between 1965 and 1980. The early 1980s he used almost exclusively for improving and polishing the text.

In an attempt to precisely date various chapters in *Islam between East and West* our best guide is the author and the information he gives in the book. There is no reason not to believe his words such as, for example, "recently stated" (before quoting the source and the year); or Izetbegović's wording "as I am writing this" (followed by the year in which he wrote it in brackets), etc. This information provided by Izetbegović is the best evidence of the time of writing, i.e. the dating of various chapters of the book.

For example, in the chapter entitled "Historical Compromise" and Social Democracy, he writes:

As I am writing this (1977) Spain is preparing for her first free elections. According to some forecasts, Spanish people will this time opt for the centre, for the first time in history. If this happens, both the leftist and rightist dogmatics should draw a lesson from the Spanish example"(Izetbegović, 1996, 338).

The chapter which Izetbegović (1996) alludes to with the words "as I am writing this" is chapter 11 entitled the "*Third Path*" *Outside Islam*. If he wrote it in 1977, this would probably mean that he wrote the first 10 chapters (or most of the first 10 chapters) earlier. This is easy to prove, too. For instance, In chapter 1 "Evolution and Creation", sub-section 3 ("Dualism of the Living World") Izetbegović (1996) refers to the opinion of, as he puts it, "perhaps the greatest living biologist today" Jean Rostand who says that "at the present moment we do not know what life is..." (57). But on the same page he adds a footnote in which he tersely states that the biologist Jean Rostand "died in 1977". This note suggests indirectly that Chapter 1 of "Evolution and Creation", and its third sub-



section ("Dualism of the Living world") were written a couple of years or months before the death of Jean Rostand in 1977.

Also, on page 340, on which he analyses specific tension in relations between Marxist-Communist and the religious Catholic forces and currents in France and the possible ways of overcoming that tension, Izetbegović (1996) writes:

Recently (1977) the Permanent Council of the French Episcopate issued a special declaration entitled 'Marxism, Man and the Christian Faith'. In it French bishops note 'the failure of Social policy of liberalism' before finally concluding that 'Marxism contains part of the truth which we are not ignoring' (340).

One can clearly see from this passage that it was written in 1977, since the author himself affirms so.

Also, speaking of his view of the Muslim countries "gaining the independence of mind and political independence" Izetbegović reveals when it was that he intended to send his book for publication. He says in one of the footnotes:

When this book was under preparation for publication, two great Muslim countries, Iran and Pakistan, cancelled their membership in the pro-Western CENTO pact. Earlier, Indonesia, Sudan and Somalia thwarted attempts to become drawn into an ideological domination by the Eastern Block (Izetbegović, 1996, 27).

In order to resolve the question of "when this book was under preparation for publication" it is necessary to know when Iran and Pakistan cancelled their membership in the CENTO Pact. It is a general view that the CENTO Pact<sup>9</sup> ceased to exist in 1979 following the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution. It follows from this that some time during 1979 Izetbegović prepared (or was preparing) his book for publication.

---

<sup>9</sup> CENTO was a military and political alliance established in 1955 by Turkey, UK, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan. Its headquarters were in Baghdad under the official name Middle East Organization. In the diplomatic and journalistic parlance it was also known as the Baghdad Pact. Iraq withdrew from the alliance so that its seat was moved to Ankara in 1959, when it became known as CENTO pact. USA joined it. After the victory of Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 CENTO lost its purpose.

On page 339 Izetbegović, indirectly again, reveals when he wrote (or proof-read) the book by saying:

Pope John Paul II has recently (during his visit to USA in 1979) stated that 'a systematic threat to man's right is linked to the distribution of material goods.' Only he who is familiar with the real nature of Christianity can judge what kind of a shift this statement signifies (Izetbegović, 1996, 339).

In some other places Izetbegović also passingly informs his readers about when he wrote a chapter or a passage of his *Islam Between East and West*. These places suggest the time context for the emergence of this work, which is of great importance for its analysis.

If one takes all these facts into account, it is no longer necessary to stress the ambiguity of the statement by Bakir Izetbegović, the son of Alija Izetbegović, that *Islam between East and West* was written in 1945, i.e. when Alija Izetbegović was 20 years old. In his statement for the Dnevni Avaz of 17 July 2004, Bakir Izetbegović is reported to have said this:

My father wrote the books *Islamic Declaration* and *Islam Between East and West* when he was very young, when he was 20. He always used to read and write a lot... (Sarač, 2004, 3).

It is possible that Bakir Izetbegović thought that in 1945 the young Alija Izetbegović, as a 20 year old, conceived major contours of his ideas which he would put to paper later, but his claim that Alija Izetbegović wrote those works at that time is not at all defensible.

After all, for the sake of putting to rest this controversy about when Alija Izetbegović really wrote *Islam between East and West*, let us refer to a kind of Izetbegović's samizdat, i.e. an edition of this work prepared by Alija Izetbegović himself. For, after the Belgrade edition of *Islam between East and West* was published in 1988 (the very first edition of the work in Bosnian), there appeared the second edition in 1990, this time in Sarajevo. In this 1990-edition of the book it is neatly stated that the publisher is Alija Izetbegović, the reviewers are Dr Predrag Matvejević and Dr Muhamed Filipović while language editing was made by Džemal Latić. The edition was published by Uniprint from Sarajevo (Izetbegović, 1990). On the back cover one can read a clear statement:

The manuscript of *Islam between East and West* was completed in 1975 and, in a way, it represents an anticipation of the renaissance of Islam and the current events in the Islamic world.

As expressed, this statement is not valid, either. For, on the pages of the same samizdat, i.e. the first Sarajevo edition of the book from 1990, on whose back cover one can read that the manuscript of *Islam between East and West* was completed in 1975, Alija Izetbegović quotes a statement from someone called Simle who reportedly said at a congress of archaeologists in 1976 in Nice:

Even cave people suffered 70,000 years BCE from 'metaphysical dizziness', a disease of the modern man (Izetbegović, 1990, 30).

If the manuscript was really completed in 1975, then it could not have included allusions to later events, that is, those after 1975, even with the most refined metaphysical intervention.

As we could see from the above mentioned quotes from Izetbegović himself, and from many passages taken *ad verbatim* from *Islam between East and West*, Izetbegović often refers to events which took place in 1977, 1978, and 1979. All this casuistry ("when did Alija Izetbegović really write *Islam between East and West*") should be put an end to with a rhetorical question: if the manuscript was completed in 1975, how come it addresses events taking place in 1977, 1978, and 1979?

The only sound answer is that the work originated in the late 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. Of course, the ideas expressed in the work could have matured in Izetbegović's mind earlier and may have even been already written down in some form or shape. But the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s are the "axial time" of Izetbegović writing *Islam between East and West*. Let's add that the early 1980s were the time when the author regularly went back to the text, the time of brushing and polishing its many passages.

In an attempt to save the author from the mistake and inconsistency of this note from the last page of the samizdat edition of *Islam Between East and West* from 1990, one can say that the author of the note probably wanted to say that the work's key themes and ideas were articulated, completed, and written down in 1975. As any responsible author would

do, Izetbegović later worked on his manuscript, returned to it, refined it, occasionally expanded it, and updated it with additional data.

#### **IV – Which “East” and which “West” in *Islam Between East and West*?**

It is possible to say that the title of *Islam between East and West* remained only briefly true to the reality it aimed to address. In other words, already by 1990 the title and the bulk of the work was already out of fashion in relation to the mind-boggling changes in the ideological and politico-geographic realities of the previous bi-polar division of the world into Socialist “East” and the capitalist “West.”

Of course, this argument is meaningful only if by “East” Izetbegović meant the Socialist east, and by “West” the capitalist West.<sup>10</sup>

In this regard, there is one among many facts indicating that Izetbegović knew that after the first edition of the book in Serbo-Croat (let us recall: Belgrade, biblioteka NOVA, 1988)<sup>11</sup> many ideological, political and politico-geographical facts and “constants” in the world had changed. If we cannot believe we can at least assume that Izetbegović realized the need to occasionally intervene and change an outdated terminology, nomenclature or data given in the work. However, this was done only rarely.

By comparing Serbo-Croat, English, Arabic and several Bosnian editions of the work it is clear that Izetbegović did not change the content of the book. As we know, after 1991 the USSR no longer existed on the world's political map. But, in spite of the planetary important fact of the USSR's disappearance, Izetbegović left the USSR in the later Bosnian editions of

---

<sup>10</sup> As it is known, Berlin Wall fell in 1990, USSR disappeared in 1991, Communist cover was gone and the revival of religious tradition within Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism in the area took place. (It is interesting that even in the 1996 edition Izetbegović did not feel the need to point out the possible lack of currency of the book title. It is hard to know his reasons, but it is possible to suggest that East (Socialist block) means and designates materialism, while West signifies individualism, and even religious individualism).

<sup>11</sup> The publishers of this edition were Bakir Izetbegović and Slobodan Mašić. Its printing was completed in November

*Islam Between East and West* without even adding the prefix “the former” (Izetbegović, 1996, 134-136). Also, in the editions from 1995 and 1996 Izetbegović mentions “West Germany” even though the country ceased to exist following the unification of two German states after 1990 (1996, 112).

One can also note that the 1996 edition of the work the Socialist Yugoslavia is described as “the former”! If one briefly compares two editions of *Islam between East and West*, the Belgrade edition of 1988 and the Sarajevo edition of 1996 (by Svjetlost), one can observe precisely this change.

For, when speaking of an incredibly high and worrying increase in suicides, depression and alcoholism and “similar diseases and vices of the modern developed world” Izetbegović (1988) says: “In Yugoslavia, for example, the number of alcoholics and suicides is literally comparable to the level of [the country’s] development” (81).

Nevertheless, in the Sarajevo edition from 1996 in this passage Yugoslavia became the “former Yugoslavia” (Izetbegović, 1996, 111).

Consequently, it is not clear why Izetbegović did not intervene in several Bosnian editions of the work in the same way and refresh the facts of the new editions when it came to the states of former USSR, West Germany, etc. Throughout the whole book of *Islam between East and West* in all editions from 1995 and 1996 the USSR always remains USSR, regardless of the fact that the USSR became “former” in 1991 when it was transformed into the Commonwealth of Independent States. The Arabic edition of the work published in Munich in 1994 by Bavaria Verlag & Handel GmbH, i.e. at a time when USSR was no more, the translators left the old state of matters as written by Izetbegović and as appeared in the first, Belgrade edition of the work! (It is hard to know the reasons for Izetbegović not updating the later editions of the work and for not refreshing and renewing them in terms of facts, as already said. One can only assume that he thought that the external collapse of USSR in 1991 did not necessarily amount to the state of affairs this polity comprised or left behind as political legacy, etc, in other words that “the death of the

goat did not stop the unpleasant smell of goat-meat", as the folk saying goes.

This concern as to why the author described Yugoslavia with the word "former" and did not do the same for the USSR (and why there was no note explaining reasons for publishing the work in an unchanged format) is not mere hair-splitting, but an attempt to give an accurate meaning to the words "East" and "West" not only in *Islam Between East and West*, but also in his thinking and ideas about Islam.

It is difficult to shed an impression that Izetbegović had in mind (very often) precisely the materialist/Socialist "East" and the religious/Capitalist "West", since such a bipolar division of the world follows from Izetbegović's words at the very beginning of the work:

Modern world is under the sign of a sharp ideological conflict which has lasted for years... (Izetbegović, 1996, 15).

What else could the "ideological conflict" mean if not "the conflict between Socialism and Capitalism" to which Izetbegović was a witness for decades and which made him (because he lived in the Socialist hemisphere) an intellectual in exile, a thinker under siege, an exiled pen!

Of course, it is quite necessary here to take into account the possibility that under "East" Izetbegović meant the several thousand years old "mystical", "Magian", "far eastern", "Zen Buddhist" East, while by the "West" he meant the "rational", "technical", "enlightening", "materialist" and "secular" West, which experienced its rise in the wake of Humanism and Renaissance and the bourgeoisie revolutions, especially after the 18th century. Nevertheless, Izetbegović was aware that his use of the terms "East" and "West" applies more to *religio-philosophical* than to *politico-geographical* classification of the world. But there are many pages in the book in which "East" and "West" mean nothing more than politico-geographical distinction and division of the world during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps because he saw in it an unchangeable constant of the world Izetbegović did not consider it necessary to explain the title of his book in any detail.

Be it as it may, Izetbegović thought that the bipolar division of the world offered him a rare chance to interpret the position of Islam as the

mediating, as the central, as the synthesizing. As a matter of fact, the accent in the title of the book is on Islam which is in between East and West. This at the same time means that the Islam as seen by Izetbegović has neither its east nor its west, because Islam –as he sees it– has not turned into an ideological bloc. The step towards Islam's transformation into an "ideological bloc" is something Izetbegović indicates, something he wishes and wants to see happen. He calls that block "the third way" which consists (at least in some of the passages) in the synthesis and in the softening of "West" and "East."

If we take the very title of the book, the words "Islam Between East and West" reveal a spirit of times, but also a spiritual disposition of the author in whose mind the ideas for this work emerged and matured. It is possible that long ago, in the prime of his youth, Izetbegović took the view that in our Muslim and Islamic interpretations Islam should be positioned as a "religion in between", that is to say, "religion of the middle position", as a teaching, a set of principles, beliefs, institutions and ideas which "find their place between Judaism and Christianity". This is a great theme of his *Islam Between East and West* which Izetbegović tries to prove.

However, the title of the work also reveals Izetbegović's admission that Islam in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s was (or maybe it still is?) placed between "East" and "West". It is not necessary to mention that not only the title, but the whole book *Islam Between East and West* is meant to offer a view or many views of the position and role of Islam in the context of the "sharp ideological conflict" between "East and West" in which the modern world lives.

Modern world is under the sign of a sharp ideological conflict which has been going on for years and whose end is difficult to see. One way or another, we are all involved in the conflict, be it as actors or as victims. What is the place of Islam in this gigantic confrontation? Does it have a role to play in shaping today's world? (Izetbegović, 1996, 15).

There is no need to beat about the bush, since Izetbegović did not do it either, and one should say that *Islam Between East and West* openly offers a solution for overcoming this "sharp ideological conflict". For

Izetbegović Islam itself is that synthesizing solution.<sup>12</sup> In his opinion the world of Islam in the contemporary world is not ideologically engaged, or ideologically drained, or engrossed in the "sharp ideological conflict". In this regard he says:

However, one part of the world is not embraced by this polarization, and its majority consists of Muslim countries. This phenomenon is not a coincidence. Muslim peoples feel that they have nothing to look for in the current ideological conflict and even when they cannot formulate an active position; they take the position of non-belonging (Izetbegović, 1996, 27).

Only the naive could think that with these words Izetbegović wanted personally to be a witness as "an ideologue of non-aligned movement" from the shadows. It would not be right to interpret his view expressed in *Islam Between East and West* about "Muslim world not belonging" during that giant polarization (as Izetbegović imagined it: "West/Capitalism/religion - East/Socialism/materialism") in the context of the then Non-Aligned Movement. That would be a shallow understanding of the book.

But, it also does not mean that Izetbegović thoroughly checked the soundness of his position when he said that "Muslim peoples feel that they have nothing to look for in the current ideological conflict." It is possible that he is partly right in saying the "Muslim peoples", but one could not say the same for the majority of Muslim regimes and political systems which largely took sides with one or the other bloc in the "ideological conflict" during the second half of the 20th century.<sup>13</sup> After all, even in the capitalist West it was not the peoples who became capitalists, but these were capitalist systems and regimes, just as in the age of Socialism in Eastern Europe only the regimes and systems were Socialist, not the peoples!

---

<sup>12</sup> Here we recall the contemporary Egyptian theoretician Muhammad 'Immara and his work "Hal al-Islamu huwa al-hallu" [Is Islam the solution?], Dar al-shuruq, Cairo, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Most of member state in the Non-aligned movement were Muslim, but for some non-alignment was just cosmetics. In most Muslim countries one quite clearly know if the governing regime was pro-American or pro-Soviet.



Hence, Izetbegović leaves aside the fact that during 20th century (especially during its second half) many Muslim regimes accepted not only Capitalism, but Socialism, too, and even Communism as their political platform and ideology. Hundreds of books were published and countless PhD dissertations written and defended on the so-called "Islamic Socialism", "Arab Socialism", etc.<sup>14</sup> Out of courtesy and for diplomatic reasons the writer of this essay will not name Muslim countries which had or still have veritable Communist regimes, Marxist or Maoist military juntas and one party systems in power and which, in accordance with their interpretation of Socialism and Marxism, perpetrated all the crimes against their own people that Stalin, Pol Pot and others did, too. There are known cases, which are sadly not isolated, of those who serviced such Muslim regimes and who destroyed and obliterated Muslim or other populations of entire lands! (Let us recall that USA claims to have launched its intervention in Iraq in 2003 partly because the Ba'athist Saddam Hussein had been mercilessly exterminating Kurds and Shiites. Regardless of this American claim born by the perspective of eyes made misty by shedding crocodile tears, it is not difficult to see from the relevant literature that many Muslim regimes and system in the 20th century were quite cruel and that they justified their cruelty with Socialism, Marxism and Communism). It was precisely Islam as religion, as culture and civilization, a traditional Islam, which became the first victim of Muslim regimes in the 20th century and their "five year plans", the regimes which took Communism and Socialism as their political platform.

In *Islam Between East and West* Izetbegović did not pay the necessary and realistic attention to that big problem of the so-called "Arab" and the so-called "Islamic Socialism". In the absence of experience and of being intellectually well-informed about the cruelties of "Arab" and "Islamic" socialism, Izetbegović enthusiastically wrote the following lines:

---

<sup>14</sup> Even the Islamic Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia published Roger Garaudy's book *Islam, Culture and Socialism* (translated by Dr. Ahmed Smajlović) in 1981 in which Socialism is occasionally praised and Islam is largely seen as being "Socialist" by nature!

The absence or failure of Marxist revolutions in Muslim countries is not a coincidence. Islam has its own Marxism. The Qur'an has retained something of the bitter realism of the Old Testament, and Marxism in Europe is a compensation or substitute for the Jewish, Old Testament component which the Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Christianity completely squeezed out (Izetbegović, 1996, 253).

Here historical facts are not in agreement with Izetbegović, nor are the clearly visible realities of many parts of Muslim world during second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Arab and Muslim world have the experience of not only the "present", but sadly also of "successful" Marxist revolutions! The Arabic word *thawrah* (ثَوْرَة) means precisely rebellion, that is, "revolution". Ba'athist regimes used the term to describe their military coups when they seized power in, for example, Syria and Iraq. In imitation of Russians, Chinese and other "brotherly Socialist peoples" they called these bloody takeovers Socialist revolutions! Many Marxist classics were translated into Arabic under the sponsorship of those Marxist regimes. Many Muslim countries saw the emergence of fierce opposition to Marxist and Socialist revolutions in the form of domestic, seemingly home-grown counterpoint – "Islamic revolution" (*al-thawrah al-islamiyyah* – الثَوْرَة ُ الْإِسْلَامِيَّة ُ)! "Islamic revolution" took as its platform neither Marxism, nor Leninism, but one or more forms of an ideologized Islam.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, one should take into account Izetbegović's love for Muslim countries (no less shared by the writer of this essay), but there is no reliable basis for Izetbegović's idealization of the Muslim world when it comes to exporting Marxist and Socialist revolutions and regimes there, because Muslim world was neither innocent, not immune to Socialism and Communism, or Capitalism for that matter. To be sure, there are differences of intensity, but Communist and Marxist regimes in the Muslim world acted according to the principle of "a chip off the old block"! Like their models in Moscow, Beijing and elsewhere they, too, set

---

<sup>15</sup> On the phenomenon of Islamic revolution as a counter-point and counter-movement to Marxism and Socialist in Muslim countries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century see: Enes Karić, *Kur'an u savremenom dobu, I- II* [the Qur'an in the Modern Age], El-Kalem & BKC, Sarajevo, 1997. See also: Enes Karić, *Tumačenje Kur'ana i ideologije XX stoljeća* [the Qur'an Interpretation and Ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century], Bemust, Sarajevo, 2002.

up concentration camps for the opposition, intellectuals, minority leaders, etc.

Traditional Islamic ulama and pro-Muslim secular intellectuals were particularly hit hard by these regimes. Sayyid Qutb, whom Izetbegović mentions in *Islam between East and West* in several places with respect (1996, 248), was hanged by a Socialist regime, the Nasserite regime of Egypt.<sup>16</sup>

The fact that Capitalist experiments in the Muslim world, just as Socialist and Communist ones, were more benign in comparison with their parent countries: the capitalism of the West and the socialism of the former Soviet and Chinese East. Due to their lack of atomic and nuclear weapons these experiments were not given special attention in the prevailing political constellation in the world. But this does not mean that Muslim world resisted the temptations of Capitalism, Marxism and Socialism.

It has already been noted that in much of his book Izetbegović offers Islam as an alternative to the "world's division into blocs". Izetbegović's offer is not shallow, it is not inspired by the political philosophy of Non-Aligned Movement, but by an enthusiastic view of Islam as "ideologically independent, uninvolved" factor and therefore, a synthesizing force in the contemporary world which can overcome the idealism of religion and the atheism of materialism.

All this non-engagement of the Muslim world is not only political. Everywhere it is followed by an equally determined demand for rejecting foreign models and influences, both from East and from West. In fact, Islam is ideologically independent, ideologically unengaged. It is so by its very definition. This is a matter of a natural and legal state of things (Izetbegović, 1996, 27).

We have already seen that Izetbegović's statement about non-involvement of Muslim peoples (and especially the regimes) in their own projects of capitalism and socialism during 20th century is questionable. There is no need to go back to this. But one takes his statement to mean that his view of the bipolar division of the world was derived (and in his

---

<sup>16</sup> Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Naser had Sayyid Qutb put on trial and hanged in

1966.

case, fueled) by the then division of the world in to capitalist West and Socialist/Communist East.

It follows from the previous quote that Izetbegović identifies Islam with the Muslim world. He says: "Islam is ideologically independent, ideologically unengaged". Indeed, if one takes the Islam of the Qur'an and Hadith, the Islam of the early centuries, one could agree with Izetbegović.

But, it is clear that by "Islam" Izetbegović means "Muslims" and, based on the rich body of evidence on which to form a view, they were not ideologically unengaged either in the 20<sup>th</sup> century or today. But this is a topic for another study.

Be it as it may, Izetbegović, having argued that Islam was "unengaged" adds that:

Islam does not have to see its chance in negating or destroying either of these two worlds. Its superiority comes from its capacity to recognize their portions of truth and justice. Global contradictions, of which the existing blocs are historical expressions, may be overcome only by building a third world... (Izetbegović, 1996, 27).

It is clear from these words that Izetbegović was not primarily a revolutionary type of man, since he is not in favor of "destroying either capitalist West or Socialist East." He is in favor of (their) synthesis, he is a synthesizer, and it is in such a context and direction that he interprets Islam:

At a time when it is becoming clear that the ideologies in conflict in their extreme form cannot impose themselves on mankind and that they must strive towards a synthesis, a middle position, we want to show how Islam is harmoniously linked to this natural course of human thought, accepting it, encouraging it and gradually becoming their most consistent and complete expression (Izetbegović, 1996, 27).

Hence, Islam is harmoniously linked to a natural course of thought, as Izetbegović says, and among the "natural courses of human thought" he counts religion and materialism, two poles, two confronting positions which Islam - as he sees it - can reconcile and bring about their synthesis.

Izetbegović was fairly convinced that Islam is the unity of "religion and materialism", that is the position he takes in the book from the first to

the last page. He thought that with its synthesizing potential Islam could contribute to surmounting the "the world's division into blocs", the globe's split into "capitalist West" and "socialist East."

Islam not only recognizes the truth of Socialism and Christianity, but even insists on it. For, if Socialism is a lie, then Islam is not a complete truth either. To demonstrate the trueness of Islam means at the same time to demonstrate the trueness of Socialism and Christianity and the imperfection of their truth (Izetbegović, 1996, 27).

If we understand Izetbegović well, religion/Christianity is true (but only half-way); materialism/Socialism is also true (half-way), whereas Islam, being a synthesis of religion and materialism (i.e. a synthesis of their external forms, Christianity and Socialism) is whole and, *ipso facto*, an encompassing truth!

Izetbegović presents variations of this argument several times in *Islam between East and West*. It is interesting that he never subjects this position to critical examination. For example, he does not ask the following question: is it islamically sound to derive Islam's foundations from a pair (Christianity and Islam) from something which, after all, is outside Islam? He does not want to ask, even as a possibility, this question: is it necessary to seek confirmation of Islam outside Islam?

Also, what if Socialism as a human-made ideological construct disappears, but Christianity survives? On what basis are we then going to reach the synthesis, Islam?

Izetbegović delays these questions and does not ask them straight away. Other Muslim reformers, revivalists and modernists of the 20th century did not ask them either, even at the methodological level of checking their premises and conclusions in various fields of research and activity. They often expressed their opinion only at the level of principle (In this context and with these distinguishing features of a principled and at the same time engaged presentation of arguments Izetbegović's Islamic thought ranks among the summits of Muslim revivalist, reformist and modernist literature. In terms of presenting arguments in the form of principles Izetbegović's book can stand shoulder to shoulder with the works of Sayyid Qutb, Abu Ala Maududi, Hasan al-Banna and others. In this regard Izetbegović must be given credit).

For better or worse, the world's duality, the dualist division of the modern world into blocs which Izetbegović lived through in the second half of the 20th century fascinated him to the extent that everywhere he saw dualism of various forms. Thus one can find hundreds of places in the book in which Izetbegović reaches the results of his thinking, or at least wants to reach them, only by way of a construed dualism.

Whatever Izetbegović writes in *Islam between East and West*, there is somewhere in the background of his thinking a dualism of various forms. For him even tawhid, the key term in Islam, is a mere synthesis reached via dualism, that is to say, dualism of religion and materialism disappears through a process of synthesis and with its vanishing and disappearance there emerges Islamic tawhid! For example, just as man is "unity of spirit and body", so Islam is "a permanent quest for a state of internal and external equilibrium:"

For the future and for man's practical attempts, Islam means a call for creating man as the carrier of body and soul and society whose laws and social and political institutions will be established in way that upholds their harmony not undermine it. Islam is, or ought to be, a permanent quest in the flow of history, for a state of internal and external equilibrium. In any case, there is no demand more natural and whose possibilities have been less examined or tested. This goal stands before Islam today and in it is its specific historical task in years to come (Izetbegović, 1996, 26).

Although Izetbegović was a good stylist, typically Socialist expressions left a visible mark on his language: "call to create a man", "socio-political institutions", "specific historic task", etc. Islam has never meant a call for "creating a man...", but it has meant, among many other things, call to bring up and refine man, etc. Also, Islamic tawhid has always (at the level of methodology of *ilm al-kalam*) meant a *unity of plurality*, not a *unity of duality*, as Izetbegović wants to demonstrate. For, Islam does not signify a synthesis of two opposites of a dualism (Islamic theology or *ilm al-kalam*, the main schools of jurisprudence in Islam, and Sufism, too, without exception have sought to explain during the 14 centuries of historical Islam that *tawhid is the unity of plurality*. Given that Izetbegović belonged to a trend in thinking which greatly disputed the achievements of *ilm al-kalam*, ulama and Sufism, he was bound by the

preliminary nature of his thinking about Islamic monotheism to fall into reductionism).

In concluding this section let us say that in the main, Izetbegović regarded "West" in the title of his book to mean religious, Christian, capitalist West. "East" is materialist, atheist, socialist East (USSR, China, etc). For the purposes of his study he often expresses the duality of opposites, "East" vs "West" into symbols of opposition and confrontation:

- a) religion vs. materialism
- b) upbringing vs. drill,
- c) dramas vs. utopia,
- d) reformation vs. revolution,
- e) cult vs. tools,
- f) intentions vs. deeds, etc.

Everywhere Izetbegović tries to retain this dualism, which is so characteristic not only of his style of writing, but of his thinking also.

#### **V - Which "Islam" in *Islam between East and West*?**

This, too, is an important question, because Alija Izetbegović did not study Islam formally or systematically, nor – as already mentioned - did he know Arabic.

He did not graduate from a Bosnian madrasa or an Islamic or some other theological seminary. In terms of Islamic studies he was a "layman", but not a "secularist"! When it comes to his Islamic education, one can say that he was an industrious, hard-working and also a self-taught person. When Izetbegović writes books on Islam, he does not pretend to offer something ulama-like or theological. As we have seen, he does not hide this fact.

In his youth, within his intimate intellectual milieu of Young Muslims circle, Izetbegović came across literature that was emphatically anti-ulama and anti-mulla in orientation.

Such an orientation among some members of Young Muslims is understandable up to a point (and it was conditioned not only by the literature they were reading, but also by the spiritual temperament of the time!). At the time the thinking in Bosnia in the first half of the 20th century (and largely in the Islamic and Muslim world as a whole) was that reform and renaissance of religious and social life of Muslim peoples cannot come out of the ranks of the old, traditional, conservative and left-behind ulama.<sup>17</sup> In the first half of the 19th and early 20th century many works were written against traditional Islamic ulama. Muhammad Abduh, though himself an alim, was anti-ulama by inclination. Muhammad Iqbal wrote several passages against traditional and "inert" ulama. The Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt was and remained an opposition to the traditional ulama university of al-Azhar.<sup>18</sup> This anti-ulama outlook was the axiom for the then Islamic modernist and reformist literature which the young Alija Izetbegović fondly read. A book by Mehmedalija Metiljević (1934) *Islam u svjetlu istine* (Islam in the light of truth) was read with enthusiasm in the Young Muslims circles. This brief compendium of anti-ulama literature is the most famous work of the kind in Bosnian and it shaped and partly gave an anti-ulama slant to Izetbegović and many Young Muslims, but also some Bosnian Muslim youths and students who were outside the circle of Young Muslims.

Mehmedalija Metiljević is a type of an intellectual who had "secular" development and who appeared in Muslim societies in the first half of the 20th century. These intellectuals looked upon ulama thinking and casuistry as outdated, boring, inert, even anti-Islamic. Describing the "outdatedness" of ulama's Islamic thought, he says:

I was in the presence of some 'ulama' in which over an hour was spent discussing some special rules according to which the beard is to be sported and moustache clipped, and at the end of the discussion each of

---

<sup>17</sup> For a critical attitude towards ulama in the Muslim world see: Kate Zabiri, *Mahmud Shaltut and Islamic Modernism*, Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Highly instructive data about the position of ulama in the contemporary age may be found in: E. Sivan, *Ulama and Power*, in *Interpretations of Islam: Past and present*, Princeton, NJ, 1986. See also: N. Keddie, *Scholars, Saints and Sufis*, Los Angeles, 1972. The main topic of all these debates is "dethronement" of ulama in the Muslim world by Modernist and reformist intellectuals.



them had his own special proofs and special opinion regarding, in their view, such a momentous question (Metiljević, 1934, 8).

It is understandable that such casuistry and scholasticism of the ulama of the day (and sometimes today) put off young intellectuals with secular education. During the period between the two world wars many young people who came from what was still a traditional Muslims society went over to various ideologies, often communism, partly out of dissatisfaction with the unattractive and sterile interpretation of Islam by ulama and mullas. Some Muslim intellectuals and high school and university students who did not agree with the ulama interpretation of Islam were looking for their own path and chose "self-teaching", autodidacticism, as Metiljević says (1934, 9).

Revivalist, modernist and reformist literature on Islam which was slowly coming to Bosnia both from East and West was the staple reading for those young people. It was suffused with encouragement and enthusiasm, it liberated Islam from traditional limitations, and especially from the "inertia of ulama thinking", as it was often stressed. It was considered that its endlessly rehashed casuistry and scholasticism were draining fresh juices out of Islam and thus making it dead.

An opinion was gaining currency among a section of Bosnian Muslim youth and intellectuals at the time that Islam was being turned into a religion, while Islam was "not a religion only," but something "more". It was also held that those people, ulama, were increasingly becoming a caste, a theological one, which Islam never had and which was alien to its "original teachings." On this Metiljević wrote:

The recent spiritual generation of that /ulama/ class, in its spiritual arrogance, has a habit to call itself 'Islamic theologians' or 'specialist in interpreting Islam...' (Metiljević, 1934, 9).

Metiljević denies priesthood (*rahbaniyya*) and theology in Islam. He thinks that Islam should be freed from the shackles of ulama and mullas and their interpretation of religion. His *Islam in the Light of Truth* is sharply intoned against ulama, a class he calls

"... a cancer, which needs to be cured as fast and as radically as possible.

The previous methods by ulama have not proved efficient in practice, on the contrary, they are dangerous because with their illogicality and

inconsistency they can push [people] away from Islam. In front of their method there is always a better method of independent autodidacticism, with which one can still awaken much greater interests among many for the ever more through study of Islam and its principles..." (Metiljević, 1934, 11).

Alija Izetbegović in principle shares such views. In several interviews on TV and for newspapers he gave after 1994 Izetbegović frankly expressed his anti-ulama views of his youth.

Under the influence of Mehmedalija Metiljević and other authors of similar orientation Izetbegović quoted the Prophet Muhammad's saying: "There is no monkery in Islam - (لَا رَهْبَانِيَّةَ فِي الْإِسْلَامِ)" (Izetbegović, 1996, 275). Following from this, Izetbegović resolutely added:

"We should say clearly and openly: yes, Islam is in favor of a natural life and against ascetism" (Izetbegović, 1996, 275).

For this reason every mention of theology in *Islam Between East and West*, even one which legitimately grew out of the fold and tradition of Islamic learning, is nearly always given in a disparaging and negative context.

Izetbegović dismissively mentions his contemporaries among Bosnian ulama in the expression "our learned theologians" (Izetbegović, 1996, 261). For example, he states that:

...theological debates about zakat are limited to the question of how much should be given of what. But more important for the institution of zakat than percentages and numbers is the principle of solidarity... (Izetbegović, 1996, 260).

It is clear that Izetbegović here ignores the fact of a long and fruitful tradition of hundreds of classical Islamic works, such as al-Gazali's *Ihya ulum al-din*, for example. Such works not only interpret key functions of zakat, but also give due consideration to the solidarity component (which Izetbegović rightly emphasizes) as one of the *many social components* of zakat. Those classical works treat spiritual, social and other aspects of Islam in great detail, but they also address the need to see zakat as a primarily religious duty.

However, Izetbegović does not give up his opposition to theology. What is more, he considers theology to be impossible in the same way as he

considers art criticism impossible. This is how he questions in one sweep both art criticism and science of religion:

The impossibility of art criticism means for the same reasons the impossibility of theology in religion. (Faulkner compared critics with priests). There can be no science about religion. True religion and ethical issues can be expressed adequately by drama, theatre, novel. Gospel and Qur'an are not theological writings (Izetbegović, 1996, 154).

Nevertheless, although critically disposed towards ulama, little by little Izetbegović began doing in his *Islam between East and West* precisely what ulama were doing for centuries: *offering a rational apologia for Islam*. In this way his work took the burden of a special "theology of Islam" (regardless of whether Izetbegović recognized its teachings or not). Also, since his *Islam between East and West* constitutes a special critique of the state of Muslim part of mankind in the 20th century as a "Qur'an realized," by some of its deepest motives the work may be considered - theological. Because, just as Izetbegović gives a (reductionist) interpretation of Islamic "tawhid" as a synthesis which he reaches out of his contemporariness, a synthesis that stems from a procedure of unifying a duality called "religion and materialism", so did classical Muslim theologians take from their time (and their spiritual disposition) concepts from Greek or old Iranian philosophy and, having "Islamized" them, incorporated them legitimately into Islamic intellectual edifice. In brief, just as theology or *ilm al-kalam* was possible as a refined science forged through great intellectual efforts of classical Muslims to create a special theological meta-language with which to describe the teachings of their religion with the aim of explaining and defending them, in the same way the book *Islam Between East and West* was possible as an example of a contemporary apologia of Islam penned by an auto-didact.

Given that he did not study Islam systematically, one often finds (unintended) material mistakes and omissions in Izetbegović's works. For example, he quotes by distant meaning a saying of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh and when he tries to quote him literally one notes frequent (unintended) mistakes. For example, in *Islam Between East and West*, in the chapter "Islam and Religion" Izetbegović quotes (footnote no. 9) a saying of the Prophet as follows: "If you see an evil, remove it by

hand; if you cannot, condemn it by word or at least by thought, but this last is the smallest Islam" (Izetbegović, 1996, 264).

Of course, there is no hadith with this narration. It is recorded in the following form:

مَنْ رَأَى مِنْكُمْ مُنْكَرًا فَأَلْيَعِزَّهُ ۖ بِيَدِهِ ۖ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِلِسَانِهِ ۖ  
فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِقَلْبِهِ ۖ وَذَلِكَ أضعفُ الإِيمَانِ ۖ .

"Whoever sees an evil, let him prevent it by hand. But if he cannot, then by his tongue, and if he cannot, then by heart (let him disdain it), but this is the weakest belief" (Sahih al-Muslim, 1972, 22).

The notions of *smaller and greater Islam* are unknown to Islamic theology. The hadith in question does not mention the *smallest Islam*, but hadith works certainly mention decrease and increase in faith (iman). Therefore, the point of the hadith is that "the weakest iman" (the weakest belief) is by no means the "smallest Islam" as Izetbegović writes by omission (This is why the Arabic translator of *Islam Between East and West* corrected this passage and quoted the Prophet's saying as mentioned in the original Islamic sources, with the key point contained in the expression *ad'af al-iman* (أضعفُ الإيمان) - "the weakest belief" (Izetbegović, 1994, 302).

There are more examples of Izetbegović conveying the Qur'an and Hadith by their sense and imprecise references to foundational Islamic texts. It will suffice to give the above-quoted examples. Izetbegović was aware of this type of shortcomings in his book. On this point he writes honestly and openly the following:

Otherwise, this is not a book of theology, nor is its author a theologian. In this regard the book is more of an attempt to 'translate' Islam into the language which the present day generation speaks and understands. This circumstance may explain some of its mistakes and inaccuracies (Izetbegović, 1996, 28).

To return to the question of which Islam in *Islam between East and West*? In answering the question it is best to follow Izetbegović himself. For him defining Islam is a highly important thing. In one place he quite rightly says that defining Islam is a process which encourages "development of

Islam." Defining Islam is a kind of fruitful reconstruction of Islam. He writes:

Defining Islam as a principle is of key importance for its future development. Countless times it has been said, quite accurately after all, that Islam and Islamic world have become rigid, closed. This situation was undoubtedly linked with a view of Islam as a completed and once for all defined teaching (Izetbegović, 1996, 23).

This passage reveals and confirms Izetbegović's belonging among Muslim renewing and reformist authors who approached Islam, among other methods, through the method of "reconstruction." As Izetbegović affirms, Islam must not be viewed as "completed and the once for all defined teaching."

There were also many Bosnian Muslim intellectuals as well as the revivalists and modernist ulama who shared this view, or perhaps Izetbegović shared their view. In their writings Husein Đozo (1912 - 1982) and Nerkez Smailagić (1934 - 1987) repeatedly expressed renewing and reformist views and modernist stands such as: "Islam begins with the Qur'an, but it does not end with the Qur'an."

Nerkez Smailagić, for example, wrote his articles and anthologies about the Qur'an and the classical culture of Islam tinged with revivalist and reformist tones. He wrote about meeting the needs for "constituting an Islamic modernity", as he liked to say. In the modern historical shifts, which in his view were going on for more than a century, he observed:

... how in Islam one can sense a latent unfolding of a general and thorough rebirth whose main feature is a move from the previous traditionalism to an active process of constituting Islamic Modernity (Smailagić, 1975, v).

Like Izetbegović, Smailagić also stressed a certain "anti-ulama" character of Islam claiming that Islam:

...by its source and spirit, was contrary to priestly institutionalization, which was to develop at the end of the classical period... (Smailagić, 1973, 110).

Izetbegović, therefore, was not only aware that today "Islamic world has become rigid, closed" but was undoubtedly also aware that ulama or mullas were to great extent guilty of that development. Consequently,

Izetbegović wishes – as one can learn indirectly – to present his views about how to “thaw”, how to “move” and “open up” Islam and Islamic teachings.

Indeed, on many of the pages Izetbegović attempts to give his answers on how to do that, but nearly all of them revolve around one expression of his, “dualism of Islam” (or *al-thuna'iyatu llati yatamayyazu biha al-islam* – الثَّانِيَّةُ الَّتِي يَتَمَيَّزُ بِهَا الْإِسْلَامُ) (Izetbegović, 1994, 302), as the Arabic translators of his work rendered it well.

Already in the opening pages of *Islam between East and West* and with a resolute tone Alija Izetbegović affirms the following:

There are only three integral Weltanschauungen and there can be no others: religious, materialist and Islamic. They either correspond to three elementary possibilities, which we have learned to call consciousness, being, and man – or they are their projection (Izetbegović, 1996, 15).

Everything he says about Islam later on the pages of the book stems from this categorial statement of his. The notion of religion in the above quote and in Izetbegović's terminological tool-kit of *Islam Between East and West* refers most commonly to Christianity, since “Islam is more than a Religion” (1996, 15), Izetbegović claims. The notion of *materialism* Izetbegović often ascribes (justifiably or not) to Judaism (and its modern derivatives, such as Socialism occasionally, whereby he silently recognizes that Socialism was a Jewish invention and a Jewish work!). The term Islamic relates to Izetbegović's understanding of a cohesive, synthesizing Islam, the Islam that combines *religion with materialism*.

If one understands Izetbegović well here, religion is concerned only with the consciousness, and consciousness belongs to religion. Furthermore, materialism is concerned with being and being belongs to materialism. Izetbegović, then, suggests that a *unity of consciousness and being results in – man*. Man is a “bipolar unity” of consciousness and being and this “bipolar unity” is best expressed in the Islamic view of man, because “Islam is a bipolar unity of the world” (Izetbegović, 1996, 237).

Following Izetbegović's line of argument, one can conclude that, being a whole - ie, the man is a *unity of consciousness and being* - Islamic view is

concerned with man (in the right way)! And this Islamic view, if it needs to be stressed at all, is whole, it combines the poles of "consciousness" and "being", and, as a consequence, Islam is best defined as a "bipolar unity of the world" (Izetbegović, 1996).

We have already seen that Izetbegović appears in his book, or in some sections, as a loyal dualist, whatever it means and whatever difficulties in interpreting his dualism. But, let us add that Izetbegović is only a dualist functionally. He employs the discourse on Islam as "bipolar unity of the world" only temporarily and in order to explain his views on Islamic monotheism or *tawhid*. It is possible to offer several explanations as to why Izetbegović accepted (even if temporarily and functionally) to arrive at his theory of Islam as "a principle of unity of spirit and matter" (Izetbegović, 1996, 15), which he held to be sound, by way of dualism.

European existentialist literature in the 20th century which Izetbegović read is one of the reasons for his claim that "dualism....is the most intimate human feeling, but not the highest human philosophy" (Izetbegović, 1996, 16). In his *Islam Between East and West* Izetbegović refers to Sartre (1905-1980), Camus (1913-1960), Jaspers (1883-1969), Heidegger (1889-1976) and other so often that it is reasonable to say that he drew from them his convictions and his overemphasis on seeing man dualistically. For, man is a spirit "thrown" into the world of "matter", and human being should be viewed in the context of "primordial contrariness of man and world" (Izetbegović, 1996, 160), as Izetbegović writes.

On many pages of *Islam Between East and West* Alija Izetbegović, under the influence of his own understanding of existentialist philosophy and its fusion with his understanding of the Qur'an, has overstressed the fact of "man's fall" from the Paradise into the world of the transient, from spirit into the world of matter. Izetbegović holds man a stranger on earth and he stressed this whenever he wrote about "man's fall on Earth."

Of course, it is true that the Qur'an notes the fact of man's exit from Paradise, but only as a voucher of man's becoming man, theomorphic being which will show all his magnificent possibilities on earth, and not cry because he allegedly found himself in a strange world. There is no

traditional school of Islam which teaches that man's fall to "enemy Earth" should be emphasized as something crucial and out of which man's destiny is to be explained. There is no school in Islam that views the world and nature as hostile environment, as "the valley of tears."

It is clear that in his attempt to promote his dualism man's body/Earth vs man's spirit/Hereafter, Izetbegović understood and tried to interpret certain Qur'anic passages about man's exit from Paradise and "descent to Earth" in terms of existentialism.

This is how he (dualistically) makes a conclusion: "Islam is the name for a principle of unity of spirit and matter whose highest form is human life" (Izetbegović, 1996, 15).

Neither religion, nor materialism – especially materialism – have the privilege of understanding man, of honoring man in his entirety, is Alija Izetbegović's message. He thinks that religion rejects man's biological life, while materialism negates man as such.

Man's life is true to itself if at the same time it realizes a humane concept, without rejecting but confirming all the zoological prerequisites of existence. All human failures can essentially be reduced either to religious rejection of man's biological life or to materialist negation of man (Izetbegović, 1996, 15-16).

When Izetbegović says that "Islam is more than a religion", nowhere in the book does he offer a systematic explanation of this "Islamic surplus" in relation to religion. He has extended the task of explaining it to the whole book, but often he elegantly leaves the search for weeding out the details of that explanation to industrious readers.

In Chapter Seven of *Islam Between East and West* Izetbegović tries, while staying true to his dualism (which is, perhaps, an age-old memory of a Bosnian beg (i.e. Bosnian Muslim nobleman) of the dualism of Bosnian patarins!) to interpret Islam through a form of synthesis or unity of "Christianity and Judaism."

According to Izetbegović, Judaism has a this-worldly inclination, "a leftist tendency" (Izetbegović, 1996, 239), it wants to "realize justice already here, on earth." For him Judaism is an old forerunner of materialism and



the new materialist philosophy and Spinoza (1632-1677) is one of its philosophers.

In Spinoza's example one can nicely follow the birth of a new materialist philosophy within the fold of Judaism or on the sources of Jewish tradition, in which the religious core remains very thin and shallow in relation to national, political and world content; the situation is completely reversed in Christianity (Izetbegović, 1996, 240).

Furthermore, for the sake of a more effective representation of Judaism as a religion inclined to materialism Izetbegović adds even the Kingdom of God, which Jews had announced, "they expected on earth, not in heavens, like Christians" (Izetbegović, 1996, 240). Passing quickly over the long and rich Jewish history and also ignoring those historical, concrete aspects of Judaism, which – if were to recount them – would not agree with the main line of argument of his book, nor would they be of any use for his one-sided argumentation (in fact, they would undermine it!), Izetbegović then comes to masons or "Freemasons". He says: "The Freemason idea of humanity's ethical rebirth on scientific basis is positivist and – Jewish" (Izetbegović, 1996, 241).

Izetbegović then proposes a research project:

It would be interesting to research esoteric as well as exoteric links between Positivism, Freemasonry and Judaism. One would find not only spiritual, but also quite concrete links and influences (Izetbegović, 1996, 241).

Following his highly suggestive but reductionist line of argument, Izetbegović goes on to claim that "the history of Jews is a history of the world's economic (trade) development." Jews are, Izetbegović asserts, city population, they improved the civilization of Cordoba, Granada, Seville, Toledo, Amsterdam, Venice, Marseille and other places. He fails to mention the example of Protestantism as a current which contributed to the development of economy and capitalism in the West. Compared with Protestantism, Jewish contribution in this regard is negligible.

All these arguments Izetbegović presents so as to show that Jews, with their alleged propensity towards this-worldly goods, trade, economy, science and civilization have practically demonstrated how their example serves as an example of one pole in Izetbegović's dual image of

the world, *the material pole*. Needless to say, that pole is just one aspect of Islam, the material one! Thus, by increasing the wealth and material prosperity of mankind Jews indirectly work for one pole of Islam, the material one!

There is no attempt at least to indicate that in Judaism one can find a rich tradition of esoterism and mysticism. As the example of Maimonides shows, Jewish theology and philosophy speak of God, spirituality, the transcendent. For the most part Izetbegović passes in silence over Kabbalah, Talmud, Mishna and the rich tradition of Jewish and Judaic esoterism because mentioning them would disrupt the dualistic philosophy he presents and defends by all means on the pages of *Islam Between East and West*.

This is why Izetbegović very quickly, in his search for the other, *spiritual* pole of Islam, turns to "the pure religion" (or Christianity, tentatively speaking) (Izetbegović, 1996, 242). While Jewish materialism (which he claims to be called Positivism in the modern world) turned man's consciousness towards the world and while it also "encouraged during the whole history...its interest for external reality," Christianity, on the other hand, "turned human spirit to itself" (Izetbegović, 1996, 242). According to Izetbegović the dualist, the pronounced realism of the Jewish Old Testament "could only have been overcome by the equally pronounced idealism of the New Testament" (Izetbegović, 1996, 242).

According to Izetbegović's scheme of things:

a) Jewish realism and b) Christian idealism, then:

a) Jewish materialism and b) Christian monasticism, and:

a) Jewish inclination to this world and c) Christian turning of the spirit to itself,

- all this duality, the whole dualistic edifice contains a rift, a split, a break of the world which had to be overcome and become a new synthesis! It is quite clear that Izetbegović assigns the role of fusion and synthesis to Muhammad and Islam. Izetbegović says: "With Muhammad, Islam was to effect the fusion of these two demands" (Izetbegović, 1996, 242).

Here as elsewhere in his book Izetbegović makes no attempt to reexamine this dualist formula dear to him of arriving at Islam as a unit

by a shortcut whose constituent parts are Jewish materialism and Christian idealism.

Izetbegović is not inclined to subject his thinking to some kind of a check. For, although Islam does not arrive in 7<sup>th</sup> century after Isa pbuh on the world stage in which there is only Judaism and Christianity, but also star-worship, Masdeism, fire-worship, idol worship, Buddhism, Hinduism, Animism, etc, Izetbegović does not attempt to situate Islamic tawhid (or Islamic monotheism) in a broader context of all pre-Islamic religions, but sticks to the narrow dualist solution (Judaism+Christianity=Islam).

Izetbegović claims that in Christianity human efforts and energy “should not be diverted into two opposing directions: to heavens and to earth” (Izetbegović, 1996, 242). He then quotes Matthew 6:24: “No one can serve two masters: either he will hate one and love the other, or he will try to please one and ignore the other” (Izetbegović, 1996, 242). He then leapfrogs by nineteen centuries and, bypassing so many great Christian commentators of the New Testament, quotes Tolstoy and his interpretation of the above-quoted passage. This is what Tolstoy says:

One cannot at the same time care about one's soul and the goods of this world. If you want the goods of this world, give up your soul; if you want to keep your soul, give up the goods of this world. Otherwise, you will tear yourself apart and will have neither (Izetbegović, 1996, 242).

Out of his essentialized reading of the New Testament and of a rare interpretation Izetbegović concludes that religion (for him meaning: Christian religion) “gives up in advance the ordering or perfecting of the external world.” This is a passage in which Izetbegović offers his understanding of religion (as Christianity):

Religion, therefore, forswears arranging or perfecting the external world. Religion naturally sees as a form of blasphemy (self-deception) any human conviction that by externally arranging and changing the world one can help increase true goodness. For, religion is the answer to the question of how to live in my own self and in front of myself, not how to life in the world and in front of people. It is a temple on the top of a hill, a refuge to which one has to climb in order to leave behind all the emptiness of an unfixable world which Lucifer has in his power. This is pure Religion (Izetbegović, 1996, 243).

In a possible critique of Izetbegović's arguments it is necessary to say that the history of Christianity itself (both, before and after the great schism of 1054 and therefore in the history of Christianity as Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism and other reformed churches) shows that religion/Christianity has by no means neglected and "left behind the emptiness of an unfixable world", nor did it abandon this world, as Izetbegović claims, but it tried to "mend it" in its own way and in accordance with its teachings. Did not Christianity and church practically govern part of the world during the Middle Ages often becoming the chief arbiter in social systems? If this was not the case, if Christianity, church and religion were not present as masters in the world and in social life, why did bourgeoisie revolutions, which were often anti-church and anti-religion, take place? Why would bourgeoisie strive (and eventually succeed) to separate clergy from wealth, property and social sphere of life, unless clergy had already been part of that social sphere?

But it would not suit Izetbegović's goal charted in *Islam Between East and West* if he checked his essentialized views against the wealth of historical evidence. He did not care about it. He only cared about saying and demonstrating, and proving as far as possible, this formula:

JUDAISM + CHRISTIANITY = ISLAM!

However much this formula keeps Izetbegović's dualism, it is mechanic, indemonstrable by *ilm al-kalam*, historically non-existent, and islamically debatable. It is precisely because Izetbegović in his book does not take much notice of *aqā'id*,<sup>19</sup> history and of the pluralism of types and schools of thought in Islam that we find him making paradoxical claims such as: "Islam is an enlightened, towards the world turned Christianity..." (Izetbegović, 1996, 245), or that "Islam contains a purely Jewish component..." (Izetbegović, 1996, 245), or his claim that "Hegel saw Muhammad's Islam as a direct continuation of Judaism..." (Izetbegović, 1996, 245).

---

<sup>19</sup> *Aqā'id* (*al-'aqidah*, pl. *'Aqā'id*) is a classical science dealing with systematization and exposition of the principles of Islamic belief, therefore it is, in a way, Islamic apologetics, Islamic theology, or, in a wider sense, *ilm al-kalam*.

In traditional Muslim schools of thought (not only theological, about which Izetbegović does not want to hear, but also mystical/Sufi, philosophical, theosophical, legal and ethical ones) Islam is never defined by or derived from the historical forms of Judaism or Christianity.

Doing so was an invention of the evolutionist schools in the West. It is a paradox that Izetbegović, who otherwise wrote excellent pages of critique of evolutionism and Darwin, became a victim of evolutionist thinking by deriving Islam as historical forms of "Judaism and Christianity." This procedure was abandoned in the West a long time ago, and it used to be dear to the hearts of Orientalists and their followers.

It is possible that Izetbegović was led to arrive to this mechanic formula (Judaism+Christianity=Islam) by the often stressed postulate in the Qur'an about the Muslims being "the middle community" (*ummatan wasatan* - أُمَّةٌ وَسَطًا) (Bakara, 2:143). But, "middle" in terms of what? Qur'an commentators emphasize that the arrival of Islam is not the concern of Judaism and Christianity only, but of all the existing religions on earth at the time. Islam encountered them all coming out of the "middle region", the Arabian peninsula which is geographically located between Africa, Asia and Europe, and starting from the "middle position" of observing the world in its entirety.

In his great text *Islam and the Encounter of Religions* the contemporary Sufi and theosophical thinker Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1999) writes that Islam encountered not only Christianity and Judaism, but also Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Shintoism, idol worship, various types of fire worship, etc. In all these encounters Islam made a name for Muslims as the "middle community" not only in geographic sense, but also in a spiritual sense. To say that Islam is a simple product, a mere sum of historical Judaism and historical Christianity amounts to reductionism which leaves aside and out of the fold a major part of religious history of mankind.

Even if that Islamic "being the middle community" meant being a "middle community" between Judaism and Christianity, this is not the reason to claim that Islam is a mechanic sum of the historical manifestations of the two religions. Izetbegović arrives at a mechanical explanation. That leads

him not only to a series of methodologically questionable conclusions; what is more, he begins discovering Christian and Jewish elements in the practices of the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, he writes:

Muhammad goes to the cave of Hira, but every time he returns to the godless<sup>20</sup> city of Mecca to continue his mission. But in Mecca this was not yet an Islam either. Islam began in Medina. In the cave of Hira Muhammed is an ascetic, a mystic, a *hanif*. In Mecca he is a messenger of religious thought. In Medina he becomes a messenger of Islamic thought. The message Muhammad pbuh carried was completed and reached its full awareness in Medina (Izetbegović, 1996, 246).

Here, too, we can see Izetbegović quite clearly being an advocate of an evolutionist view of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, even though, as already mentioned, he has written brilliant pages in refutation of theory of Evolution.

In giving possible suggestions for a critical interpretation of Izetbegović's views from the above-quoted passage according to which "in Mecca Muhammad is a messenger of religious thought, while in Medina he becomes the messenger of the Islamic thought" we can add that in the Qur'an itself, during the Meccan period of Muhammad's messengership, Islam is called *Islam*, just as Muslims are called Muslims during the same Meccan period of revelation. And those two words (*Islam* and *Muslims*) come from the same root in the Arabic language. It is sufficient to open the Qur'an to find a plethora of suras which are dated back to the Meccan period and which clearly refer to the words "Islam" and "Muslims" as known, clear, acceptable and understandable words already in the context of the Meccan period of revelation and of Islam's entry into history simply because in Mecca Muhammad was spreading Islam, not something else! (It is sufficient to take a look at the following passages: 39:22; 11:14; 27:81, all of which are Meccan and contain terms, words and concepts *Islam* and *Muslims*).

Classical hermeneutics of the Qur'an was always suspicious about the sharp and clear cut classification of the Qur'an into "Meccan" and

---

<sup>20</sup> At the time of the arrival of Islam Mecca was not a godless city. It was a city of many gods, i.e. a polytheistic city.

“Madinan” parts, because that would amount to undoing the unity of the Qur'an, just as it would also imply a development of ideas in the Qur'an!

Recognizing and accepting a chronological development of ideas in the Qur'an would mean contesting its quality of being sealed by God! The Qur'an is not a text organized according to some “development of ideas”, it does not follow a chronology, nor is it constituted as such. For two centuries now Orientalists have been stuck with the problem of fixing and dating Qur'anic passages without being able to conclude the debate. The reason they have not been able to do it is because the Qur'an is a sacred text, a book which is not proven by logic of its formal arrangement of chapters and passages so much as by the logic of its eternity, holiness and *baraka*.

Of course, Alija Izetbegović was fond of that simple, crystal clear, but also easy scheme of things. There is religion (Christianity) on the one side and materialism (Judaism) on the other. Islam came to unify the two, it is the synthesis! Once he accepts the scheme as an axiom, he turns to identifying “ascetic”, “monastic” ways of life in the Prophet and so, he suggests that in Mecca the Prophet was not spreading Islam, but religion! This trajectory of Izetbegović's thought is rational and seems acceptable and logical! But not all rational things are necessarily right. This is especially the case with simplifications which Izetbegović often offers on the pages of *Islam between East and West*.

Izetbegović's dualism is in itself the first simplification he agrees to in *Islam between East and West*. Let us mention few typical sentences, dualistically intoned maxims, which can sound Spenglerian and quite effective, but if subjected to a more thorough examination, they simply must be supplemented! For example, Izetbegović writes:

- 1) *Mosque is the place for people, and church is “temple of God”.*
- 2) *Mosque is dominated by an atmosphere of rationality, while church is dominated by an atmosphere of mysticism.*
- 3) *Mosque is always at the centre of action, near market places and in the middle of settlements. Church requires “elevated places”.*

4) *Gospels address man, while the Qur'an addresses people (in plural)* (Izetbegović, 1996, 249-250).

Each of these statements is expressed effectively and in the manner of a general judgment, but none of them can stand factually, historically, or "Islamically". Let's consider them one by one.

A) However much is mosque for people, so is church. However much church is a "temple of God", so is mosque. In the Qur'an itself Ka'ba in Mecca is called "Holy Sanctuary" (*al-masjid al-haram* - الْمَسْجِدُ الْحَرَامُ) (ISRA, 17:1). Moreover, Muslims call Ka'ba and the Meccan sanctuary the House of God (Baytullah) and they find nothing religiously questionable or contentious about that.

B) There are mosques in which mysticism dominates, and there are churches in which rationalism prevails. This depends on the historic era in which a church or a mosque was built. It also depends on whether the architect and builder of that particular sacred building had mystic or rational inclinations, or both! The mosque in Isfahan inspires rationality and mysticism at the same time, as does the Cologne cathedral. One can cite thousands of such examples both on Islamic and Christian side.

C) There are also mosques standing out-of-the-way. They can be seen in Malaysia, in Bosnia, and in Casablanka. There are churches near markets and even in the middle of them. Many churches in Vienna, Florence and other European cities present extraordinary examples of a harmonious connection of markets, squares and trade with prayer.

D) In addition to addressing people, Qur'an also addresses man as a singular being. Many chapters have names in singular, such as (*Mu'min*) *Believer*, *Insan* (*Man*). There are also Qur'anic passages which address the individual.

Here, too, the author does not attempt to reexamine the coherence and reasonableness of his dualistic trajectory in proving the wholesomeness of Islam and of the argument that "Islam is more than religion".

Izetbegović sees Judaism, Christianity and Islam through the method of "essentilizing", which means that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are three "essences" which history hardly touched. If he sometimes allows



for history to reach them, he falls into reductionism and a selective choice of facts.

Although Izetbegović states that "Islam is more than religion", he nevertheless designates Islam in the book as "religion" in a conventional sense of the word. For example, in staying true to his dualism, he writes that the appearance of Islam;

... marked the appearance of religion of 'two worlds', a comprehensive system of human life, recognition that in the name of science man does not have to discard religion and fight for a better life in the name of Religion (Izetbegović, 1996, 275).

Also, when he writes about ethics which stems from philosophy and about ethics which stems from religion, Izetbegović classifies Islam as a "revealed Religion" (Izetbegović, 1996, 78), along with Judaism and Christianity.

Again, in one place he refers Le Bon whom he quotes as saying that till today Islam has remained "the clearest monotheistic Religion" (Izetbegović, 1996, 248).

These examples show the difficulties in which Izetbegović gets himself in his effort to implement consistently his new terminology concerning Islam. For, if Islam is a "religion revealed" by God (to which Izetbegović agrees), how can one explain his claim that "Islam is more than religion."?! Where is that "surplus" and where did Islam "gain" something?! Does that "surplus" come from God and did God himself mean it for Islam?! These are all questions Izetbegović did not want to address, maybe because he thought it would look like he was doing an ulama-like work.

## **VI – How is Islam in *Islam between East and West* seen as a political and social theory?**

On the pages of *Islam between East and West*, Izetbegović links the purpose of Islam almost solely to man. Thus, he states:

The Qur'an is a realistic, almost anti-heroic book. Without a man who applies it, Islam is incomprehensible, even non-existent in the true sense of the word (Izetbegović, 1996, 247).

As an intellectual who felt certain revulsion to esoteric theories and theosophies and schools of Tasawwuf in Islam, Izetbegović, it would seem, ignores their teachings that the whole universe is a "Muslim" and "in submission to God." Accordingly, mineral, vegetative and animal worlds are also in the state of Islam and those worlds, *eo ipso*, are, along with countless spiritual worlds, Muslim in their own way! However much impressive and spiritual, Izetbegović is not interested in such speculations. In contrast to those schools he links Islam mainly to man.

As he was predisposed for ideological readings of the Qur'an by the literature on which he was educated Izetbegović saw in Islam an "effective teaching" for ordering a new world. "Islam does not idealize much this world" writes Izetbegović (1996, 247). Therefore, in this world Muslims must strive to order it.

Here lies at least part of the reason as to why it is necessary, at least in contours, to address Izetbegović's definitions of Islam, which he gave along the lines of exteriorizing this faith as a specific "political and social theory". In his book Izetbegović gives many such definitions of Islam, unsystematically and in various places. Thus, while making a resolute and categorical claim in which he states that there are "only three integral worldviews and there can be no other: religious, materialist and Islamic" (Izetbegović, 1996, 15) he implicitly designates Islam as a "worldview", but does not specify whether it is a human, Divine, angelic or someone else's "worldview".<sup>21</sup> Besides, Izetbegović on the same page argues that Islamic and religious worldview are not identical, since, according to him, "Islam is more than a Religion" (1996, 15).

The assertion that "Islam is more than a religion" was (and still is) a claim made by classical Muslim revivalists and reformers. Classical Muslim authorities interpreted Islam and exteriorized its message in the direction of its social, state and imperial concepts, too. So, it is no news to

---

<sup>21</sup> Throughout most of its history Islam never defined itself as a worldview. The notion of Islam as a *worldview* or *Weltanschauung* is recent and came from the West. Of course, the idea of *Weltanschauung* is not bad and one could write very fruitful studies about Islam as "a worldview". It is possible to say that Islam is a kind of "worldview", but it should be kept in mind that according to the classical interpretations of Islam the world is not an object, nor is man an indisputable subject and arbiter.

view Islam, among other things, as a specific political theory, because with its symbolic treasure Islam lends itself to integral interpretations and in it one cannot identify a clear line of separation marking the world into religiously neutral, certainly not out of religious aspects.

But, politics is neither a primary, nor an eternal principle of Islam, but by all accounts a secondary (and historical) possibility of Islam. According to the descriptions and accounts of principles of Islam in classical kalam works politics is not designated as an eternal principle of Islam. During its history, Islam realized itself for the sake of what it came for out of eternity: first of all as a faith and above all, as a faith. As a faith Islam lived and survived under different Islamic as well as un-Islamic policies and systems. By living under different Islamic and un-Islamic policies Islam did not become less of Islam, nor did it lose its religious importance and freshness.

Many times Izetbegović's words that "Islam is more than a religion" were used against him so as to discredit him and accuse him of holding an "integralist view" of Islam and Muslim societies and for smuggling in an idea which advocates the argument that "in Islam that which is more than religion, is politics." Everyone, including Izetbegović, has the right to interpret and view the world and religion as he wants. That is not (nor it should be) the subject of accusations and judgments, especially not court judgments.

Historically viewed, it is true that Islam realized itself, as it still does, not only as religion but also as a social system, law and even politics. But, in certain ages Christianity, Judaism and other world religions also manifested in their own way as "politics." It is possible, and this cannot be excluded, that many world religions will get a chance again to shape social realities in various parts of the world, in different times in future, with lesser or greater force, through state, law and social systems of various types.

Therefore, when Izetbegović elaborates on Islam as, among other things, a political doctrine, he is not doing anything against humankind, nor is he carrying out some sort of a diversion against Islam. In principle, such a theoretical approach is legal and legitimate as is the action of some

American presidents who show inclination to church or Christian prohibition of abortion and who advocate it by promoting state laws in favor of sanctioning abortion.

Of course, we should keep in mind that by "politics" classical Muslim authors do not mean total politics, or politics as "man's destiny"; nor do they mean rigid skills of ruling over other people; what they mean by it is a "holy politics", moral ordering and managing of public affairs in human communities in accordance with justice. There is a big difference between the classical use of the term "politics" and its modern usage.

What is important for the purposes of this analysis is the way in which Izetbegović views Islam as a political doctrine. Let us look for answers in Izetbegović's work itself. In one place he says:

Muhammad pbuh had to return from cave. Had there been no return, he would have remained a hanif. Given that he did return, he became the preacher of Islam. That was an encounter of internal with the 'real' world, mysticism with reason, and meditation with action. Islam began as mysticism and ended as political and state thought. Religion accepted the world of facts and became Islam (Izetbegović, 1996, 247).

This passage, too, Izetbegović argues along evolutionist lines (Islam begins as mysticism; it ends as political and state thought). Not only theology (*ilm al-kalam*), but also history of Islamic institutions and of Islamic culture and civilization do not support such a position. For, Islamic foundations, the Qur'an and Hadith, in principle (and in embryo) contained everything which Muslim will have discovered in history through a valid use of *ijtihad*, which is to say by way of the effort of spirit and intellect. The Qur'an and Hadith contain in principle religious, mystical, ethical, theosophical, aesthetic, legal, political and other inspirations. Those inspirations are always there, not in a way in which one comes before or after others (not in a way which suggests that one issues from others), but they are simultaneous and by divine providence stored, dormant, banked up in the inspired sacred texts and, *in potentio*, they are open to manifestation or interpretation, when spiritual mood emerges in people and at certain times, to draw mainly on these or those aspects of Islamic sources, Qur'an and Hadith.

According to this holistic approach, it is not reasonable to say that "Islam started off as mysticism and ended as a political a state thought." For, if Islam started off as mysticism, does it mean that it stopped being mysticism once it became a "political and state thought"? An evolutionist approach to the study of Islam would answer with a "yes", whereas a holistic approach to Islam would reply with a "no".

Ottoman sultans, by drawing political and legal inspiration from Islam in (and for) their time, and by creating an empire on the basis of drawing legal and political theories from sharia, did not stop being mystics!<sup>22</sup> All the currents of Islam, all the inspirations of Islam are always there; it is just that people, out of the different spiritual dispositions of their times and epochs, responded to inspirations coming out of the sources of Islam with different perceptions and by placing various accents on things!

Furthermore, with his words that "Islam began as mysticism<sup>23</sup> and ended as political and state thought" Izetbegović implies and suggests a notion that political and state thought in Islam is the highest form of expression of Islam. Other forms and contents of manifestation of Islam would have much to object to that view.<sup>24</sup>

By defining and reducing Islam to a "political and state thought" Izetbegović very quickly made further reductionist interventions. In fact, he had to make them because he followed the "general logic" of his book *Islam Between East and West*. One such intervention is noticeable in his claim that two Islamic formulae – *Allah akbar* (God is greatest) and *la ilaha illallah* (There is no deity save God) – represent "at the same time two most revolutionary mottos of Islam" (Izetbegović, 1996, 248). It seems problematic to reduce religious principles and the sacred Qur'anic

---

<sup>22</sup> Mevlevi shaikhs used to strap a sword on Ottoman sultans! It was a symbolic sign that mysticism did not disappear with the development of "Islam as politics."

<sup>23</sup> Islam did not start off as mysticism, it started off as Revelation and Faith and remained Revelation and Faith. Mysticism is only one aspect of Islam.

<sup>24</sup> Just as does Evolutionism of Darwinian type comits error by arguing, for instance, that aemeba does its part for the higher form of life and then, in that higher form of life, the ameoba is gone, it no longer participates in it.

Holistic theory of Islam, in contrast to the evolutionist one, would argue that with the genesis of man, nothing in him (man) ceased existing, he has what is found in the aemebas, reptiles, beasts, angels, etc.

statements to "revolutionary reductions", mottos and slogans. As a concept, revolution is not an Islamic, but a European and Western invention. In one place Seyyed Hossein Nasr calls European revolutions "screams against the heaven".

But we can understand Izetbegović in his consideration of key principles of Islam in the context of revolutionary slogans and it is humane to do so. Besides, he argued this during turbulent and contradictory times, with fast moving events which by their appearance seemed to confirm his theoretical conclusions. Indeed, during 1970s and 1980s, in the age of the event of Catholicism in Poland and of Islam in Iran, it seemed convincing that after Socialist and Communist revolutions it was possible to have revolutions based on religion. It was thought that religion can serve as the main platform for revolution.

In his books Izetbegović was a witness of the times, he was "the son of his time", as the Sufis would say. The contradictions of his time are often interspersed with contradictions on the pages of his book. One can say that those contradictions are not his or subjective, but are an "objective given."

When Izetbegović wrote his *Islam between East and West* it seemed that Islamic world was experiencing a revolutionary ferment. It seemed that everywhere there was an Islamic renaissance at work. Hence Izetbegović's claim that "Islam has its own Marxism" (Izetbegović, 1996, 253), that is to say, Islam has no need for the Marxism of Karl Marx which is secular, etc. With the slogan "Islam has its own Marxism" Izetbegović wants to say that Islam has its own theoretical and revolutionary resources which can serve for creating social forms, systems and patterns in which morality and justice would be satisfied.

Furthermore, in Islam Izetbegović did not see a revolutionary inspiration only. He also thought that Islam (at least by indication) was democratic, too:

Islam does not know an elite in the form of monks, holy men, or two programs: one for the elect, the other for common folk. This is an indication of a democratic principle (Izetbegović, 1996, 250).

Here, too, one can see Izetbegović's essentialized Islam at work. An essentialized Islam, perhaps, does not recognize the elite, not because there is no elite, but because there is no essentialized Islam anywhere!

From the point of view of history, there are more realizations and manifestations of "Islam", as there are epochs in Islam, which had elites and, what is more, could not be without them. Let us recall that in Iran it was one such elite which shouldered the revolution which they called Islamic! In Shiism there is a division of the believers into an elite "khawwas" and the common people "awwam", etc. In ahli sunni Islam there are "naqib al-ashraf", "sayyids", etc, which are also particular kinds of elite, etc.

While offering a new definition of Islam, Izetbegović adds a little later that "conditions in which Islam appeared can also help us to understand it easier as a teaching of unity of religion and politics" (Izetbegović, 1996, 250). The author stresses his dualistic viewpoint (religion + politics = Islam) to prepare the ground for another, not so clearly expressed dualistic viewpoint, which includes culture and civilization as its constituent elements.

According to the Qur'an - but not the gospels - God created man to be His viceroy on earth (Qur'an, 2:30). Man could achieve power over nature and world only with knowledge and work, that is to say, with science and action. Thanks to this fact, as well as to its attention to law and laws, Islam has showed that it wants not only culture, but civilization, too (Izetbegović, 1996, 251).

In this part of *Islam between East and West* Izetbegović increasingly puts emphasis on action. He indicates his new dualistic formulae of Islam such as: knowledge + work = Islam, and: science + action = Islam. This kind of thinking inevitably led to further reduction and essentialization of Islam expressed in claims that the Qur'an in places "is not a religious and moral, but social and political codex." Here is one such passage:

When the Qur'an approves and even orders fighting (Qur'an, 2:216, 22:39, 60:2, 60:8-9, 61:10-11, etc) instead of suffering, submitting and repeated suffering and submitting, it is not religious and moral, but social and political codex. Muhammad pbuh was a fighter.... (Izetbegović, 1996, 252).

A classic holistic approach to interpreting the Qur'an would understand this Izetbegović's viewpoint like this: the fact that Qur'an orders Muslims to defend themselves does not mean that it denies suffering and patience. Suffering and patience, fighting and defense, compassion and forgiveness, etc, are given as juxtaposed and simultaneous motifs and possibilities of human existence. They are not separate Qur'anic motifs, nor are they evolutionist phases which are to be crossed one by one, as it seems to the writer. For the time being we shall put aside whether it is good to define the Qur'an as a "codex" in the first place. It is particularly questionable to call it a "religious and political codex."

In his insistence on "social and political" and an engaged reading of the Qur'an, Izetbegović steps into the terrain of a whole series of reductions, which then lead to further reductions. One of the biggest reductionist interventions in the book (Islam between East and West) is his argument that Sufism, Sufis and dervish orders are a new form of a flacid Islam, a kind of "degradation of Islam", as he puts it.

In arguing that the prohibition of alcohol in Islam is supposedly social (and not religious), he finds room for a claim that "the dervish represents a return from Muhammad to Jesus". This is the passage:

Prohibition of alcohol in Islam is essentially a social prohibition because alcohol is primarily a 'social evil.' In principle no religion can have anything against alcohol (some religions have to lesser or greater extent even used artificial stimulants which facilitate extasis; darkness in cathedrals and the smell of incense belong to this category). It is known that some dervish orders (Islamic version of monasticism) did not reject alcoholic drinks. But the dervish is a degradation of Islam. Islam means advance from Jesus towards Muhammad pbuh. The dervish is a return from Muhammad to Jesus. In darwish-Christian feeling and experience of the world the prohibition of alcohol and narcotics makes no particular sense (Izetbegović, 1996, 252; 1988, 193).

The fact that there is a small and negligible minority of heterodox dervishes who permit a glass of alcohol is not and should not be the reason to discard the whole, over a millennium old edifice of Sufism and Tasawwuf. Even if a large number of Sufis on earth were to drink alcoholic beverages it would not be sound methodologically to draw long term conclusions about the whole Sufism from there, because on what



argument would stand the claim that dervish orders signify a "degradation of Muslims"? Sufism is quite an engaged, important and intensive activity in Islam, a spiritual and esoteric activity. Not only is Sufism a legitimate and generally recognized school of Islamic thought and practice, but it is also a school which played, as it still does, a magnificent role of providing refinement, enrichment and spiritual discipline within the majority of Islamic schools of other currents, in legal, ethical, philosophical, theosophical schools.

Nonetheless, Izetbegović was not attracted to Sufism and Tasawwuf, nor did he store much hope in the heritage of other classical schools of Islam. It is for these reasons that he made claims such as that "dervish orders and mystic philosophy" are the "most characteristic form (...) of deviation" from the true Islam, and this "deviation" could even "be described as a Christianization of Islam, a return of Islam from Muhammad pbuh back to Jesus" (Izetbegović, 1996, 252).

Izetbegović was fascinated by a political view of Islam and an ideological reading of the Qur'an, so that in his interpretation of sacred principles and institutions of Islam he gladly reaches out for political reductionism. According to him, Islam transformed umma from a "purely spiritual community" into a "spiritual and political community" (Izetbegović, 1996, 305) Therefore, according to Izetbegović, umma cannot express itself validly and suitably unless it does so by way of politics. This also implies that politics is the highest form of organization and expression in Islam. On many pages of Islam between East and West Izetbegović in various ways offers variations on the theme of *political expression of Islam as Islam's final purpose*. Here we would like to offer few illustrations.

When Izetbegović examines key Islamic institutions such as salat, hajj, zakat, etc, the trajectory of his thought goes in the direction of *religion - society - politics*! Using in his time widespread and much exploited Socialist word "socialization", in one place Izetbegović argues that salat has a social tendency and is most intensely expressed in *juma* (communal Friday prayer), and *juma*, again, is a "political" salat:

This 'social' tendency in salat (this proces of socialization of salat) is completed with juma. It is a markedly civic, 'political' prayer. It is performed on holiday in the central mosque and is led by a state functionary. Its essential component is *khutba* [sermon], a largely political message... (Izetbegović, 1996, 257- 258).

It is important to stress, as Izetbegović sees it, this insistence on politics in this context because "this is a metamorphosis of religion into Islam" (Izetbegović, 1996, 258), and Islam, according to him, is not a complete Islam unless it transforms "prayer into political salat", "alms into obligatory tax", etc. This is how Izetbegović interprets the "metamorphosis of alms into tax":

This metamorphosis of religion into Islam can equally clearly be made in the example of zakat. In the beginning (Meccan period) of Muhammad's mission zakat was a voluntary form of giving to the poor; it was, therefore, alms. As the Madina community was formed – and this is a historical moment of a previously purely spiritual community growing into a state – Muhammad pbuh began treating zakat as a legal obligation, as tax... (Izetbegović, 1996, 258).

Needless to say, with the above-mentioned view about zakat Izetbegović again showed that he is on the side of reformist Islam. There is no reason to say about his understanding of *zakat* what we have already said about the word *Islam*. Indeed, just as Islam is mentioned in Meccan and Medinan suras, so is *zakat*, too. There is no difference in meaning, in the purpose of the use of the word in the Meccan and Medinian suras.

Besides, Izetbegović does not check his view about *zakat as tax* against the plans of desacralizing religious institutions.

And it is precisely in this field, in its polemic which traditional and perennial Islam initiated against Muslim reformers and modernists, that many questions were raised such as: can we treat taxes paid in the USA, or any other ordered state, and which are backed by state enforcement, as zakat from the point of view of Islam?

Furthermore, does the force used by the state in collecting zakat divests this institution from the sacred trusts it contains, does it divest it of being a voluntary act which religion demands also, because "there is no compulsion in religion"?

For the most part Izetbegović's school of Islamic thought did not ask this or similar question. Therefore the debate between modernists and the traditional Islamic school is ongoing.

On many pages Izetbegović's book *Islam between East and West* burns with the great desire to show a socially visible Islam, an Islam which is present and at work. Taken by that desire, Izetbegović did not wonder about the sacred dimension of Islamic institutions, nor did he want to consider the *sacred* as something inexplicable and unquestionable. The postulates of traditional Islam: *one explains by the sacred, but one does not explain the sacred!* – is a dimension Izetbegović did not want to introduce into his book.

According to Izetbegović, Islam is the “true” Islam if it is here and now, in society, at work. All institutions of Islam have a temporary, “untrue” purpose, but also their “true”, permanent and social and/or political purpose. “Zakat acquired its true significance only with the establishment of the Medina community” (p. 258), when it *evolved from alms into tax!* Salat acquired its “true” purpose only when it became a *political salat*. Umma, the spiritual community of Muslims, acquired its true purpose when it was transformed into *state*; these are the summaries of Izetbegović's efforts to offer concepts of “socialized islama.”

In accordance with his insistence on “social and political” aspects of Islamic institutions Izetbegović argues that they are all socially orientated. Hajj, for example, being the fifth obligation, also manifests a “religious ritual, trade fair, political gathering (...) all these together” (Izetbegović, 1996, 264). The testimony of faith (Shahadah) is

...made in front of witnesses, which is the consequence of the dual meaning of the act. With the statement one joins a spiritual community, for which one needs witnesses, but also a social and political community, which has legal, not just moral, significance (Izetbegović, 1996, 263).

Even Islamic fasting has, according to Izetbegović, a social dimension:

There is no doubt that we find a similar component (social) in the Islamic fasting. Muslim masses always considered it manifestation of togetherness, and this explains sharp reactions of the people to cases of public violation of this duty. It was considered (or rather, felt) that this

undermines internal social cohesion. Therefore, fasting in Islam is not exclusively a religious question and hence a personal matter of an individual, but a social obligation (Izetbegović, 1996, 264).

In accordance with his dualism ("All of Islam is under the sign of this 'bipolar' unity" (Izetbegović, 1996, 263), as he claims), Izetbegović offers an interesting view. Not only do the institutions of Islam are distinguished by that duality of *temporary* and *permanent* purpose, but they also relate to each other "dualistically", because some are "spiritual" and others are "material and social", etc. Thus, he writes:

...*salat* appears as a spiritual, and *zakat* as a social component. *Salat* is directed towards man, *zakat* towards the world; *salat* has personal, *zakat* a social character; *salat* has a subjective, *zakat* an objective aim; *salat* is an instrument of upbringing, *zakat* is an element of a social order, etc (Izetbegović, 1996, 262).

Although Izetbegović writes outstanding pages on utopia, it is also good to note in his writings a strong utopian strain. We can see it in his discussing *zakat*, when he says that it is not the percentages of property to be given which are important so much as the act of solidarity itself:

The essential thing is the principle by which the rich section of society has an obligation towards a poorer section. One should not doubt that the true Islamic order, one day it is realized, will seek to fulfill the very purpose of this principle, without caring too much about percentages... (Izetbegović, 1996, 260-261).

Izetbegović does not say when the "true Islamic order" will be realized, but he hopes it will be "one day."

Izetbegović's *Islam between East and West* is a courageous book. It is also a valuable example of a text as protest, and whose pages are exceptional because they were written in the age of set opinions and ideologies. *Islam between East and West* is an attempt to overcome the then socially desirable theory of interpretation of Islam and such an intellectual position comes from the existential situation of the author himself.

Simply everywhere Alija Izetbegović saw the whole world to be split between religion/Capitalism and materialism/Socialism, with the exception, as he thought, of the Islamic world. He assigned the role of

synthesis and unification of antagonized poles to Islam and the Islamic world.

Therefore, when we read *Islam between East and West* today, we must bear in mind also the author, his existential situation, and the times in which he thought out his ideas and wrote his books. It is in that, and only in that context that we should interpret Izetbegović's texts which today appear contradictory to us.

His later life and political involvement offered Izetbegović new insights, knowledge and experiences. After writing *Islam between East and West* he went to jail for second time. When he came out, he founded a political party, joined politics and became Bosnian president. Then he found himself in the middle of war and, due to the war drama, in his and Bosnian suffering he visited tens of capitals, West and East. As a grey-haired man well into his 70s he then acquired many new and important experiences. He also acquired them in important places, concerning important matters and with important people.

This is probably when deep rethinking took place. For, only after rethinking could Alija Izetbegović write in his subsequent works views which are quite contrary to the ones he expressed in *Islam between East and West*. For this occasion, I shall only mention one such example. With regard to his glorification of the Islamic and Muslim world (which was also placed as a simultaneous critique of the West), Alija Izetbegović writes:

This is the situation in which church rears souls, and state rules over bodies, according to the pattern: *give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what is God's*. Western man has been taught that he can be a Christian in private, and that he can be a machiavellist as a public or businessman. Those unable to resolve or sustain this conflict or become victims of neurosis. All those who came to know Muslim world are unison in the impression about an extraordinary harmony between man and his environment, about the individual's fitting into social tissue, about a cohesion which is not at all artificial, external, political, legal, but internal, organic. This fact is present even in spite of poverty and backwardness which prevail (Izetbegović, 1996, 278).

This standpoint expressed exclusively on the basis of feeling and "Islamic solidarity" changed as soon as Izetbegović gained experiential

knowledge about today's Western and Muslim worlds. More than 20 years after writing the book, in his speech given to the OIC meeting in Teheran,<sup>25</sup> Izetbegović (2001, 348) had this to say:

Forgive me for being frank. Beautiful lies do not help and bitter truths can be healing.

The West is not rotten, or degenerate. 'The rotten West' – Communist system paid dearly for this self-delusion. West is not rotten. It is strong, educated and organized. Its schools are better than ours and its cities are cleaner than ours. The level of human rights in the West is higher, and social care about poor and the less able is better organized. Westerners are by and large responsible and punctual people. These are my experiences with them. I also know the dark side of their progress and I am not losing sight of them.

Islam is the best, that is true, but we are not the best. These are two different things we often mix.

Instead of hating the West, let us compete with it! Is this not what the Qur'an commands us to do: 'Compete in what is good...' With faith and science we can create strength we need.

In its many passages and views Izetbegović's *Islam between East and West* already belongs to the past and history. But, the concerns which the book contains, the ideals it indicates, the angst it occasionally shows, the place it seeks for Islam, the indirect critique of Muslim present it brings to light – all that stands to author's credit, it makes him alive, but also outlives him!

In those passages *Islam between East and West* can still be read as a fresh and engaged word, which can also be applied partly to our own knowledge, thinking, conviction and belief.

## References

Iqbal, Muhammad (2011). *Javid-Nama*. vol. 14. Iran: Routledge.

Iqbal, Muzafar (2003). Challenges to Islam and Muslims: What is to be done?. in *Islamic Studies*, vol. 42, 4, Islamabad.

---

<sup>25</sup> The conference was held on 11 Decembre 1997.

Izetbegović, Alija (1988). *Islam između Istoka i Zapada*. [Islam Between East and West]. Beograd: NOVA.

Izetbegović, Alija (1990). *Islam između Istoka i Zapada*. [Islam Between East and West]. Sarajevo: Samizdat Edition.

Izetbegović, Alija (1994). *al-Islamu bayna al-Sharqi wa al-Garbi*. Munich: Majalla al-nur al-kuwaytiyya and Muassasat al-Bavariya/Bavaria Verlag & Handel GmbH.

Izetbegović, Alija (1996). *Islam između Istoka i Zapada*. [Islam Between East and West]. Sarajevo: Svjetlost.

Izetbegović, Alija (2001). *Sjećanja (autobiografski zapisi)*. [Reminiscences (Autobiographical notes)]. Sarajevo: TKD Šahinpašić.

Karčić, Fikret (1990). Društveno-pravni aspekt islamskog reformizma. [Social and Legal Aspect of Islamic Reformism]. *Fakultet islamskih nauka*, Sarajevo.

Karić, Enes (1997). *Kur'an u savremenom dobu, I- II*. [the Qur'an in the Modern Age]. Sarajevo: El-Kalem & BKC.

Karić, Enes (2002). *Tumačenje Kur'ana i ideologije XX stoljeća*. [the Qur'an Interpretation and Ideologies of the 20th Century]. Sarajevo: Bemust.

Keddie, N. (1972). *Scholars, Saints and Sufis*. Los Angeles.

Metiljević, Mehmed-Alija (1934). *Islam u svjetlu istine*. [Islam in the light of truth]. Tuzla: self-published.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (1999). *Sufi Essays*. Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc.

*Sahih al-Muslim* (1972). vol. II. Bayrut.

Sarač, Edina (2004). "Izabrana djela" Alije Izetbegovića u deset knjiga početkom iduće godine. [Selected works of Alija Izetbegović in ten

volumes at the beginning of the next year]. *Dnevni Avaz*, Sarajevo, 17 July 2004.

Sivan, E. (1986). *Ulama and Power, in Interpretations of Islam: Past and present*. NJ: Princeton.

Smailagić, Nerkez (1973). Znanost u islamskoj kulturi. [Science in Islamic culture]. in: *Klasična kultura islama*, I. [Classical culture of Islam, vol 1]. Zagreb.

Smailagić, Nerkez (1975). *Uvod u Kur'an*. [Introduction to the Qur'an]. Zagreb.

Spengler, Oswald (1926). *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.