Beyond the (a)Political:
Salafism and Politics in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina

by:

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Abstract

Since the Bosnian War (1992-1995) and genocide, the topic of Salafism has emerged as a threat to the "European" and "secular" Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is most prominent in the literature and securitized reports produced since the mid-2010s. Considering that Salafis have largely been represented in existing literature either as violent or as political quietists, I am to provide ethnographic data and research that supports how political participation and governance among Salafis manifests today, and how this informs both the past and present tensions. The central questions that will be explored to answer this are as follows: How do Salafis define political participation, and to what extent do Salafis participate in local and state elections and political parties? What forms of community organization, religious activity, and social services can be understood as governance or political participation? And most importantly, how has public perception shaped Salafi communities' relationships with the state and broader community, considering the history of violence and subsequent distrust? This thesis aims to provide a critical intervention in the study of Salafism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, by first applying Talal Asad's conceptual framework of Islam as a discursive tradition and secondly, Asad's critical framework of secularism in order to understand the dynamics and role of the state with Salafism, and the contention of Islam entering the political sphere.

Keywords: Salafism, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Politics, Discursive Tradition, Secularism

Chapter One: Introduction

Salafism has been the topic of major discussion among Muslims, non-Muslims, academics, journalists, politicians, and policy makers alike. For those who have engaged with "Muslim content" on social media, forums, and online lectures alone, one can observe the sheer volume of content available to the average layperson. When conducting research, search results yield topics which mostly correlate Salafism with categories such as "jihadism," "extremism," and "violence," to name a few. In both academic and non-academic spaces, we can observe that Salafism is presented either as a "pure" Islam, encouraging Muslims globally to return to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the three righteous generations that followed, or, alternatively, it is presented as a global, menacing, and radicalizing threat, often pointing to transnational fundamentalist terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda, al-Nusra, ISIS, and so-forth.

These characterizations are not only confined to the Middle East and North Africa, nor are they presented as such exclusively in "the West," most notably with the effects of the Global War on Terror and the proponents of the saying "Islam needs a Martin Luther." While this discourse is most prominent from non-Muslim perspectives, it can also emerge from within Muslim communities that reflexively perpetuate and impose these assumptions.[1] Of my own community, Bosnian Muslims are often described as following a "tolerant" and "European" Islam, juxtaposed to one that is "non-tolerant" and "non-European." Darryl Li describes this in *The Universal Enemy* as an opposition "between an Islam that is frightening and one that is potentially redeemable."[2] Considering that Bosnia and Herzegovina is home to one of the largest European Muslim

[1] Rosa Karolin Meyer, *Salafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions: "Living on the Line": Urban Social Integration of Pious Muslim Actors in Sarajevo Novi Grad*, (Springer VS Wiesbaden, 2025), 112.
[2] Darryl Li, *The Universal Enemy: Jihad, Empire, and the Challenge of Solidarity*, (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2019), 54.

communities in the region, alongside countries like Kosova and Albania, the arrival of Salafism has emerged at the center of this debate in the Balkans.

Early into my research, a YouTube video from The Berkley Center at Georgetown University, "Islam in Bosnia after Communism: The Saudi Connection," explored the Saudi influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the presence of Salafi communities.[3] The video details the emergence of Salafism in Bosnia following the arrival of transnational foreign mujahideen fighters, humanitarian aid, missionary work, and the subsequent establishment of Salafi separatists in the country. At the end, the narrator made a comment that peaked my interest: "Though small numbers of Salafis have taken up arms and joined various militant groups in Iraq and Syria, a majority belong to the privatist fraction and refrain from politics and violence…none have attempted to form Islamic political parties or introduce Islamic law in the country."[4] While I would generally agree with these statements, that a small number of Bosnian Salafis have joined transnational militant groups, that Bosniak Salafis in the country have not established Islamic political parties, and the majority are non-violent, I still struggled with the juxtaposition of each of those claims with one another. Why is refraining from politics and violence important to emphasize in the same sentence? Does the absence of an Islamic political party and desires to establish Islamic law in the country equate to being apolitical, or as the narrator states, part of "privatist factions?" Can anyone truly refrain from politics, let alone Bosniaks in a country devastated by genocide due to religious identity? While these questions emerged, I do not assume that the intentions of the narrator, Harun Karčić, were to reduce Bosniak Salafis to either an apolitical shadow of the vibrant Muslim culture of Bosnia or a community prone to radicalism and violence. Instead, I was left

[3] https://youtu.be/y9gCys7lTUQ?si=HTUF2aoGv6uqDw7g
[4] https://youtu.be/y9gCys7lTUQ?si=HTUF2aoGv6uqDw7g

asking, how are we defining political participation, what does political engagement look like for Salafis in Bosnia, and what is missing from this discussion?

First and foremost, it is important to emphasize that Bosniaks' ethnic and religious identity is directly linked to self-determination, thus political apathy impacts the Muslim community– whether pious or secular. Islam plays a central role in the lives of Bosnian Muslims, and the expressions of Islam, its various traditions, revivalist movements, the exchange of practices and ideas, are all central to what Talal Asad called on us to understand; Islam is a discursive tradition.[5] Initially, the goal was to question the validity to claims of political quietism among Salafi Bosniaks in Sarajevo with consideration to religious ideology and the precarity of a post-Dayton Bosnia for Bosnians. Through my observations and interviews, I was unable to definitively showcase broad apoliticism, at least from a local and national perspective. Thus, this research instead presents how Salafis continue to negotiate with the state itself, through its political and religious institutions, the representations of their beliefs, and the ways that Salafi organizations fill the gaps in social services that neither the government nor the Islamic Community can provide. Additionally, it is important to note that this research is neither a comprehensive study of the theological merits of political participation among Salafis, nor is it to justify beliefs of any piety movements.

In Chapter 2, I address the three central tensions that are currently present both in the study of Salafism and Salafism in Bosnia and Herzegovina: What is the role of Salafism within the discursive tradition? How has the secularization and centering of a Europeanness of Bosnian Islam impacted how pious Muslims generally, and Salafis in particular, are viewed? Finally, how have both of these impacted Salafis, with a particular focus on political participation and governance?

[5] Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*. (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986), 14.

Chapter 3 provides the historical background of Islam in Bosnia, the Bosnian War (1992-1995), and the emergence of Salafism during the war with the arrival of foreign-born mujahideen fighters. I look at the arrival of international Islamic humanitarian aid and NGOs, primarily from Saudi Arabia. I then trace the advent of Salafism in the country since the end of the war in 1995 to the present, focusing on mobilization of Bosnian Salafis to fight in Syria and Iraq, subsequent surveillance and raids conducted by the state in recent decades, and the lasting impact of this has left for Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. Finally, I look at the most recent developments since 2015 and the role of Salafi *daʿwa* with social media and the social community services that Salafi organizations provide.[6] To truly and holistically reflect on the emergence, spread, and adherence of Salafism in Bosnia and Herzegovina today and the relationship to political participation (or political quietism and jihadism for that matter), we must first establish the context of the social and political precarity of Muslims in the Balkans.

In Chapter 4, I detail the methodology utilized to conduct this research, specifically through the use of long-form interviews with individuals and participant observations at religious and community events and organizations. This section also encompasses reflections on my own relationship and positionality to the community, ethical considerations, and limitations, all of which should be viewed critically to ultimately understand the obstacles which emerge when conducting an ethnography of a rather heterogeneous, loosely affiliated, religious group, such as Salafism. Most importantly, in reference to refusal, which is discussed in Chapter 5, I discuss the imperatives for sensitivity.

In Chapter 5, I present the results of the ethnographic study that I conducted with my participants, focusing on the following themes that emerged: general political engagement,

[6] *da'wah*, or the act of inviting others to Islam, i.e. missionary work.

community organization and local involvements; representation, perceptions, and discrimination and overall distrust of the state, journalists, and academics leading to suspicion and general wariness about participation. Additionally, I highlight the dynamics between Salafi and non-Salafi Bosnians and insights to the educational services provided through two women's organizations. The final chapter summarizes my findings in the field within the theoretical framework that I provided in Chapter 2.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Brief Overview of Salafism in the Sunni Tradition

Salafism, much like any Islamic school of thought or movement, is not so easily defined. In *Islamic Groups and Their World-Views and Identities*, Adis Duderija affirms that historically Salafism is not associated with one particular movement, "rather it usually refers to the general attitude of the post-*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* generations' mind-set on 'emulation-worthiness' of the first century religious and political authorities who were perceived as having continuously remained faithful to the teachings of the Qur'ān and the example of the Prophet.[7] Masood Bano in *Salafi Social and Political Movements* confirms this, and the generations include the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions, and the two following generations referred to as the *Tabi'ūn* and the *Tabi' al-Tabi'in*.[8] Moreover, Yasir Qadhi in *Understanding Salafism* and Duderija make a distinction between "proto-Salafism," and what can be viewed as, what Duderija labels, "neo-Salafism" in an effort to trace historical lineages.[9]

This historical lineage is however not as linear as one might think, though Salafism is concretely situated in the Sunni tradition of Islam. Duderija, states that in some ways the employing of the rhetoric for Muslims "to follow Quran and Haḍīth directly," to establish a sense of authority and a reflection of historical tradition, has become "cliche" but also largely ignores the embodied practices that have been produced over the centuries.[10] Similarly, Qadhi further

[7] Adis Duderija, *Islamic Groups and Their World-Views and Identities: Neo-Traditional Salafis and Progressive Muslims*, (Arab Law Quarterly, 2007), 347; *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, lit. meaning predecessors of the righteous.
[8] Masooda Bano, "Introduction: Salafism Today–A Break with the Past," in *Salafi Social and Political Movements*, ed. Masooda Bano (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 2.; *Tabi'ūn* and *Tabi' al-Tabi'in*, lit. successors and successors of the successors, respectively.
[9] Yasir Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism: Seeking the Path of the Pious Predecessors*, (Oneworld Academic, 2025), 66.; Duderija, *Islamic Groups and Their World-Views and Identities*, 347.
[10] Duderija, *Islamic Groups and Their World-Views and Identities*, 343.

explains that proto-Salafism may overlap with other historical traditions, such as "*ahl al-haḍīth* movement, (proto-)Ḥanbalism, and (proto-)Sunnism," and that there are several concrete differences from contemporary Salafism.[11] Furthermore, and probably most importantly, Qadhi states that there is no "single, teleological trajectory," that connects early Islam to contemporary Salafism, though he attempts to find continuity from previous traditions.[12]

For the sake of brevity, Qadhi lists the Salafi core beliefs in regard to theology, law, spirituality, and political activism. The four core theological principles are as follows: *tawḥīd*, to believe and worship God alone; *Īmān*, faith in the heart, in exclamation, and through action; *al-walāʾ wa-l-barāʾ*, association with believers and disassociation with those deemed as non-believers; and *al-firqa al-nājiyya,* the belief they are the saved sect.[13]

In terms of *shariʿa* (law) and the relationship to *fiqh* (jurisprudence) within Islam broadly, the latter is interpreted by *mujtahid* (jurists) utilizing *Ijtihād* (juristic interpretation) derived from the primary sources of the Qurʾan and Haḍīth, secondary sources of *ijmāʿ* (consensus) of those interpretations.[14] This results in the rulings of what would be considered *wājib* (obligatory), *mandūb* (recommended), *mubāh* (permissible), *makrūh* (repugnant), and what is *harām* (forbidden).[15] The Ḥanafī, Shāfi'ī, Mālikī, and Ḥanbalī schools of jurisprudence are the four main Sunni *madhahib* that were established by the 10th century.[16] This would lead to, "the practice of *taqlīd*, whereby subsequent generations of scholars of each *madhab* placed heavy emphasis on

[11] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 66.
[12] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 66.
[13] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 28-36. *Tawḥīd* (monotheism), *Īmān* (faith), *al-Walāʾ wa-l-Barāʾ* (Association and Dissociation), and *al-Firqa al-Nājiyya* (the saved sect).
[14] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 35-37.
[15] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 36.
[16] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 38.; Bano, "Introduction: Salafism Today–A Break with the Past," 2.; *madhab* (pl. *madhahib*), meaning: path.

respecting the work of the earlier scholars in their respective tradition."[17] Salafism, on the other hand, advocates for the ongoing engagement with the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth and rejecting *taqlīd*.[18] Qadhi states that this rejection can divide Salafis into three categories: "soft-madhabists, critical-madhabists, and anti-madhhabists."[19] This distinction is a point of contention with Sunni Muslims around the world, as they typically follow one of the four *madhahib*. The Islamic Community follows the Ḥanafī school in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In terms of spirituality, this is closely related to Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) also known as Islamic mysticism. Often the two are positioned against one another, due to the fact Salafism broadly rejects any forms of *bidʿa* and *shirk*, innovation and idolatry respectively, which Salafis apply to certain practices among Sufis (and other Muslims).[20] There are several practices that are disagreed upon, but it is important to highlight a few. First, in Sufi traditions an individual is typically initiated into a specific *ṭarīqa* (Sufi order) under the guidance of a *murīd* (master) and pledge *bayʿa* (allegiance) to a *shaykh*, or spiritual leader; Second, the invocation of God through the rank of the Prophet (PBUH), the names of God, and other pious individuals known as *tawassul*; Third, the veneration of the saints, *awliyāʿ*, the practice of intercession through the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) or saints known as *istighātha*.[21] Salafism rejects supplicating to others through intercession, and labels this as idolatry. Alternatively, it is important to emphasize that Salafism is not against spiritual purification, or *tazkiya*, and recognizes a need for *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence).[22] As Qadhi states, it is not that Salafis are "opposed to spirituality but to mysticism."[23]

[17] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 38.; Bano, "Introduction: Salafism Today–A Break with the Past," 5.
[18] Bano, "Introduction: Salafism Today–A Break with the Past," 5.
[19] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 39.
[20] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 44-48.
[21] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 44-48.
[22] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 44.
[23] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 44.

The most controversial of Salafi beliefs are of political activism, the relationship to leaders and the government, and that of *jihad*. Qadhi states that the current Salafi movement's attitudes towards politics may be divided into five categories: apolitical, soft-loyalists, dogmatic-loyalists, activists and militants.[24] Roughly, this can be delineated between scholars such as Shaykh Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī who refrained from political engagement and thought that Islam should be spread through *daʿwa* (propagation), *taṣfiya* (purification), and *tarbiya* (education).[25] Soft-loyalists such as Saudi clerics Safar al-Ḥawalī and Salman al-ʿOudah in Saudi Arabia who led the *al-Ṣaḥwa* movement, which was critical of the Saudi king's overreaching authority, though they did not outright rebel against the king.[26] Alternatively, Saudi Shaykh Ibn Bāz religiously prohibited the criticism of rulers (political leaders, in the case of Saudi Arabia, the monarchy) for fear of eliciting *fitna*.[27] After the Ṣaḥwa, there was a strong pro-government response specifically with Shaykh Rabīʿ b. Hādī al-Madkhalī, who was a professor at the University of Madinah and stated that "fierce loyalty was a mark of piety."[28] The final group, which are commonly referred to Jihadi-Salafis, believe that in order to achieve ultimate religious goals, a Muslim should engage in violence, such as militant groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS.[29] However, the concept of jihad is not exclusive to Salafism and is rooted in Islamic law as derived from both Qur'ān and Haḍīth. In Darryl Li's chapter, "Will the Real Jihadi Please Standup?" he states that the use of the term *jihadi*, or "jihadist, and jihadism has come to prominence since the 1990s and is most commonly used instead of the Arabic equivalent, *mujahid*. *Jihad* is translated

[24] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 49.
[25] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 49.
[26] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 51.
[27] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 50.; *fitna* can be translated as temptation, strife, trial, disorder.
[28] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 51.
[29] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 51.

as "struggle," and *mujahid* as "the one who struggles."[30] In further sections both categorizations will be discussed.

Additionally, it is important to note that there is continued confusion between Salafism and the Islamic movement of Wahhabism, the latter of which receives its namesake from the reformist Shaykh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), from the Najd region of modern-day Saudi Arabia.[31] Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab revived the teachings of an earlier scholar from the 13th century, Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya[32] This distinction is relevant as Wahhabism and Salafism are often used interchangeably throughout the world, and both have influence in Bosnia, though there are several distinctions. In the chapter, "*Wahhabi Salafism Versus the Islamic State*," Abdullah Bin Khaled al-Saud explains that what we know as "Wahhabism," originates from the alliance with the Saudi rulers of Najd in order to establish the first three Saudi states, the final one being the modern-day state of Saudi Arabia in 1932.[33] Contemporary Salafi methodology arrived to Saudi Arabia from South Asia with the literalists *Ahl-i Ḥadith* movement and modernist, literalist Egyptian scholars, such as Sheikh Rashīd Ridā in the 20th century.[34] While the *Ahl-i Ḥadith* and Wahhabi scholars shared similarities on strict literalism, Egyptian modernist and political scholars were critical of Wahhabi literalism and followers of the Ḥanbali school of jurisprudence.[35] The arrival of The Muslim Brotherhood's political activism through the modernists, influenced Saudi youth and inspired the *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya* movement in the 1960s, which would later threaten Wahhabi scholars and the authority of the Saudi royal family

[30] Li, The Universal Enemy, 4.; is probably most commonly associated with the mujahideen in Afghanistan since 1979.
[31] Bano, "Introduction: Salafism Today–A Break with the Past," 8.
[32] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 117.
[33] Abdullah Bin Khaled al-Saud, "Wahhabi Salafism Versus the Islamic State: Age-Old Traditions Appropriated by Modern-Day Terrorists," in *Salafi Social and Political Movements*, ed. Masooda Bano (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 172-173.
[34] Bano, "Introduction: Salafism Today–A Break with the Past," 6.
[35] Bano, "Introduction: Salafism Today–A Break with the Past," 7.

and influence scholarly positions on the role of political activism.[36] In the 1970s the Saudi state and Wahhabi scholars would begin to adopt the term Salafi, as it provided not only a more neutral terminology that emphasized the rightly guided generations but it would move away from the misconception of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab being a *mubtadi‘*.[37] However, Qadhi points to earlier efforts in 1929 after the establishment of the modern state of Saudi Arabia, by King ‘Abd al-’Azīz.[38] The further melding of Salafism with Wahhabism was solidified when the Saudi state established the Islamic University in Medina in 1961, which taught various scholars, and produced and spread literature in line with Salafi interpretations, and to this day is seen as one of the primary institutions that promotes Salafi Wahhabi teaching to Muslim students internationally.[39] This is particularly relevant in terms of Salafism’s spread in Bosnia, as one of the most prominent Salafi *shayukh*, Dr. Sheikh Jusuf Barčić, would later graduate from the university.

Discursive Tradition and Salafism

Talal Asad’s conceptual framework of Islam as a discursive tradition is defined as “a complex and evolving set of discourse,” rooted in historical continuity, “that guides religious practice and interpretation.”[40] Abbas Jong and Rami Ali in “Political Islam as an Incomplete and Contested Category,” affirm that this framework moves away from studying Islam as different interpretations, and instead focuses on the “historical continuity, adaptability, plurality, and the interrelation of power and authority with tradition and discourse.”[41] The application of Islam as a

[36] Bano, “Introduction: Salafism Today–A Break with the Past,” 10.; *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya*, meaning Islamic Awakening.
[37] Bano, “Introduction: Salafism Today–A Break with the Past,” 11.; *mubtadi‘* meaning someone who is an innovator.
[38] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 162.
[39] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 66.; Bano. “Introduction: Salafism Today–A Break with the Past,” 7,11.
[40] Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*. (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986), 14.; Abbas Jong and Rami Ali. “Political Islam as an Incomplete and Contested Category: A Post-Foundationalist Revision.” (Religions 14, no. 8 2023), 10-11.
[41] Jong and Ali, “Political Islam as an Incomplete and Contested Category,” 11.

discursive tradition to Salafism, and generally to other piety movements, is contested particularly by Aaron Rock-Singer, who in "The Roots of Islamic Piety"questions the "historical narrative," and "the comparative lack of attention to the ideological and material contexts," of modern piety movements. [42] Further, Rock-Singer clearly rejects the idea that Salafism (and Islamic piety in general) "begins not within a discursive tradition of Islamic ethics," but instead is rooted in the 19th-century piety movement in Egypt in response to colonialism.[43] Katherine Lemons aptly responds to Rock-Singer and states that historical continuity or rupture is not the issue, rather that the concept of tradition presents, "a non-historicist conception of time and an approach to the past that is not chronological," urging both anthropologists and historians to question the secularity of the disciplines," and how continuity and change both influence tradition.[44]

Jong and Ali reaffirm the discursive tradition, especially when applied to Political Islam or Islamism writ large, as it highlights the use of tradition to inform embodied practices and political imaginaries, while yielding vastly heterogenous interpretations.[45] Moreover, Salafism is but one piety movement and within Salafism there is no singular conclusion and set of beliefs. To address the issue of historicity, Jong and Ali point to the Benjaminian influence of the discursive tradition, stating that Asad "draws implicitly," from Walter Benjamin's *33 Theses on the Philosophy of History,* and that Asad's view of tradition, "is not a continuous lineage of doctrines but a strategic

[42] Aaron Rock-Singer, 2022. "Introduction: The Roots of Islamic Piety." (Political Theology 23 (7), 202): 676.
[43] Aaron Rock-Singer, "The Roots of Salafism: Strands of an Unorthodox Past, 1926–1970" in *In the Shade of the Sunna: Salafi Piety in the Twentieth-Century Middle East*, (University of California Press, 2022), 20.
[44] Katherine Lemons, "Response to the Roots of Islamic Piety." (Political Theology 23, no. 7, 2022), 720.
[45] Jong and Ali, "Political Islam as an Incomplete and Contested Category," 35.

and contingent engagement with the past, shaped by crises, interruptions, and recontextualizations."[46]

Local vs. Global / Traditional vs. Transnational

Salafism was "something almost wholly unknown as the Bosnians had their traditional Islam," which was grounded in the Ḥanafī school of jurisprudence and Sufi traditions.[47] Moreover, Salafism is at times presented as a "version" of Islam that parallels what has been labeled as a localized and distinct "Bosnian Islam." Tone Bringa wrote *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way* following the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while working in the field in a small central Bosnian Muslim-Croat village, focusing on how Muslim identity is created and community relations.[48] In *Remaking Muslim Lives*, David Henig focuses on the "ways Muslim lives and cultural values have been reconfigured in the face of ruptures caused by political violence," and dispossession in post-war times.[49] Other scholars, such as historian Ensaf Begić, focus on Bosnian history and how Bosnians "preserve their affiliation to Islam while always keeping an eye on their European roots and autonomy."[50] To support this, Begić draws on Bosnian theologian Ahmet Alibašić who summarizes the features of a Bosnian Islam: "1) secularised, 2) civic and non-violent, 3) democratic and pluralistic and 4) nationalised."[51]

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[46] Jong and Ali, "Political Islam as an Incomplete and Contested Category," 17.; Walter Benjamin. "33 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'." in The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), -.
[47] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism,* 491.
[48] Tone Bringa, "Introduction" in *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village.* (Princeton University Press, 1995), 8 .
[49] David Henig, "Introduction" in *Remaking Muslim Lives : Everyday Islam in Postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina*. (University of Illinois Press, 2020),
[50] Esnaf Begić, "Bosnian Islam? Islam and Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina from a Historical Perspective," in *The Enduring Legacy of the Habsburg Islam Policy*, eds. Sevgi Adak, Thomas Schmidinger. (Edinburgh University Press, 2025), 152.
[51] Begić, "Bosnian Islam?" 153.

This idea of a distinct European and Bosnian Islam is also reflected in Fikret Karčić's "What is the 'Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks?'" He explains the Bosnian tradition as belonging to the Hanafi–Maturidi doctrine, having a cultural heritage based on Ottoman-Islamic influence, pre-Ottoman traditions which have synchronized with Islamic practices, reformist interpretations of Islam, the establishment of the Islamic Community, and the practice of Islam in a secular context.[52] Hesová questioned the validity of such claims, that there are a "set of ingredients and principles for a liberal, European Islam," and rather situates the emergence of a Bosnian Islam (or European Islam) not so much as a model but as a result of an "organizing of religious life" and national identity through the efforts of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina.[53] Xavier Bougarel additionally questioned this idea of a distinct Bosnian Islam, and the proponents of such statements, concluding that this risked defining Islam in Bosnia as a "homogeneous and *sui generis* [of its own kind] reality."[54] Though Bougarel's arguments were made nearly two decades ago, the attempt from nationalist parties, specifically SDA, *Stranka Demokratske Akcije* (Party of Democratic Action), though initially were to "re-Islamise the national identity of Bosnian Muslims actually resulted in a paradoxical 'nationalisation' of Bosnian Islam."[55] Reflecting on Karčić, Rosa Karolin Meyer in her recent ethnography of Salafis in Sarajevo, states that this model of a distinct Bosnian Islam ignores normative practices of what constitutes Islam and speaks against the *ummah*, which she concludes is probably a result of "neo-fundamentalist groups that questioned the everyday Islam" in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[56] Moreover, the establishment of the Islamic

[52] Fikret Karčić, "Šta Je to 'Islamska Tradicija Bošnjaka'?," (Preporod 23/841, 2006), 14.
[53] Hesová, "Islamic Tradition," 137.
[54] Xavier Bougarel, "Bosnian Islam as 'European Islam': Limits and Shifts of a Concept" in Islam in Europe. Diversity, Identity and Influence, eds. Aziz Al-Azmeh and Effie Fokas, (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17.
[55] Bougarel, "Bosnian Islam as 'European Islam'," 3.
[56] Meyer, S*alafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions*, 6.; *ummah*, meaning global Muslim community.

Community was an attempt by the Austro-Hungarians to disconnect the Muslims from "Istanbul."[57] Most recently, Hamdija Begović traces and critiques the transition of Bosniak-*ness* that once was centralized as part of greater *ummah* to one that has been individualized and localized.[58] Conversely, Salafism recenters the role of Islam in the everyday lives of Muslims and their individuality as part of the global *ummah*.

Categorizing Salafism

There have been various categorizations that have been utilized for understanding Salafi beliefs and actions largely based on creed and methodology, '*aqīdah* and *manhaj* respectively. Quintain Wiktorkowitz's categorizations of purists, politicos, and jihadis, in the "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," are very often utilized, particularly to draw distinction not in terms of beliefs but in terms of what strategies to employ for contemporary issues from tradition, such as political engagement in non-Muslim countries..[59] Other scholars have argued for expanding these categories providing additional criteria, most notably Joas Wagemaker in *A Quietist Jihadi*, who expanded this to include hyphenated subtypes: quietist Salafis, political Salafis, and Jihadi-Salafis.[60] Others have proposed alternative criteria for consideration, such as Thomas Hagghammer focusing on political action, such as "socio-revolutionary activism", "global jihadism" and "vigilantism" in *Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries?*[61] Focusing on the role of

[57] Meyer, S*alafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions,* 10-11.
[58] Hamdija Begovic, "From Ummatic Muslims to State-centered Bosniacs: The Case of the Muslims of Bosnia." (American Journal of Islam and Society 2025), 75.
[59] Wiktorowicz, Quintan. "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement." (*Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3, 2006): 207–8.
[60] Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*. (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 51. Wagemakers, Joas. "Salafism: Generalisation, Conceptualisation and Categorisation. Contextualising Salafism and Salafi Jihadism." edited by Magnus Ranstorp. (Copenhagen: National Centre for the Prevention of Extremism, 2020), pp. 26.
[61] Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism," in Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), 257-64.

specific Salafi scholars and their leadership, Jarret Brachman produces a categorization which includes Albānī-Salafis, Salafist Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood), Qutubis, and so-forth, in *Global Jihadism*.[62] Alternatively, Zoltan Pall in *Lebanese Salafis Between the Gulf and Europe*, divides Salafis in relationship with the head of state; subservient purists or *harakis*, the latter meaning activists who challenge or oppose.[63] Massimo Ramaioli further proposes a new classification scheme, and views Salafism as a Gramscian-informed vanguardism, reflecting on two of Antonio Gramsci's principles of "historic-bloc" and "modern Prince;" put simply, meaning the current cultural-institutional context Salafis find themselves in and the group formation which responds to those conditions.[64] He lists them as the following: accommodationists, partisans, delayers, agitators, mobilizers, and belligerents.[65] These categorizations and definitions of Salafism have been made by political scientists, experts on Salafism or counterterrorism.[66] Alternatively and most recently, as mentioned earlier, Qadhi divides the contemporary Salafis into five categories: apolitical, soft-loyalists, dogmatic-loyalists, activists and militants.[67] However, arguing even against Qadhi's more sympathetic approach to the study of Salafism, Samir Amghar states that Salafism has been a sort of all-encompassing concept used to explain "different phenomena: from a synonym for ultra-orthodoxy and Islamic fundamentalism, to the person wearing a long beard and a religious outfit worn below the ankles, or the full veil, to jihadism and Islamic violence."[68]

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[62] Jarret M. Brachman, "Doctrine and schools," in *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 26.
[63] Zoltan Pall. *Lebanese Salafis Between the Gulf and Europe: Development, Fractionalization and Transnational Networks of Salafism in Lebanon*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 25-6
[64] Massimo Ramaioli. "Salafism as Gramscian Informed Vanguardism." (Contemporary Islam 17, no. 2, 2023), 304.
[65] Ramaioli, "Salafism as Gramscian Informed Vanguardism," 297.
[66] See Wagemakers,"Salafism".
[67] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 49.
[68] Samir Amghar, "Quietism versus Jihadism: The Need to Rethink Contemporary Salafism." (Contemporary Islam 17, no. 2, 2023), 218.

Moreover, Amghar warns against such rigid definitions, conflation of violence, and lack of actually addressing the concrete concern of radicalization.[69]

Narratives and Securitized Reporting

The presence of Salafism in Bosnia and Herzegovina arrived with humanitarian aid, arms, and foreign mujahideen during the Bosnian War (1992-1995).[70] Shortly after, from 1997 to the mid-2000s terrorist attacks, largely linked to Salafis, made national and international news, labelling Bosnia as a fertile ground for terrorism.[71] This was only exacerbated by the recruitment of Bosnian Muslims to Syria and Iraq in 2011 into the mid-2010s by local Salafi leaders. Most prominently, Edina Bećirević in her article "Salafism vs. Moderate Islam," lists the secular state's concerns that "Salafi way of life strongly challenges," specifically: the state and its laws, "eroding the secularity of the state," and undermining European Union and NATO membership.[72] Similarly, Sead Turčalo and Nejra Veljan in "Community Perspectives on the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina," concluded the link to radicalization was a result of the war, as well as other factors including lack of trust in institutions.[73] Marko Babić in "Salafism in Bosnia and Herzegovina," adds to this by highlighting poor socio-economic conditions."[74] However, Hesová in her article "Wahhabis and Salafis, *daije* and *alimi*" observes that these reports emerged after the return of Bosnians from Syria, and that not only do they pose a marginal "threat," these reports largely, universally equated Salafism with violence and militancy; instead she

[69] Amghar, "Quietism versus Jihadism: The Need to Rethink Contemporary Salafism," 218.
[70] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 490.
[71] Hesová, "Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi : Bosnian Neo-Salafis between Contestation and Integration." (Southeast European and Black Sea Studies 2021), 594.
[72] Edina Bećirević. "Salafism vs. Moderate Islam, A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims." (Atlantska inicijativa, 2016), 10-11.
[73] Sead Turčalo and Nejra Veljan, "Community perspectives on the prevention of violent extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina," (Sarajevo: Atlantic initiative, 2018) 23.
[74] Marko Babić, "Salafism in Bosnia And Herzegovina," (Institute of European Studies: Geographical Overview, Western Balkans, 2017), 185.

highlights the discursive and heterogeneous views among Salafis and adds that we cannot reduce Salafis to a singular "Salafi community."[75]

Moreover, these reports offered suggestions to curtail radicalization, though in the following decades trends towards radicalization were not present. Turčalo and Veljan list the importance of anti-extremist programs, the employment of psychologists, and community policing programs.[76] Bećirević, alternatively provides recommendations to limit Saudi Salafi proselytizing and funding, to encourage the Islamic Community to set policies limiting the influence of Salafism, and developing counter-narratives through NGOs.[77] Not only has the Islamic Community absorbed Salafis who recognize their institutional authority in the country, Hesová confirms that this has always been the case, and the number of Salafis who challenge this authority have waned.[78] Additionally, Salafis have filled the gaps in social services that have not been filled by the state or the Islamic Community, offering training for teachers, youth activities, mental health support, marriage counselling, education for both youth and adults, usually at no cost.[79]

Secularism and Islam in the Political Sphere

Jong and Ali define the difference between Political Islam and Islamism as follows: "'Political Islam' is seen as primarily oriented toward power, state and political authority, while 'Islamism' is viewed as a broader tendency encompassing various dimensions of social and individual life."[80] Salafi organizations and community organizing has provided an opportunity for them to meet community needs (both Salafi and non-Salafi) along with continued proselytizing.

[75] Hesová, "Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi," 609-610.
[76] Turčalo and Veljan, "Community perspectives on the prevention of violent extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina," 24.
[77] Bećirević, "Salafism vs. Moderate Islam," 12.
[78] Hesová, "Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi," 610.
[79] Hesová, "Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi," 610.
[80] Jong and Ali. "Political Islam as an Incomplete and Contested Category, 9.

This has further been confirmed by Rosa Karolin Meyer's recent book, *Salafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions*, that these services should be seen as a form of governance through the support of foreign aid and NGOs, as well as community organizing.[81] However, Bećirević stated that the concern is with the "radicalization of thought" and Salafism's interpretation of Islam threatening the secularity of the state and the potential for EU and NATO membership.[82]

The ongoing concern in Bosnia and Herzegovina in regard to Salafism continues to be framed as a threat to Islam in Bosnia, which is characterized as "European" and "secular." Talal Asad in *The Formations of the Secular*, states the following about secularism:

> One old argument about the need to separate religion from politics is that because the former essentially belongs to the domain of faith and passion, rational argument and interest-guided action can have no place in it. The secularist concedes that religious beliefs and sentiments might be acceptable at a personal and private level, but insists that organized religion, being founded on authority and constraint, has always posed a danger to the freedom of the self as well as to the freedom of others.[83]

Further, Asad asks what was the cause for "Islamism" to enter the public sphere in the first place, for example, "the establishment of clinics or schools in underserviced areas."[84] Even in the reports shared earlier, Turčalo, Veljan, Babić, and Hesová have confirmed that dissatisfaction with the state and institutions, socio-economic conditions, and psychological effects of the war have negatively impacted Bosnians as a whole.

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[81] Meyer, S*alafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions,* 177-179.
[82] Bećirević, "Salafism vs. Moderate Islam," 10.
[83]Talal Asad, "Secularism, Nation-State, Religion" In *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, (Stanford University Press, 2003), 186
[84] Asad, "Secularism, Nation-State, Religion," 199.

Very little has changed in recent years, Bosnia has not reached EU membership, the country remains in a tripartite government with two autonomous regions and three rotating presidents and continued economic hardship. Salafi proselytizing has reached many more through online platforms and community services. Meyer points to Sanin Musa, the founder of the *Vjera Narod Država* Party (Faith, People, Nation), who entered the 2022 election as a contender and has a Salafi background.[85] He is most well-known for organizing against the Pride Parades in Bosnia. However, recent headlines refer to him as a former Salafi, and he is not supported by other prominent Salafi figures who have more popularity.[86] Furthermore, Salafis entering the political sphere still raises alarms, though Meyer states that there is no definitive proof of Salafis exerting political influence.[87] What can be confirmed, however, is that Salafism has become part of the broader Muslim community, though as Bećirević states, "even nonviolent radical behavior deepens fears of 'others' and contributes to general social distrust and insecurity."[88] Negative perceptions of Salafis, and pious Muslims generally, continue on.

[85] Meyer, S*alafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions,* 144-146.
[86] https://detektor.ba/2020/07/21/bivsi-selefijski-daija-osnovao-politicki-pokret-vjera-narod-drzava/ https://sarajevotimes.com/who-benefits-from-tensions-fueled-by-sanin-musa/ https://www.dnevnik.ba/vijesti/tko-je-sanin-musa-vrijeme-da-muslimani-preuzmu-konce-ove-drzave-i-namecu-pravila-kojima-je-allah-zadovoljan/; Meyer, S*alafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions,* 146.
[87] Meyer, S*alafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions,* 178.
[88] Bećirević, "Salafism vs. Moderate Islam," 9.

Chapter Three: Historical Background

A Brief History of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Islam came to present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina beginning with the Ottoman conquests of the medieval Kingdom of Bosnia fell in 1463.[89] Over time, many of the inhabitants converted to Islam though Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic presence remained. Traditionally, Bosniaks are Ḥanafī Muslims, following the *madhab* (school of jurisprudence) of Abu Ḥanafah and adhere to the *Maturidi aqida*.[90] Sufi traditions and practices, most notably Naqshabandis, thrived in this region and are present in Bosnia and the region to this day.[91] The status and fate of Muslims in the region was shaped by the continuous shifts in empire and the rise of nationalism. By the 1800s the decline of the Ottoman Empire experienced various internal concerns and was influenced by contentious external factors; rebellions, financial pressures from Europe, global economic changes, industrialization.[92] For example, the Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876) were an attempt to modernize and centralize the government, though this would create tensions among non-Muslim communities.[93] In 1878, the Congress of Berlin established the Austro-Hungarian de facto administrative control of Bosnia and Herzegovina until official annexation in 1908.[94] This ended almost 450 years of Ottoman rule in Bosnia. Under the Austro-Hungarians, a distinct ethno-religious identity for Muslims was encouraged, and the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Islamska zajednica u Bosni i Herzegovini*) was established in 1882 under the

[89] Michael A. Sells, *A Bridge Betrayed*, (University of California Press, 1998), 33.
[90] Qadhi, Understanding Salafism, 490.
[91] Zora Kostadinova, "Edep: Ethical Imagination and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammed," (Contemporary Islam 18, no. 1, 2024): 89.
[92] Sells, *A Bridge Betrayed*, 33
[93] Mehmed Bećić, "The Commercial Law for Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1883: A Legal Transplant Debate Perspective." (Comparative Legal History 13 (2), 2025) 232.
[94] Marko Atilla Hoare, *Serbia: A Modern History* (Oxford Academic, 2024), 564.

leadership of a Grand Mufti, titled *Reis-ul-ulema*.[95] The establishment of the Islamic Community by the Austro-Hungarians was an attempt to disconnect the Muslim populations in the region from "Istanbul."[96] As aforementioned, ethnic and religious tensions heightened during this period resulting in the First and Second Balkan Wars, and World War I, leading to mass waves of Muslims throughout the Balkans, known as *muhadžiri*, settling in modern-day Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine between 1883 to 1911.[97] The end of the First World War resulted in the establishment of the short-lived Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941), only for World War II to break out and for Bosnia and Herzegovina to then be incorporated into the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in 1945.[98] This period is often pointed to as a decline in Muslim life, though it was overseen by the Islamic Community, albeit under the supervision and control of the socialist state at the time. Yugoslavia eradicated traditional institutions, *madrese*, Quranic primary education, and Sufi *tekkes*.[99] In 1968, after many appeals for recognition, Bosnian Muslims in the country gained the ability to register as "muslims by nationality," and became a legally recognized demographic, separate from other ethnic groups such as Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins and others.[100] However, by 1989 religious, ethnic, and nationalist tensions would culminate in the Yugoslav Wars, including the Bosnian War (1992-1995).

Bosnian War and Foreign Fighters

[95] Meyer. S*alafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions,* 10-11.; *Reis-ul-ulema* meaning leader of the scholars, equivalent to a Grand Mufti.
[96] Meyer. S*alafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions,* 10-11.
[97] Leyla Amzi-Erdogdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe: Muslims in Habsburg Bosnia Herzegovina*, (Stanford University Press, 2023), Introduction, 59-60
[98] Meyer, S*alafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions,* 8.
[99] Francine Friedman, "Growth of Bosnian Muslim Nationalism Under Tito 1," *The Bosnian Muslims: Denial Of A Nation*, (Routledge, 2018), 200.
[100] Sells, *A Bridge Betrayed*, 131

The war broke out shortly after Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence on March 3, 1992, under the leadership of President Alija Izetbegović.[101] The weapons embargo which was placed on Yugoslavia the year prior in 1991 continued to remain in effect, even after independence, and the lack of arms disproportionately disadvantaged the independent Bosnian Army; according to the US Institute for Peace, the Serb-majority Yugoslavian Army (JNA) controlled the majority of military artillery.[102] The newly elected president, Izetbegović, campaigned and pleaded with Western countries to lift this embargo, while at the same time, the official institution representing the Muslims in the region, the Islamic Community, lobbied support from the Middle East and other Muslim-Majority countries.[103] Though the embargo was not lifted, these efforts resulted in significant aid reaching Bosnia from Muslims all over the world, as stated by Harun Karčić, in his chapter "Arab Brothers, Arms, and Food Rations."[104]

Though the war was about territory, self-determination, and sovereignty, the plight of Muslims attracted international media attention. Images of concentration camps, snipers shooting at civilians, and other atrocities reached and inspired Muslim volunteer fighters from around the world to join the war effort in Bosnia, and fight in the name of Islam. Li accounts journalist coverage at the time, pointing to "a small group of Arab 'holy warriors,' veterans of the recent jihad in Afghanistan that had set up camp in the village of Mehurići."[105] Along with foreign fighters, much-needed humanitarian aid also entered the country by summer of 1992, most notably

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[101] Francine Friedman, "Collapse of Yugoslavia and the Fate of Bosnian Muslims." in *The Bosnian Muslims: Denial of a Nation*. (Routledge, 2018), 217.; Parts of this section draw in part on a previous course paper, "Foreign Fighters as Insurgents or Freedom Fighters: The Case of Mujahideen of Bosnia and Herzegovina," Anthropology of Insurgency, University of Michigan, 2025.
[102] US Institute of Peace, "The Military Balance in Bosnia and Its Effect on the Prospects for Peace." (US Institute of Peace, 1995), 5.
[103] Harun Karčić, "Arab Brothers, Arms, and Food Rations: How Salafism Made Its Way to BiH" in Wahhabism and the World: Understanding Saudi Arabia's Global Influence on Islam, ed. Peter Mandaville. (Oxford University Press), 275.
[104] Karčić, "Arab Brothers, Arms, and Food Rations," 276.
[105] Li, The Universal Enemy, 29.

from Saudi Arabia, but also Kuwait and Malaysia, largely from individual donors and piety institutions.[106] Qadhi affirms this, and connects the arrival of Salafism to Bosnia and Herzegovina with the arrival of "humanitarian aid that came to help the war effort, as well as the foreign fighters who sought to defend the besieged Muslim population."[107] Thus the arrival and spread of Salafism in Bosnia and Herzegovina are directly correlated with the participation of the foreign-born mujahideen fighters and foreign aid from Muslim countries, primarily Saudi Arabia. Moreover, shifted the Bosnian War beyond a local war for self-determination, religion, and territory, but one that became a transnational Muslim issue.

The foreign fighters were part of transnational Islamist networks and viewed their participation in Bosnia as a primary duty of a Muslim to protect other Muslims against non-Muslim aggression and occupation, and by August 13th of 1992, the unit named el-Mudžahid Brigade, also known as *Katiba*, was incorporated into the official Bosnian Army.[108] Bosnian Muslims also joined the Katiba and even outnumbered the foreign-born mujahideen fighters.[109] However, the number of foreign-born fighters has been overinflated in the past, at times estimated at 12,000 though more conservative numbers total them at 3,000, while some as low as five hundred.[110] According to Li however, the Katiba had one thousand men at its peak, only half of whom were foreign-born.[111]

The Katiba by and large functioned independently: they chose their own leaders, fundraised internationally, promoted Salafi teachings, and ran Islamic religious educational programs.[112] The Katiba and traditional Muslims had found themselves at odds ideologically throughout the war.

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[106] Karčić, "Arab Brothers, Arms, and Food Rations," 276.
[107] Qadhi, *Understanding Salafism*, 491.
[108] Karčić, "Arab Brothers, Arms, and Food Rations," 276.
[109] Li, *The Universal Enemy*, 55.
[110] Li, The Universal Enemy, 2.; The Katiba, in Arabic: Katībat al-Mujāhidīn, and Bosnian: Odred Elmudžahedin. This was the Mujahids' battalion in the Bosnian army.
[111] Li, The Universal Enemy, 2.
[112] Li, The Universal Enemy, 15.

According to Li, one primary complaint by Bosnian soldiers was the requirement to undergo religious training and "re-education" prior to being able to officially join the Katiba.[113] Though both the Bosnian and foreign-born soldiers believed personally that Arab Muslims were more educated in Islam, Bosnian soldiers' piety being brought into question added to the already strained relationship.[114] The Katiba presented their motivations for this re-education as a way to unify the soldiers under one singular "banner of Islam."[115] However, this is further complicated as these motivations were also heavily influenced and tied to the funding and aid received from donors.[116]

Proselytizing Literature

Li states that "unfamiliar forms of Islamic piety—often labeled as 'Wahhabi'—began to stand out in the area: long beards, face veils and headscarves, new styles of prayer," which were perceived to be influenced by, "Arab 'guests' specifically those bringing funds from the Gulf."[117] This roughly appeared and coincided with the circulation of the booklet titled *Notions That Must Be Corrected*, in 1993, authored by Egyptian *da'i*, Imad el-Misri.[118] The booklet "carried the logo of the Islamic Heritage Society, Kuwait's leading Salafi organization."[119] El-Misri listed the innovations that were leading Bosnian Muslims astray, including but not limited to, the intercession of saints and the visiting of Sufi shrines, such as Ajvatovica.[120] He also criticized the prevalence of gender-mixing, *premarital sex, smoking, drinking alcohol*, men removing their facial

[113] Li, The Universal Enemy, 113.
[114] Li, The Universal Enemy, 209.
[115] Li, The Universal Enemy, 112.
[116] Li, The Universal Enemy, 112.
[117] Li, *The Universal Enemy*, 53.
[118] Li, *The Universal Enemy*, 53.; Parts of this section draw in part on a previous course paper, "Foreign Fighters as Insurgents or Freedom Fighters: The Case of Mujahideen of Bosnia and Herzegovina," Anthropology of Insurgency, University of Michigan, 2025.;da'i, meaning a missionary or preacher who engages in *da'wah*, or the act of inviting others to Islam, i.e. missionary work.
[119] Li, *The Universal Enemy*, 53.
[120] Li, *The Universal Enemy*, 53.; Katarzyna Puzon, *Islam and Heritage in Europe: Pasts, Presents and Future Possibilities*. (Taylor & Francis, 2021), 3.

hair, and listening to music, among other issues.[121] El-Misri's teachings were not welcomed by many Bosnian imams within the Islamic Community and non-Salafi Bosniaks alike.[122] They claimed that his teachings were not only attacking Bosnian Islamic traditions but were also causing *fitna* among Muslims.[123] Interestingly, though the booklet is often seen as a deviation from local beliefs and traditions, the second half of the booklet is an adapted version from the work of Saudi scholar, Saʿid bin Ali bin Wahf al-Qahtani, in *The Fortress of the Muslim*, who himself credits his analysis of Haḍīth to three scholars of Albanian and Balkan origin: Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Arnaʾut, and Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾut.[124] Even though the booklet was met with resistance, it still served as the source for many Bosniaks' Islamic reawakening and their subsequent adoption of Salafi beliefs.[125]

Role of Islamic NGOs

The emergence of Salafi practice coincided with the aid received from Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. Harun Karčić extensively documents the funding received from Saudi Arabia and connects this to the rise of Salafism. He focuses on four main channels whereby Salafi ideas were brought to Bosnia: "Saudi institutions, Saudi-funded nongovernmental and humanitarian organizations, Arab volunteer fighters, and graduates of Middle Eastern universities."[126] The aid came from Saudi Arabia starting in mid-1992 during the arms embargo. The aid received was from individuals and foundations, though this shifted with the new leadership in the Saudi High Commission, and it is estimated that the official amount of donations from Saudi Arabia alone

[121] Li, *The Universal Enemy*, 53.;
[122] Li, *The Universal Enemy*, 53.
[123] Li, *The Universal Enemy*, 54. fitna, meaning strife.
[124] Li, *The Universal Enemy*, 71.
[125] Li, *The Universal Enemy*, 54.
[126] Karčić, "Arab Brothers, Arms, and Food Rations," 276.

would amount to approximately $600 million from 1992 to 2011.[127] Karčić lists the Saudi-funded organizations that were active during the war:

> The Muslim World League, Al Haramain Foundation, the International Relief Organization, World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), Saudi Arabian Red Crescent Society, the Islamic Waqf Organization, Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage, Centre for the Affirmation of Islamic Sciences, Muqaf Foundation, Third World Relief Agency, Al Furqan, and the Makkah Humanitarian Organization.[128]

The Saudi High Commission also funded, "hundreds of orphans and thousands of families of fallen Muslim soldiers…it also fully operated eighteen refugee camps, provided school equipment for children, food, medicine, fuel for heating, water, and milk."[129] Additionally, these organizations provided lectures on Islam, funded summer schools, Qur'ān lessons, and published Islamic literature, all free to Bosnian Muslims. Most of this aid was sent to Sarajevo, which would be distributed to other Muslim majority cities like Zenica, Travnik, and Tuzla.[130] Throughout the war, the Saudi High Commission kept close ties to the Islamic Community and utilized imams and religious leaders to distribute aid, repair mosques, and employed imams fluent in Arabic to translate books.[131] More than half of the mosques in Bosnia were destroyed during the war and Bosniak Muslims sought funding to rebuild mosques. The most prominent of these mosques was the King Fahd Mosque built in 2000 in Sarajevo's Alipašino Polje neighborhood.[132] These mosques also diverged from the traditional Balkan style of the region. Moreover, Saudi Arabia

[127] Karčić, "Arab Brothers, Arms, and Food Rations," 276.
[128] Karčić, "Arab Brothers, Arms, and Food Rations," 277
[129] Karčić, "Arab Brothers, Arms, and Food Rations," 276.
[130] Karčić, "Arab Brothers, Arms, and Food Rations," 276.
[131] Karčić, "Arab Brothers, Arms, and Food Rations," 277.
[132] Bećirević, "Salafism vs. Moderate Islam," 94.

was not the only country to send significant amounts of aid during this time. Similar aid was sent throughout the war from various countries including Kuwait, Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, and others.

1995-present

Foreign aid, especially from Saudi Arabia, resulted in hundreds of housing developments, mosques, and libraries.[133] These libraries were filled with proselytizing books, most often written or translated by Bosnian Muslim graduates of Middle Eastern Universities.[134] The most prominent of these graduates was the late Dr. Shaykh Jusuf Barčić, a graduate from the Islamic University of Medina, who emerged as a leading and vocal figure of Bosnian Salafis in the early 2000s.[135] He and Nusret Imamović, a graduate of a university in the United Arab Emirates, established one of the first para-*jamaats*, in Gornja Maoča.[136] Barčić had several confrontations with the Islamic Community, the most contentious of which were his attempts to spread Salafi teachings at Sarajevo's central mosque, Gazi Husrev Beg, in the Old City.[137] Barčić died in a car accident in 2007, which led to Imamović becoming the leading figure and representative of the community, and by 2014, there had been a major division. Imamović had advocated for Muslims to fight for al-Nusra in Syria, while another prominent Salafi, Bilal Bosnić, advocated for Muslims to join ISIL instead, when the Syrian Civil War broke out which began in 2011.[138] By 2013, Imamović left Bosnia to participate in the Syrian Civil War as a member of al-Nusra.[139] At this time, extremist rhetoric began to emerge. Some of this was directed to other Muslims, the government, and

[133] Parts of this section draw in part on a previous course paper, "Foreign Fighters as Insurgents or Freedom Fighters: The Case of Mujahideen of Bosnia and Herzegovina," Anthropology of Insurgency, University of Michigan, 2025.
[134] Karčić, "Arab Brothers, Arms, and Food Rations," 276.
[135] Hesová, "Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi," 600.
[136] Bećirević, "Salafism vs. Moderate Islam," 39.; para-*jamaats* meaning parallel communities.
[137] Hesová, *Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi*, 601.
[138] Hesová, *Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi*, 601.
[139] Hesová, *Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi*, 602.

ultimately resulted in the Bosnian government conducting raids, arresting recruiters, and returnees from Syria.[140] In interviews conducted by Bećirević, many Salafis shared that this period stereotyped Salafis as terrorists, especially due to overzealous arrests made by security agencies and media portrayals.[141] This resulted in increased surveillance of Bosnian Salafis and the beginning of mass securitized reporting. Since this shift in leadership, Safet Kuduzović emerged as the leading *da'i* in the country.[142]

Hesová writes that Kuduzović, and other current *da'is* like Elvedin Pezić, have transformed the image of Salafis, specifically with their online presence and use of social media "to the point of being prime Bosniak influencers."[143] Both Kuduzović and Pezić have a significant following on all social media platforms, including Instagram, Youtube, and Facebook. The current Salafi mission has shed the extremist rhetoric and has shifted to providing public services for the broader community beyond online preaching. Hesová states that, "youth activities, psychological support, marriage counselling, and sometimes sports, computer literacy, and Arabic, but above all, religious lectures," have been provided by Salafis.[144] The King Fahd Cultural Center in Sarajevo, offers religious and technical classes, most of which if not all, are free to the public. Most importantly, they continue to offer guidance on social and Islamic norms, and provide a sense of community and social identity, by encouraging "a specific dress code, solidarity acts, social and verbal behaviour, and (masculine) role models – all channels of personal empowerment."[145]

[140] Hesová, *Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi*, 602.
[141] Bećirević, "Salafism vs. Moderate Islam," 80.
[142] Edina Bećirević, "Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report." (British Council 2018), 18.
[143] Hesová, *Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi*, 607.
[144] Hesová, *Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi*, 607.
[145] Hesová, *Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi*, 607.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This thesis is based on qualitative ethnographic in-field research conducted in the summer of 2025, between May 12th and August 11th. Research focuses on the Bosnian Salafi community in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the primary focus on concluding the ways in which political participation manifests in people's everyday lives, considering assumptions of generalized political quietism and their relationship to the state and broader community, particularly in the years following the end of the Bosnian War, massive surveillance and raids of Salafi communities in the early 2000s, as mentioned previously in Chapters 2 and 3. Rather than strictly relying on historical research and analysis, ethnographic methods were most appropriate as both informal and formal discussions would fully encompass answering relevant questions and concerns, with the added benefit of discussing the history and development of the Salafi community. Sarajevo was chosen as the fieldsite for two specific reasons; principally, it is Bosnia's largest city with the highest percentage of Muslims. Moreover, the city houses the King Fahd Mosque, the King Fahd Cultural Center, several women's organizations, and hosts prominent Salafi scholars and lectures regularly.

Interviews

Over the course of my fieldwork, I spoke with approximately thirty individuals in total and conducted a dozen long-form semi-structured interviews, the latter of which provided the major basis of my results and analysis in the following chapter. All interviews were conducted in the Bosnian language, borrowing at times from Arabic and Islamic terminology when discussing certain topics pertaining to faith. For these semi-structured interviews, I compiled a list of relevant questions that would serve as a guide for the conversation, though participants lead the discussion. Most of my interlocutors held official roles such as Islamic teachers and imams, while others were

community leaders or veterans during the Bosnian War, though in many cases these roles overlapped. In addition to formal roles, several of my interlocutors were people heavily involved with the community as members and participants, particularly with the women's organizations, mosques, and the cultural center.

Because of the population size and accessibility to resources that were available in Sarajevo, I was able to connect with several community members who would later recommend other possible participants in the area or at least provide other avenues of reaching participants. The first concrete example of these dates to mid-July. I connected with a husband and wife outside of the King Fahd Mosque. The husband stated that he would not be comfortable speaking with me due to my gender and introduced me to his wife. Though his wife was not interested in participating, she gave me the contact information of one of my key participants, Almedina, who then introduced me to several other women in the wider community. Other participants I was able to meet more organically, sometimes at the mosque, cafes, or markets.

The demographic make-up of my participants also varied, allowing for varied responses and results. The majority of my participants were between the ages of forty and sixty. Two of my participants were in their mid-to-late thirties. Of the twelve interviewees, half were men and the other half were women. Nine interviewees identified as Salafi, and of the three who did not, I included their answers for the purpose of adding details to the perception of Salafis and current social issues. The majority of the interviews lasted between thirty minutes and two hours, with the average interview length averaging an hour and fifteen minutes. One interviewee and I spoke for approximately four hours on one occasion. I had follow-up conversations with some participants, while others preferred to have one interview, but we later spoke in person more informally. Some

interviews were recorded, while others are hand-written fieldnotes that I compiled in a personal notebook.

Participant Observations

My observations were conducted in a variety of ways, which aided in framing the discussions and answering the questions I posed. Throughout my research, I followed several social media pages of prominent Salafi preachers, read online forums, and watched YouTube lectures. As will be discussed in both Chapters 5 and 6, media and online forums are one of the most effective ways that Salafi-oriented ideology, material, and discussions circulate. These topics generally discussed practicing proper forms of piety, such as keeping prayer, dressing modestly, and avoiding cultural innovations that may deter a practitioner. During my time in the field, the majority of my observations were conducted at mosques, attending religious lectures, community events, and informal group discussions during gatherings.

Ethical Considerations

There are several ethical considerations that were taken into account prior to conducting this study. In order to ensure proper adherence to ethics and standards, I applied to the Internal Review Board for research approval and later received a notice of exemption from ongoing IRB review, April 21, 2025. Because of the nature of this study, consent and anonymity remain primary concerns. When conducting the interviews, all participants were asked for their consent, whether these discussions were recorded or written. Some participants signed formal consent forms while others only reviewed them and provided verbal consent. Others provided consent via WhatsApp or Viber. The consent form listed their rights as a participant, both in terms of communicating with me directly and my observations in group settings when I participated with them at lectures or events. Additionally, the documents that were shared, included my contact information and my

affiliation with the University of Michigan. To ensure anonymity, all participants were assigned pseudonyms at random, with no resemblance to either their first or last name.

Imperatives for Sensitivity

Sensitivity to religious beliefs and religious trauma was an additional priority during my time in the field, considering the impacts of the Bosnian War and genocide. Many people lost family members and other loved ones, many have been displaced and dispossessed of their family homes, and some have experienced continued ethnic and religious tensions. Additionally, several women in particular shared challenges that they experienced when they began to observe hijab from friends and family. Other women also shared their husbands' and family members' experiences. With that in mind, my research does not intend to dismiss or ignore the political implications or the cultural impacts this study may have on my participants. Throughout the interviews, some of my interlocutors and I developed a level of mutual understanding that some aspects of our interviews were not pertinent to this study and overall may cause further harm to pious Muslims as a whole, especially for future studies that may engage with this topic. It was a privilege for me as a new researcher to gain their trust, and with that at times came a comfort with sharing personal experiences that are of a sensitive nature. In agreement with participants, all information that was of a private or personal nature will not be included in the study unless it was explicitly agreed upon.

Terminology and Identifying Participants

The term "Salafi" is often used interchangeably with "Wahhabi" as explained earlier. In Bosnia and elsewhere, Wahhabi is often viewed as a derogatory term, and many people reject this characterization. While approaching community members, this has to be kept in mind as there are negative perceptions of more religious and practicing Muslims, not only in Bosnia but globally. I

refrained from the use of the term "wahhabi" and when this was utilized, it was almost exclusively initiated by the participants in interviews when discussing perception, representation, and discrimination. Further usage of this term is discussed in Chapter 2. For clarity and specificity, if the participant did not volunteer that they self-designate as "Salafi," participants were asked directly of their self-designation. Some referred to themselves only as "Muslims," "*ahl-sunnah wa al-jumm'a*," or "believers," but would also state that they "follow the *salaf al-salih*."

Positionality

As a person of Bosnian descent, a practicing Muslim, and a woman, my access and ability to create a connection to the community allowed me to engage with individuals and spaces that may otherwise be inaccessible to researchers, whether due to language barriers, gender identity, or religious affiliation. Having the ability to speak Bosnian allowed me to interview participants in their native language. At times, and especially when discussing topics related to Islam, my knowledge of Arabic and Islamic terminology provided me the ability to have seamless interviews with little to no need for translation tools and services. Considering the latter point, as a practicing Muslim and as a student whose Master's concentration currently focuses on Islamic studies, the breadth of knowledge that I have about Islam generally, and Salafi methodology in particular, provided me access to more pious Muslims, establishing a sense of mutual understanding. Finally, as a Muslim woman I was able to gain access to women's only spaces and events that would not be available to male researchers. In these spaces, whether it was on an individual or group basis, women were able to openly discuss their views and perceived roles in their households and the community. Our conversations included various topics surrounding marriage, sex, gender dynamics, and sexism, which made it possible to broaden my research to reflect on the role of

women in the revivalist movement, though these topics require further research and are not fully reflected in this thesis.

Limitations

This research is not intended to be statistically representative of Salafi Bosniak views of political participation and community organizing. Nor is it meant to provide a comprehensive sampling of individuals and their personal perceptions of bias, discrimination, and state relations. However, this study does provide both ethnographic and analytical insight that are useful for exploring the questions that I have posed. It is important to note, however, the limitations of this research. The first is the depth and breadth of this study, and the second is the influence that my personal and social identities may have had on both my access to participants and what they shared. This thesis is based on research conducted with participants from Sarajevo in a roughly three-month period and yielded a smaller pool of participants. Additionally, the snowball sampling method, while allowing me to interview individuals in a more insular religious community in a short period of time, may skew results, causing perspectives held by individuals outside of this network to be left out. These findings are not representative of all Salafis, some of whom may possibly practice complete political quietism or be more actively involved.

While my social identities did provide me with access to participants, as mentioned previously, these same social identities were factors when it came to the comfort of possible participants. As a woman, I gained access to participants in women-only social circles. However, some men that I spoke with were not comfortable participating in an interview on an individual basis, specifically due to my gender. While my background and national origin is from Bosnia and Herzegovina, I have lived my entire life since birth in diaspora, and my connections to Sarajevo are through my parents and visiting family. Additionally, while all my participants were pious

Muslims, I exhibited none of the outward displays of piety (i.e. hijab, long loose-fitting dresses, niqab, etc.) most commonly practiced among my women participants. While some Muslims and non-Muslims may consider my attire "conservative" by most liberal and moderate standards, my lack of hijab presented as a deterrent. This was confirmed by several of my participants, who kindly reminded me that practicing Muslim women should wear hijab. Some participants expressed a degree of intrigue about the study itself and that it was conducted by a student from an American university, however others explicitly expressed not only their lack of interest in providing information to American-affiliated universities and researchers, but shared their skepticism of my intentions as an outsider to the community. One person that I approached outwardly asked why this research was not being conducted in the United States among Bosnian Salafis in any of the communities in the area, for example in the Detroit metropolitan area where I grew up. While in some instances my social background allowed me to connect with participants in various ways, complexities of identity, insider-outsider dynamics and perceptions may have also contributed to refusal to participate, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: Results

In early July, I enrolled in a Qur'ān recitation seminar at a local women's organization in Sarajevo's Novi Grad, where I met one of my interlocutors, Nura, a *mu'allima* who led portions of the course.[146] Nura introduced me to the rest of the women in our class. Many of them expressed interest in the topic, particularly because they felt their community was facing several ongoing issues with bias and discrimination. Some of the women described themselves as politically active, participating in elections, community organizing, and following local and national politics closely, while others refrained altogether. Regardless of personal political engagement, there were several issues that they felt were political in nature that needed to be resolved. One major issue was finding difficulty in attaining jobs with supervisors who would allow them to pray during their shifts. *Jum'ah* prayer in particular was an issue, especially for their husbands.[147] Many stated that even though Muslims were allotted one hour of time for prayer a day, it did not guarantee that their supervisors would be obligated to fulfill the request.[148] Though most of the women currently were unemployed and stay-at-home parents, over the years when they worked, the women who wore *niqab* reported experiencing particular hardship in the workplace.[149] One woman said at her last job at a local grocery store in her neighborhood, some of the customers complained to her supervisor that they were uncomfortable with her.[150] Another woman shared that her friend was denied work at a local travel agency and was explicitly told it was because she wore niqab, and

[146] Fieldnotes, July 9, 2025, Stup, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.; *Mu'allima*, lit. female teacher and scholar in an Islamic context.
[147] *Jum'ah* prayers are held on Fridays and are mandatory for Muslim men.
[148] Nedim Begović, *Presude Evropskog suda za ljudska prava* (Časopis za interdisciplinarne studije, 2014), 27.
[149] *Niqab*, a type of face covering.
[150] Fieldnotes, July 9, 2025, Stup, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.

that if it had only been hijab then it would not have been an issue for employment.[151] When I asked them how this was possible since protection against religious discrimination is prohibited under the Law on Freedom of Religion, they stated that it was still commonplace and avenues to remedy discrimination in the workplace proved to be a difficult process.[152]

Two other women on the following day pointed to interpersonal situations in which they experienced discrimination and even violence. Nura, in a later interview, told me that when she first started to wear hijab as a young woman in the early 2000s, a man assaulted her in public.[153] Safija, on the other hand, shared that her husband was experiencing social discomfort with his coworkers even though his supervisor was understanding and obliged his requests to fulfill his prayers, even on Fridays. She said, "my husband is the only man that [works there and] has a beard, he shortens his mustache, and has cropped pants…they call him a *vehabija* (Wahhabi)…they see us as fundamentalists and think we take our faith to the extreme."[154] The women in the group shared that these experiences directly stemmed from their specific way of displaying piety, through their dress, and for the men, how they fashioned their facial hair.

Vehabija is widely used as a pejorative. They also reported that they often heard people refer to them as terrorists and extremists. Many of my interlocutors shared that they were perceived to be influenced by a recent and "foreign Islam," or an Islam that was not native to the region, that instead was an "Islam that belonged to the Arabs." The so-called foreignness of Salafism is not only in diverging beliefs between the *Islamska Zajednica* (Islamic Community), which strictly adheres to the Ḥanafī *fiqh* of Sunni Islam that has a monopoly on Islamic authority in the country,

[151] Fieldnotes, July 9, 2025, Stup, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.
[152] Begović, Begović, Presude Evropskog suda za ljudska prava, 26.
[153] Interview with "Nura" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, WhatsApp phone call, Ann Arbor, MI, audio recording "Nura."
[154] Fieldnotes, July 9, 2025, Stup, Sarajevo Bogdanic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.

and that of Salafi methodology. It is deeply embedded in the assumed understanding of what Salafism is and what many perceive to be its origins, Saudi Arabia.[155] Several non-Salafi Bosniaks that I interacted with in the field, especially if they were inquiring about my research, would point to this "foreignness." This included my neighbor, who later introduced me to her daughter, Halima, and referred to her as a being part of "the *vehabija*."

One evening as I was hanging clothes on the line in the small courtyard of the building, Halima arrived and sat with her brother and mother who were already lounging in plastic chairs by their front door. Her mother introduced us before she and the brother went inside, while Halima and I continued our conversation. We mostly spoke about her children and her recent divorce from a man whom her family disapproved of specifically because of his religious observance. We were making plans to go for a walk to the pharmacy and look at make-up together when her brother came outside and told me, "Convince her to take that thing off." At the same time another neighbor was heading to the front door of the courtyard and made a passing comment, "this isn't our way, it's their way…what is wrong with the way we are Muslim?" This frenzy of everyone sharing their opinions did not seem to bother Halima. Her entire family was against her wearing a hijab, even though it had been almost fifteen years since she began to cover her hair and dress more modestly. They had hoped since her divorce that she would abandon dressing modestly.

Halima and I decided to take our stroll through the city and speak in private. After giving me advice on which beauty brands she wanted to show me, she turned to me and said:

> They tell me to take it off every time I visit them, so don't think it was because of you. That's the most he's [her brother] said to me in years…they use this word, *vehabija*, but

[155] *Islamska Zajednica Bosne i Herzegovine*, lit. The Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina; *fiqh* meaning school of law, jurisprudence.

do not understand what it means. No one refers to themselves that way. Besides, my family says this because my ex-husband is a *salafija*.[156]

Since her divorce, Halima had moved away from the Salafi community and considers herself a "main stream Ḥanafī Muslim" and that covering her hair and dressing modestly is a universal Muslim requirement. Even though Halima has since left the Salafi ideology behind, she was still very critical of those who call her a Wahhabi and assert that Salafism is a "foreign Islam."

Many nominal or cultural Muslims in Bosnia, and throughout the Balkans, view wearing hijab and dressing modestly for women as a sign of adherence to Salafi ideology.[157] However, in recent years, as aforementioned, this has changed, as many more Muslim women in Bosnia have also begun to wear hijab. Anecdotally, since my first visit to Bosnia in 2020 and in comparison, with the summer in the field, I too have noticed many more women and young girls wearing hijab. Piety and dressing modestly, however, is not only applicable to Salafis in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was by chance that I met my first participant at a cafe in Sarajevo's Old City, Bascarsija. Hamed and I were sitting practically shoulder to shoulder for at least an hour before we struck up a conversation. One of the Turkish ice-cream shop owners ran through the crowd wearing a traditional Turkish cultural costume and shouting in Turkish, presumably hoping to attract customers to visit his shop around the corner. After a short exchange, Hamed turned his attention to the book I was reading, *The Universal Enemy*, and asked if I was visiting from abroad. "I figured you were visiting from somewhere else; your book is in English. Are you here for vacation?"[158] I explained that I was in Sarajevo for fieldwork and to interview pious Muslims and ask them about

[156] Interview with "Halima" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, Centar, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, July 27, 2025, audio recording "Halima."
Salafija, Bosnian for a Salafi person.
[157] Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo
[158] Fieldnotes, May 19, 2025, Aksaray Cafe, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.

politics. Hamed's face lit up, "You couldn't have met a better person. I'm a pious Muslim and I am very politically opinionated." I had not realized then that I met someone who was very important to the community, and someone that I had seen on social media prior to my arrival.

During Hamed's interview two days later, he spoke to me mostly about the war.[159] The effects that it had on him as a young imam who had recently completed madresa at Gazi Husrev-Beg, and a few years prior. When the war broke out, he joined the military as a non-combat member, serving as a moral support and a spiritual leader for Muslim soldiers. He shared that he was *very* politically active; in elections, protests, and participating as a speaker for various events, particularly those in line with raising Bosniak ethnic and religious awareness. Early into our first interview, I had asked him why he did not have an official position as an imam within the Islamic Community, hoping to gauge his perspectives on the central religious authority. He simply explained that he serves the community in a different way, and one that allows him to express himself freely. Interestingly, through this line of questioning, I was able to ascertain that he was not Salafi as he spoke very highly of the Islamic Community. Hamed said that this was one of his major qualms with some Salafi preachers in the past having made negative statements about the institution. He explained the history behind the reabsorption of the *para-dzemats* only six years earlier and felt that at this time the relationship between the Salafis and the Islamic Community were significantly less contentious. I have heard similar sentiments from others, both Salafi and non-Salafi, in recent years. An example that was often given of this changing climate was Elvedin Pezic's lectures being hosted by the Islamic Community.[160]

[159] Interview with "Hamed" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, Aksaray Cafe, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, May 21, 2025, audio recording "Hamed."
[160] Interview with "Hamed" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, Aksaray Cafe, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, May 21, 2025, audio recording "Hamed."

The ongoing stereotype for Bosnian Muslims is that they are known for being lax or liberal. In a city with approximately one hundred mosques, there are bars that serve alcohol, casinos, and various forms of "immodest" dress among women. Rosa Karolin Meyer in her recent book had this to say: “during my field research, I met Bosnian Muslims who summarized their religious everyday life with the statement: ‘Alcohol is ok, pork is not!’”[161] However, Islam is not absent from nor is it invisible in daily life. I enrolled in an Arabic calligraphy course in the Old City. My calligraphy instructor and I spoke regularly about faith, worship, and the rising observance of Islamic dress among individuals, particularly among youth and young adults. Every day, I watched men and women entering and exiting the courtyards of the mosques and visiting Islamic bookstores. I overheard people greet each other with *salam alejkum,* use other explicitly “religious” verbiage, or simply tell a friend they were rushing to get to prayer.[162]

Since Hamed and I frequented the same spaces fairly often, he introduced me to his colleagues and friends who were involved with similar activities as him. One of his colleagues, Isa, agreed to meet for coffee and participate in an interview. Isa dedicated his career to politics, is formally educated as a lawyer, and identifies as a pious Muslim. He stated that there are continued political pressures to separate Bosnian Muslims as a whole from Islam, and for them to narrow their focus primarily on nationality and promoting secularism. “Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a Bosniak nation, it is a country that was formed as an end to a war and genocide, but largely doesn’t function, which continues to this day.”[163] He believes that there is a future for Bosnia where Islam will continue to grow in the daily lives of Bosniaks. As an example, he said, “look

[161] Meyer. S*alafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions,* 6.
[162] Fieldnotes, May 21, 2025, Skenderija, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.
[163] Interview with “Isa” (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, August 1, 2025, Cafe Behut, Sarajevo, audio recording “Isa.”

around, you find more and more young people going to mosques, girls and women wearing hijab, and so forth."[164]

The overall image of Bosnian Muslims largely falls within these two categories, non-practicing or cultural Muslims and those who practice but follow the traditional interpretations. These Bosnian Muslims who are practicing are considered "moderate" "tolerant" and part of an established "European" and "secular" Islam."[165] This in turn is juxtaposed to the dominant narrative that the arrival and spread of Salafism is not only threatening this European, tolerant and acceptable version of Islam but risks radicalizing the Muslim community from within, and more broadly, European democracy itself within Bosnia. Bećirević stated the following in "Salafism vs. Moderate Islam:"

> The Salafi way of life in Bosnia strongly challenges the BiH Constitution and Bosnian laws, including those related to family, gender equality, and the right to education. Even though most Salafis do not present a security threat and are not violently extreme, they have been radicalized in a broader sense through their adoption of an ideology that requires them to make major changes in the way they practice Islam and live their everyday lives. This interpretation of Islam does not accept the secular notion of the state, and while most Salafis will not engage in violence to impose 'pure Islamic law' they are striving in the long term for slow but steady shifts in society.[166]

Though this paragraph is extracted from an article she wrote ten years ago, these negative perceptions of Salafis continue.

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[164] Interview with "Isa" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, August 1, 2025, Cafe Behut, Sarajevo, audio recording "Isa."
[165] Meyer. *Salafi Groups in Social Welfare Functions,* 6.
[166] Bećirević. "Salafism vs. Moderate Islam," 10.

Salafism as a methodology is unique in its interpretation when compared to traditional schools of jurisprudence. Further, there is no uniform Salafi movement or community. Instead, Salafis have organized through groups and follow particular *shayukh*. By the 1980s, Salafi ideology had fully developed throughout the world, most prominently through Saudi-led efforts, though in the Saudi context it is heavily influenced by "Wahhabism" (See Chapter 2). Basic tenets are as follows: rejection of innovation, mysticism, and emphasis on the utilization of a literalist approach to textual interpretation. It is often presented by its adherents as prestigious, or pure, and it is the oldest and most authentic interpretation or practice within Islam.[167] This sometimes clashes with Bosniak Islamic traditions, especially cultural practices that are intertwined with religious observance, such as the celebration of the Prophet Muhammed's birthday, veneration of Sufi saints, and even marriage practices.[168] Many Bosnian Muslims would argue that these customs are in line with being Muslim the "Bosnian way," while Salafis deem these practices as innovations.

For example, towards the end of June, I met Hamza, who finished *madresa* in Sarajevo, and had been an *imam* on the outskirts of the city for several years.[169] During his interview, he told me he quit his position as an *imam*, in part, due to Bosniak cultural practices that he also deemed to be *"bida'*."[170] He included *mevlud* and memorials of the deceased, all of which he said he obliged for the sake of his congregation, but he felt these practices were at odds with his beliefs.[171]

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[167] Bano, "Introduction: Salafism Today–A Break with the Past," 6.
[168] Typical Islamic marriages in Bosnia have witnesses but are usually another couple. In Islamic practice, the bride's father or another male member of her family would typically be her witness.
[169] *Madresa*, Islamic School.
[170] Interview with "Hamza" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, July 18, 2025, Masjid Istiqlal, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, audio recording "Hamza."
[171] *Mevlud*, or *mawlid* in Arabic, refers to *mawlid al-nabawi*, the birthday of The Prophet (PBH); memorials for those who have passed are typically commemorated on the 7th and 40th day, on the anniversary, and the second anniversary. This is considered an innovation along with other celebrations, such as birthdays.

He completely rejected the practice of venerating Sufi saints, such as Ajvaz-dedo and the pilgrimage to Ajvatovica. He added, "I personally believe that things like Ajvatovica are only promoted by the Islamic Community for Bosniak national identity. People should focus on being Muslims first."[172]

Beyond cultural practices, Salafism and Hanafi Sunni Islam are at odds with one another in terms of *aqida*, or creed. To put it simply, the Hanafi Maturidi creed places emphasis on belief, what is in one's heart as it pertains to the belief in God and the intentions one has to being a good Muslim. On the other hand, most Salafis adhere to the Athari creed which places more emphasis not only on a literalist approach to interpreting the Quran and Haḍīth but on actions; meaning that a true believer has faith and expresses it through their behavior. Many Salafis, like most of my interlocutors, observed a more pious way of dressing. Men have long beards, clipped mustaches, and wear trousers above their ankles; while women wear a hijab, sometimes niqab, and loosely fitted long dresses. Some of the participants in this study were partial to Saudi scholars, referencing some prominent Salafi Wahhabi scholars that they follow, including Shaykh bin Bāz and Shaykh 'Uthaymīn. These sheikhs, and bin Bāz in particular, were referenced by speakers at lectures that I attended, such as at the women's organization in July.[173]

However, I do not think that it is differences in practice alone that put Salafism at odds with the dominant Muslim community in Bosnia. Salafism lives in the shadow of a sordid past, during one of the darkest times in Bosniak history. The arrival of Salafism is strongly correlated with the foreign-born mujahideen fighters who fought alongside Bosnian Muslims. While the majority left, local Bosnian Salafis made their own communities, the first being Gornja Maoča, by Dr. Shaykh Barčić and Nusret Imamović. They dedicated their time to spreading *da'wah*, and

[172] Ingvild Flaskerud and Richard J. Natvig, *Muslim Pilgrimage in Europe*, (Routledge, 2017), 98.
[173] Fieldnotes, July 9, 2025, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.

calling on Muslims in Bosnia to return to a pure Islam. These para-*jamaats*, or parallel communities, were extremely critical of the Islamic Community.[174] For example, Dr. Shaykh Barčić had confrontations with local imams and practitioners in Sarajevo.[175] With Dr. Shaykh Barčić's death in 2007, Nusret Imamović took the lead as the de facto head of Bosnian Salafis, though this would affect the image and perceptions of Salafim. Shortly after the Syrian Civil War broke out, a split between Imamović and another member, Bilal Bosnić, divided the community. In 2014, the two diverged between which Syrian rebel faction to support, al-Nusra or ISIL respectively. In the years that followed, several Bosnian Muslims would travel to Syria. Under pressure from the United Nations, European Union, and United States, Bosnia was forced to address concerns over extremism.[176] As a result, the Bosnian government conducted raids and arrested recruiters and fighters who had returned from Syria, and began to surveil Salafi communities.[177] Since then, Edina Bećirević affirms that Safet Kuduzović, "filled the Salafi leadership vacuum and is now one of the most influential *da'is* in BiH."[178]

Not all Salafis supported the recruitment efforts to Syria, contrary to the way this was presented in the past. While most of my interlocutors would mention it in passing, they almost exclusively spoke about the effects on public perception. In one interview, Faris, a veteran of the Bosnian War who adopted Salafism later in life, said, "for me it never made any sense. How can you encourage people to go fight a war in Syria? What does Syria have to do with being a good Muslim?"[179] Faris was sympathetic to the mujahideen who fought in Bosnia to aid fellow Muslims

[174] Bećirević, "Salafism vs. Moderate Islam," 39.
[175] Bećirević, "Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report." (British Council 2018), 18.
[176] Hesová, *Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi*, 602.
[177] Hesová, *Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi*, 602.
[178] Bećirević. "Extremism Research Forum," 18.
[179] Interview with "Faris" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, local market in Dobrinja, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, June 30, 2025, personal notebook.

against "Serb Orthodox oppression," a war of defense for Bosnians. Conversely, he saw the Syrian Civil War as a war between Muslims.

I met Faris while shopping at a market, looking for watermelon. I was not expecting him to be so forthcoming, but while he was cutting a wedge for me, we began our conversation. After I informed him that I was in Sarajevo for research on Islamic piety and politics, he was intrigued. He asked about my thoughts on the Twelve-Day War with Iran and Israel, and eventually about transnational Muslim solidarity and where it was missing. Since mid-June, Iran was the topic that came up in most conversations, even with my friends and family. Bosnian Muslims generally view Iran favorably on account of their support during the Bosnian War and the close alliance with President Alija Izetbegovic There is even a small Shia community in Bosnia, largely concentrated in Sarajevo. This stance has created tensions with Bosnian Salafis who are vehemently opposed to Iran and are anti-Shia. For example, on Instagram, a recorded lecture of Safet Kuduzović was shared by a few Salafi-oriented accounts. What struck me the most was the anti-Shia rhetoric and criticizing those who support Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iranian Revolution: "you all are applauding Khomeini and the Iranian Revolution, what do you think they say about you. They call you, and me with you, dirty."[180]

Salafis largely remain anti-Sufi and anti-Shia, pointing to innovations and certain practices that they deem to be idolatrous, like *istighātha.*[181] However, prominent *da'is* that followed since Imamović's departure, shed the extremist rhetoric.[182] went to fight in the Syrian For example, on a social media post, I was able to view a clip of a Bosnian Salafi *da'i* stating that there needs to be a new approach to appealing to Muslims: "we used to come to them with a weapon, but now we

[180] Fieldnotes, June 23, 2026, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.
[181] *Istighātha*, intercession with saints and other holy people in Islam.
[182] Hesová, *Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi*, 602.

come to them with a rose. Does this mean that our message has changed? It has not…we are simply modifying the presentation of our beliefs."[183]

Bećirević stated that Salafism "in a vulnerable Bosnian society with a recent history of genocide and mass violence, even nonviolent radical behavior deepens fears of 'others' and contributes to general social distrust and insecurity."[184] However, during my time in the field, I had the opportunity to meet with Srdjan Puhalo over a Zoom meeting, as he is currently living in Banja Luka and I had not been able to meet with him in person. Puhalo, a psychologist and publicist, conducted two studies and believes that the radicalization concern is disproportionate and instead a reflection of an ongoing anti-Salafi bias in the media. He made it clear in our conversation that he was not conducting the research as a spokesperson for or against Salafis. If anything, he wanted to showcase the public image that was presented in the media and gauge citizens' perceptions about Salafis/Wahhabis and the latter's experience with prejudice.[185] To quote Hesová:

> There is a palpable discrepancy between the radicalization framework and the few available empirical insights, that is, between the assumption that Salafism is a breeding ground for extremism, and the picture of a closed, socially conservative, ultra-observant, but quietist rural community.[186]

Simply put, when Salafis (or Wahhabis, the terms were used interchangeably) were presented in the media and securitized reports published, an overarching negative image was cast against all pious Muslims, projecting a correlation between piety, radicalism, and violence. This has

[183] Fieldnotes, June 23, 2026, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.
[184] Bećirević, "Salafism vs. Moderate Islam," 9.
[185] Srdjan Puhalo, Promocija Publikacije "Selefije u BiH" (Srdjan Puhalo - Promotion of Publication "Salafis in Bosnia and Herzegovina); https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsihOs-sG3s
[186] Hesová, *Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi*, 9.

continued to impact on perceptions of Salafis in Bosnia even a decade later and was one of the major themes that emerged during interviews.

Perceptions of Salafism's impact on the culture is a sensitive matter, even more than the potential of political engagement or involvement. The most informative conversations pertaining to this was with Faruk. He is in his mid-thirties, married with children, and lives and works in Sarajevo's Novi Grad area. We met through a mutual acquaintance who I had initially asked to connect me with someone who has experience transcribing audio recordings. During our text exchange about the processes he utilized, he wanted to learn more about the topic of the interviews. I explained to him that I was conducting interviews for my thesis concerning political participation among pious Muslims in Sarajevo. He asked to be interviewed, as he was very knowledgeable about this topic and has a personal interest.[187] We met a few days later at a grocery store cafeteria. As I walked into the space, I realized that I did not know what he looked like as his profile picture on Viber was of a Saudi flag. I walked around the area and saw a man sitting with an open laptop. Faruk was very open with me from the beginning. He explained that he was very drawn to the topic of politics and saw this as an important topic for the "future of the Salafi community."[188]

Faruk returned to faith about ten years ago. Prior to this, he described himself as a "classical Bosniak Muslim."[189] He first began to pray and read the Qur'ān but felt that it was important to keep learning and develop his knowledge about Islam. He came across Salafi da'is and was attracted to their messages. He listened to various scholars, preachers, even those in English speaking countries like in the UK and the US. Faruk viewed this as an opportunity to grow as a

[187] Fieldnotes, June 12, 2026, local grocery store, Mojmilo, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.
[188] Interview with "Faruk" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, June 16, 2026, Cafe in Mojmilo, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, audio recording "Faruk."
[189] Interview with "Faruk" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, June 16, 2026, Cafe in Mojmilo, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, audio recording "Faruk."

Muslim and to apply it to the world around him. He said, "I realized Allah gave me this knowledge so that I can help Islam in this way. But of course…a man has to learn about faith. Not only about faith but also everything around himself so he can be an active member of the community, and not just a bystander."[190]

> Something that is fairly important to this topic [Salafism] that we are speaking about…we have what we can call three currents: *black tekfir*, for example, Abu Muhamed from Vienna who was arrested and is in prison since I don't know when, and for them meddling with in [secular] politics is *kufr* and *shirk*. That's it. Meaning end of story. Then we have what we call *white tekfir*, that's like Maoca, I don't know…we can say Idriz Bilibani. For them when it comes to voting, the parliament, those are the topics they concern themselves with…voting and politics, those are *taghut*. They include the Arab leaders, and it all works around that. And these people haven't gotten into anything at all. Then we have those such as mimber.ba, with Kuduzovic. How can I describe them? I can't exactly say 'balanced' but what I can say is that they are approaching every topic as it comes.[191]

While many have divided Salafis between being apolitical and seeking fundamental political change, the former is also overestimated.

> If the example is voting, the '*ulema* says to look at what is the greater evil…many don't agree with 'democracy' because Allah's *shariah* is above all, but we live where we live. Meaning that we have to make use of these things. One of those things is to allow for a man who is good and able to do something useful in this space.[192]

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[190] Interview with "Faruk" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, June 16, 2026, Cafe in Mojmilo, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, audio recording "Faruk."
[191] Interview with "Faruk" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, June 16, 2026, Cafe in Mojmilo, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, audio recording "Faruk."
[192] Interview with "Faruk" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, June 16, 2026, Cafe in Mojmilo, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, audio recording "Faruk."

Hamza, the imam who I mentioned previously, also shares this view that Muslims must remain politically and religiously engaged.[193]

Many studies in the past have pointed to the distrust of Salafis, often centering fears of violence, intolerance, and radicalization. While in the field, I was also met with distrust, especially when asking participants about political engagement. I received several refusals with no explanation, even after friendly discussions at bookstores, cafes, makeshift markets on street corners, and mosques. Possible reasons for this may include true abstention from politics due to religious or personal reasons, my approach, or it may have been due to my gender, nationality, perceived piety, role and so on. However, these are all assumptions, and they do not offer any concrete insight. Instead, I turn to examples where participants shared their skepticism and suspicions of my intentions.

For instance, Selma, a joyful woman in her late fifties, full of laughter, and marriage advice. She prides herself on being a (top-tier) matchmaker and advising young women how to become good Muslim wives and mothers. She was not impressed by my lack of a husband, children, and the dedication to continuing my education in my thirties. Over the course of the summer, Selma and I met regularly. She was first introduced to Salafism by her husband after he returned from his overseas job in the Gulf. Aside from voting and posting on social media about humanitarian concerns around the world, she primarily focused on her grandchildren.

She was wary of the topic I had concerned myself with for this research project. Selma, who I would say never fails to smile or keep conversations light-hearted, turned to me one day during one of our walks at the park and said, “I need you to be careful, you are asking these types of questions…there are all kinds of people out here, you know. They might think you are an

[193] Interview with “Hamza” (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, July 18, 2025, Masjid Istiqlal, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, audio recording “Hamza.”

undercover journalist or spy. I don't want anything happening to you."[194] She explained that it was not necessarily that they were violent people, rather that there have been instances in the past that have led to general distrust of journalists, academics, and politicians broadly.

I was put into contact with Almedina, the director for a women's organization. During my interview with Almedina, the first time that we met, half way through our conversation she asked to see my passport or provide some type of identification that confirmed my role as a researcher and of my background that I shared with her.[195] Though I was not able to show her my passport, which I would have provided if I had it with me, we instead settled on searching for my name online, reviewing my social media, and answering any questions that she had. Aside from the usual details that could be found on my university profile and on my personal Linkedin, she was able to see that I came from a pious Muslim family, which ultimately relieved her fleeting concerns. She shared that the past surveillance and raids had left a lasting impression on her, and while she enjoys engaging in dialogue and discussing various topics both secular and religious, online and offline, worries of misrepresentation remain a concern. Early in the field, even Faruk shared that one of the reasons he wanted to do an interview with me was to have the experience before introducing me to others due to general skepticism.[196]

Following our interview, Almedina invited me to a lecture and discussion she hosted at her organization at the beginning of August, prior to my departure. There were roughly fifty women present and some younger children. The room was set up traditionally: seat cushions laid out on the floor along the wall and with large round tables at each section, filled with fruits, sweets, and

[194] Interview with "Selma" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, Safet Zajko Park, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, June 25, 2025, notes in personal notebook.
[195] Interview with "Almedina" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, Women's organization Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, June 25, 2025, notes in personal notebook.
[196] Fieldnotes, June 12, 2026, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.

Bosnian coffee. Two women were seated at the front with Almedina, Zahra and Amina. Almedina focused the discussion on recent community affairs and issues that they collectively have seen affect the community.[197] Specifically, she highlighted the rift among pious women, namely what they viewed as "boycotting one another," not having a common understanding, and general bickering. In a similar vein, Zahra spoke about the importance of interacting with non-Muslims, of saying "good day," and how there are even pious women who wear hijab or niqab who will not "return a *selam*."[198] This is in reference to the concept of *al-walāʾ wa-l-barāʾ* where it is common for some pious Muslims to avoid sharing *salam* to those they cannot confirm are "true" believers, and non-believers in general.[199] Amina shared experiencing discrimination while working with different humanitarian organizations throughout Europe.

> We are living in a time of negative peace, with anti-hijab laws and Islamophobia…Muslims in other parts of Europe are minorities and are negatively impacted daily…Muslim women especially experience all kinds of hardship because of how we dress, but also from within the community and from their husbands.[200]

All three women stated the solution for this is specifically through *aqida* training.[201]

> This will create a better environment to not only help one another but also advocate for human rights, and women's rights in particular. Allah has bestowed this, look at the example with the Constitution of Medina during the time of the Prophet (PBUH).[202]

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[197] Fieldnotes, August 1, 2026, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.
[198] Fieldnotes, August 1, 2026, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.; to "return" a *selam* is a direct translation. When a person says "as-salāmu ʿalaykum," the response back is,"ʿalaykumu as-salām." Meaning "Peace be upon you"
[199] *al-walāʾ wa-l-barāʾ*, association and disassociation, for further explanation see, Qadhi. *Understanding Salafism*, 28-36.
[200] Fieldnotes, August 1, 2026, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.
[201] Fieldnotes, August 1, 2026, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.
[202] Fieldnotes, August 1, 2026, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.; The Constitution of Medina was signed in 622 in the city of Medina and served as a legal, economic, and social declaration for unifying a diverse community.

Almedina shared with the group something that she mentioned earlier during our interview: what her online presence and starting this organization has meant to women. "So many women message me privately and seek advice."[203] Through social media, she created avenues for individuals to engage with difficult topics, such as mental health and marital issues and provide Islamic guidance. "There are many women who are going through something…there is a lot of sadness…and someone tells them, 'you have Allah,' or 'Allah is enough. How are we showing up for each other?"[204] Almedina highlights the importance of women's rights in the community, and the concerns that men have been using lectures from religious leaders to control their wives. She urged women to not make their husbands and children the main focus of their lives, to not be a "self-sacrificing" wife, and instead focus on faith, proper practice, and kind behavior[205]

Almedina turned to me and said "We don't only have to talk about our husbands and children…we can discuss social issues! Sit in front and share with the women what you are researching."[206] Several women were politically active, especially Zahra and Amina. They specifically felt every avenue should be taken to improve the lives of Muslims in their community. At the same time, most of their concerns were with how the political parties currently do not have their best interests in mind, especially those of a conservative Muslim perspective. Moreover, they pointed to little hope for actual change considering the tripartite system. Even though the war ended, there are no opportunities for true change. One woman pointed to the economic issues for young people, lack of job opportunities, and housing prices in the city. Over the past several years, thousands of Bosnians have left the country.

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[203] Interview with "Almedina" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, Women's organization Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, June 25, 2025, notes in personal notebook.
[204] Fieldnotes, August 1, 2026, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.
[205] Fieldnotes, August 1, 2026, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.
[206] Fieldnotes, August 1, 2026, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, personal notebook.

Nura, the woman I spoke with earlier at the other women's organization, during her interview mentioned women getting together to petition the local city hall and create an accessible pathway to the mosque. They applied for the grant and received the material a few weeks shortly and organized a volunteer group to complete the project.[207] Faruk, who works in information technology, provides classes through various religious organizations.[208] My interlocutors have created avenues for meeting community needs through local organization and personal commitments.

[207] Interview with "Nura" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, WhatsApp phone call, Ann Arbor, MI, audio recording "Nura."
[208] Interview with "Faruk" (pseudonym), interviewed by Arnela Bogdanic, June 16, 2026, Cafe Mojmilo, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, audio recording "Faruk."

Chapter Six: Conclusion

As my time in the field came to an end, I found myself reflecting on the discrepancies between literature, media, and the experiences my interlocutors shared with me. Similar to the first women's organization that provided a Qur'ān seminar, these two women's organizations provide religious education for both adult women and children, offer courses for Arabic, day camps for children, and generally provide women a sense of belonging and community for support. Additionally, the majority of participants and individuals that I spoke with were politically active in local elections and kept abreast of issues locally and nationally. Political quietism, at least in Sarajevo, is much more nuanced than has been reported. To reflect on Asad's framework of secularism and how Islamism may cross over into the public sphere, it is due to the state's inability to provide for its citizens.[209] Salafi political and community engagement, at any level, threatens secularism as they center Islam over nationalism and secular government. Moreover, to reduce Salafism to an "other" or as simply "foreign" to Bosnia and Herzegovina is an injustice, even though its arrival to the region is controversial, to say the least. The exchange of religious ideologies and practices will continue, and they will also localize. As Hesová stated in 2021, Salafism "has, in various forms, been or has become (at least tacitly) part of the plural Bosnian establishment," and dynamics will only continue to change.[210] As Bosniaks in Bosnia, the region, and in diaspora are continuously negotiating what it means to be Muslim and how this informs our identities, the idea of a "Bosnian Islam" may even be challenged altogether. Further, Islam as a discursive tradition, and when it should or should not be applied, cannot be minimized to perceived legitimacy of certain historical traditions or compared to revivalist piety movements in times of

[209] Asad, "Secularism, Nation-State, Religion," 199.
[210] Hesová, *Wahhabis and Salafis, Daije and Alimi*, 610.

ruptures. The ruptures themselves inform new discourses, and yield new interpretations of texts and practices.

My goals for future research are to expand the pool of participants, and not only those in the urban area of Sarajevo, but also to other Muslim majority cities and rural areas. Additionally, this research would benefit from long form ethnographic study, to build better relationships and engage with individuals more consistently. Recommendations for future researchers are to reflect on both the secularization of our fields, the merits of security reports in times of tensions and violence and instead look towards systemic issues that negatively affect citizens broadly and create the social instabilities. Finally, reflecting reflexively about our positions as researchers and our own social identities when studying Salafism in particular, and Islam generally, will aid us in providing a holistic picture.

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