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**TEMELJNI ELEMENTI ISLAMSKJE TRADICIJE BOŠNJAKA:**  
**stavovi, percepcije i praksa**

**THE CORE TENETS OF THE ISLAMIC TRADITION OF BOSNIAKS:**  
**attitudes, perceptions and practices**





ILUSTRACIJA - *Detalj iz Kur'ana*; Vjerovatno osmanska Turska, Edirne (Drinopolje, Odrin ili Jedrene), 1457–58. godine.

ILLUSTRATION - *Detail from the Qur'an*; Probably Ottoman Turkey, Edirne, 1457–58.

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Dr. Ahmed Kulanić he graduated in Theology at Faculty of Islamic Studies, University of Sarajevo, he obtained his master degree in the field of Political Sciences from the Department of Social and Political Sciences at *International University of Sarajevo - IUS*, and he obtained Ph.D. in a field of Social and Political Sciences at IUS, on the topic: *Religiosity, Ideological Orientations and Party Preference among Bosniaks*. He was in the position of Assistant at the Faculty of Philosophy at IUS, and today he is a Senior Assistant in the Department of Social and Political Science at the same faculty. In the last few years, he has actively participated in the non-governmental sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina, working on several projects in the field of religion and political science, and is also involved in several domestic and international research projects. He co-authored a book entitled *Spread of Islam in Bosnia under the Ottomans* published several articles, encyclopedia entries, reports, and analysis. He edited the book *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Law, Society and Politics*. Currently, he also serves as Managing Editor of *Epiphany - Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies*, and coordinator for research, science and education at the *Institute for Bosniak Studies - BZK Preporod*.





ILLUSTRATION ~ Reconstruction done on the basis of the sources from: William James Müller (*A Muslim at Prayer*, 1841) and Khālid Nājī (*Figures at prayer inside a mosque*, c. 1910).

## Abstract

This article aims to give an overview study of the main specific tenets of the Islamic tradition of Bosniak Muslims as defined and institutionalized by the traditional Islamic Community in Bosnia. Also, it attempts to shed light on current perceptions, attitudes and practices in the context of an overall pre-Ottoman and post-Ottoman religious tradition of the Bosniak people known historically as *Bono Homini* ("the Good People"). The article provides a survey on the Bosniak Muslims in regard to their Islamic tradition in Bosnia with the purpose to reveal whether there are regional, gender and age differences among them in terms of their religious beliefs and practices. In doing so, the author was assisted by the authors in this area such as Ćimić, Karčić and Alibašić.

**Key words:** *Islamic tradition of Bosniaks, Islamic practices and rituals in Bosnia, religion in secular state, Muslims in Bosnia, Islam in Bosnia, Islam and secular state.*

## Introduction

In its millennial history, Bosnia<sup>1</sup> has been a meeting point of different cultures, traditions and religions. Due to its religious diversity, religion and religiosity played a dominant role within the Bosnian society as a whole representing one of the key cornerstones of Bosnian ethnical plurality as well. There are three main ethnic groups in Bosnia: Bosniaks<sup>2</sup>, Serbs and Croats who are defined also by their religious affiliation: the Bosniaks being mainly Muslims, the Serbs mainly Orthodox Christians and the Croats mainly Catholics. It is a well-known historical fact that Islam arrived to Bosnia via the Ottoman Turks in 1463, namely by the Ottoman Fātiḥ Sultān Muḥammad - Mehmed (1432-1481), commonly known as Mehmed the Conqueror.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the presence of Islam in Bosnia both as a faith and tradition backdates to the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>4</sup> During the Ottoman period, Islam in Bosnia had had the status of a state religion. It had been involved in many, if not all, aspects of social and cultural life of the Bosnian population. According to the Ottoman regular census, the majority population of Bosnia had been the Muslims (Bosniaks)<sup>5</sup>; however, due to the loss in frequent wars as well as a forced emigration the first census organized by Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1879, the Muslim Bosniak population had been not majority anymore, but the Orthodox-Christians.<sup>6</sup> In the period of

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<sup>1</sup> The old and historical name of Bosnia implies its province „Herzegovina“, which is a constitutive part of the present Bosnian State: Bosnia and Herzegovina. So, whenever the name Bosnia is used in this article both as the homeland and the state, it implies its province „Herzegovina“ as well.

<sup>2</sup> When they came to Bosnia in the 3rd century B. M. (Before Milād), the Romans used to call the people of Bosnia „Bono Homini“ („Good People“); when the Ottomans and Austrians came they called them „Bosniaks“; and when Serbian Ilija Garašanin (d.1874) was writing his „Načertanije“ („Draft“ in 1844) for a national program of Greater Serbia, he designated the „Bosniaks“ as one ethnical group in Bosnia of three religions: Orthodox Christians, Catholics and „Muhammadans“. But due to the Serbian and Croatian national and religious missionaries, the Serbs and Croats in Bosnia waived their Bosniak ethnicity in favor of the Serbian and Croatian nationality mainly based on their particular religious affiliation: Serb-Orthodox and Croat-Catholics. The Muslims in Bosnia remained loyal to their historical Bosniak ethnical background and their Bosnian national and state identity. On the history of the name, religion and character of the „Bosniaks“ prior to the arrival of the Ottomans, see the link available at: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjft7fIOzPAhUEmlsKHxTYBa8QFjABegQIARAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fdamirnadivanu.wordpress.com%2F2018%2F10%2F08%2Fbono-homini-blog-book%2F&usq=AOvVaw1t1emAMOVxb8jKrpFBaUlm>. Checked on May 6, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> See link available at: [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjft7fIOzPAhUEmlsKHxTYBa8QFjABegQIARAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FMehmed\\_the\\_Conqueror&usq=AOvVaw1dGoVYqG02O0WVNFkOr8V5](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjft7fIOzPAhUEmlsKHxTYBa8QFjABegQIARAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FMehmed_the_Conqueror&usq=AOvVaw1dGoVYqG02O0WVNFkOr8V5). Checked on May 6, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Imamović, Mustafa: *Historija Bošnjaka* („The History of Bosniaks“), Sarajevo 1997. It is interesting to note that Islam has arrived to Europe by two gates: the Iberian Peninsula in 8th century and the Balkan Peninsula in 14th century.

<sup>5</sup> Handžić, H. Mehmed: *Islamizacija Bosne i Hercegovine i porijeklo bosansko-hercegovačkih muslimana*, Sarajevo, Islamska dionička štamparija, 1940.

the first and second state of Yugoslavia, the Bosniaks were the largest ethnical and national group in Bosnia, but still they had not been rightly considered as a majority in the Bosnian state due to specific socio-political circumstances.<sup>7</sup> According to the last census in 2013 the population number of Bosnia is 3.531.159 citizens, of whom 50.11% are the Bosniaks, namely 1.8 million. Religiously they are 50.7% Muslims, which means that they are a majority in Bosnia.<sup>8</sup>

The Bosniak Muslims throughout their long history - from the Ottoman times through the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then through the first and second State of Yugoslavia and the period of the Communist regime - had developed their Islamic identity, culture and tradition that represent a unique experience of living religion among the other Muslim cultures and traditions in the world. As a result of the last aggression on the Bosnian state (1992-1995), the Bosniak Muslims tend to emigrate to the West rather than to the East like Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it is justified to say that Bosniak/Bosnian Muslims who are a native or indigenous Muslim community in Europe, have their own unique Islamic tradition, culture and understanding of Islam based on their Bosnian-European experience, while at the same time they are fully aware of their belonging to the Ummah as a universal Muslim Community.<sup>10</sup>

## Four fundamental characteristics of the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks

First, the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks is the tradition of the routinization of the *Sunnah* (Prophetic moral and legal norm) and *Jamā'ah* (the unity of Muslim Community) both in the theological and social or political sense. In the theological sense the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks implies six articles of faith (*imān*) and five obligatory religious practices (*islām*). The six creeds are: the belief in One God, Angels, the books of God, the messengers of God, the Day of Judgment and the belief in God's absolute decree (*qadā'*) and God's absolute design (*qadar*); and the five obligatory religious practices are the inner and outer testimony of trust (*shahādah*) in God and His last Messenger Muhammad, a.s., the practice of five prayers a day; the annual fasting in the month of Ramadan; giving the annual moral tax of *Zakāt*; and performing a lifetime pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to Mecca. In the social or political sense, the Islamic tradition of Bosniak maintains the idea of the

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<sup>6</sup> McCarthy, Justin : *Ottoman Bosnia, 1800 to 1878*. In Pinson, Mark (ed.), *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina: Their Historic Development from the Middle Ages to the Dissolution of Yugoslavia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, (1996).

<sup>7</sup> Filandra, Šaćir: *Bošnjačka politika u XX stoljeću*. Sarajevo, IP Sejtarija, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> *Federalni zavod za statistiku: (Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2013)*, Sarajevo, FZS, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Emirhafizović, Mirza, et al. (ed.): *Migrations From Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Sarajevo: Ministry of Human rights and refugees and Faculty of Political Sciences, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Karčić, Fikret: *What is 'Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks?'*, Sarajevo, Preporod, December 7, 2006.

rightful succession of the Prophet Muhammad, a.s. by a consent of an election of Abū Bakr as the first Caliph followed by the righteous caliphate of 'Umar al-Khaṭṭāb, Othmān ibn Affān and Ali bin Ṭālib.

Second, the important characteristic of the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks is a traditional adherence to the Ḥanafī school of Islamic law (*sharī'ah/fiqh*) and the al-Māturīdī school in Islamic theological doctrine (*'aqīdah/kalām*). In the Ḥanafī school<sup>11</sup> they have found an advantage in the free judgment (*ijtihād*) in Islamic legal issues and in the school of al-Māturīdī<sup>12</sup> they have discovered the power of rational thought in matters of fundamental tenets of faith and theology.



ILLUSTRATION ~ Detail from an exhibition of new approaches to illuminating the translation of the Qur'an (by Mehmed A. Akšamija, author of design and illumination) – QUR'AN WITH TRANSLATION TO THE BOSNIAN LANGUAGE – the form of the book is given in the author's sheets (quire) – Tunisia 1995.

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Detalj sa izložbe novih pristupa iluminaciji prijevoda Kur'ana (autor dizajna i iluminacije Mehmed A. Akšamija) – KUR'AN SA PRIJEVODOM NA BOSANSKI JEZIK – forma knjige je data u autorskim arcima – Tunis 1995. godine).

<sup>11</sup> Wensinck, A. J.: *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development*, Cambridge University Press, 1932.

<sup>12</sup> Cerić, Mustafa: *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam - A Study of the Theology of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)*, ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur, 1995; Cerić, Mustafa: *Korijeni sintetičke teologije u islamu: Ebu Mensur el-Maturidi (853-944)*, El-Kalem, Sarajevo, 2012; Rudolph, Ulrich: *Al-Maturidi and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, translated by Rodrigo Adem, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2015; *El-Maturidi i razvoj sunijske teologije u Semerkandu*, bosanski prijevod: Enes Karić, Centar za napredne studije - CNS, Sarajevo, 2018;





ILLUSTRATION – Reconstruction done on the basis of the source: Osman Hamdi Bay, *A Young Woman Reading the Qur'an*. The Ottoman Empire, Istanbul 1880.



Third, the distinctive characteristic of the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks is in their inclusive approach both in terms of an inter-Muslim relationship whereby they have an equal love for *Ahl-i Bayt* and *Ahl-i aṣḥāb*, in other words they are first and foremost Muslims before being attached to any exclusive *mazhab* (school of thought) whether in matters of *sharī'ah/fiqh* or in matters of *'aqīdah/kalām*; and in terms of an interreligious relationship of *Ahl-i kitāb* (Jews and Christians in particular) they are open for a constructive dialogue for the sake of peace and tolerance.

Finally, the fourth characteristic of the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks is their commitment to the Middle Way (*Al-Wasatīyyah*) as a response to all sorts of religious extremism and violence.

## The Islamic tradition of Bosniaks between theory and practice

In the following survey we have collected 677 responses in the period between June 15<sup>th</sup> and August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018, that has 95% of the level of confidence with the margin of error of  $\pm 3.77$  in relation to the entire Bosniak population eligible to vote (18+ years old) of 1.479.135. The aim of this survey is to show how much in what way the fundamental characteristic of the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks are implemented in their daily life. In relation to the gender distribution of the answers they consist of 55.2% of male and 44.8% of female Bosniaks, as indicated in below table:

Gender:	
Male	55.2%
Female	44.8%

Table 1: Sample structure gender characteristics

In the relation to the age of respondents we introduced five major categories, namely 18-23<sup>13</sup>, 24-29, 30-39, 40-49 and 50 and above years old, in addition respondents in our survey are 34 years old on average as show in the table below:

Age: (M=33.81)	
18-23 (Daytonians)	21,4%
24-29	19,9%
30-39	30.6%
40-49	19,5%
50 and above	8,6%

Table 2: Sample structure by age groups



As shown in the above table the most represented age category is aged between 30-39 years, while the least represented are those that are 50 years old and above.

The distribution of the questionnaire in the ten major provinces where the Bosniaks live (seven in the Bosnian entity called “Federatioin”, two in the Bosnian entity with Serban majority and the single Brčko District), that has been based on the last census from 2013. Each region was minimally represented by three or more cities (except the Brčko District and Goražde Canton in which it occurred within one city only). This gives the strength and validity to the representativeness of the questionnaire distribution. The percentage of the administrative-territorial distribution is given in the table below:

Place of Residence	%
Bosnia-Podrinje Canton	2,5
Brčko District	2,5
Central Bosnia Canton	7,7
Herzegovina-Neretva Canton	5,5
Bosnian entity with Serban majority	7,5
Sarajevo Canton	21,9
Tuzla Canton	23,2
Una-Sana Canton	10,0
Zenica-Doboj Canton	19,2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Table 3: Sample Structure by Place of Residence

Furthermore, the cross tabulation table as shown below gives us the insight into the structure of the sample based on the age and place of residence according to which Daytonians, but also all other age groups are represented in all geographical regions in the study.

The principal component analysis using varimax rotation and factors’ loading with Eigenvalue greater than one was conducted for the items listed below grouped into two major factors explaining 55% of the total variance. Among the above items two had negative loading, namely (7.13.). The celebration of St George’s day is in collision with Islamic tradition; and (7.15.) Amulet or talisman and future/fortune-telling is strictly forbidden in Islam in relation to other items.

<sup>13</sup> We split those aged between 18 and 19 into two categories. The reason for introducing these two categories lies in the fact that those aged between 18 and 23 are born after the signing of Dayton Peace Agreement (and therefore mostly they are for the first time participating in electoral process in the Bosnian state and, thus, from now on in the study they are defined as „Daytonians“. Furthermore, we want to see whether there are differences between this group in comparison to other age groups in Bosnia in terms of their religiosity, ideological orientations and party alignment.

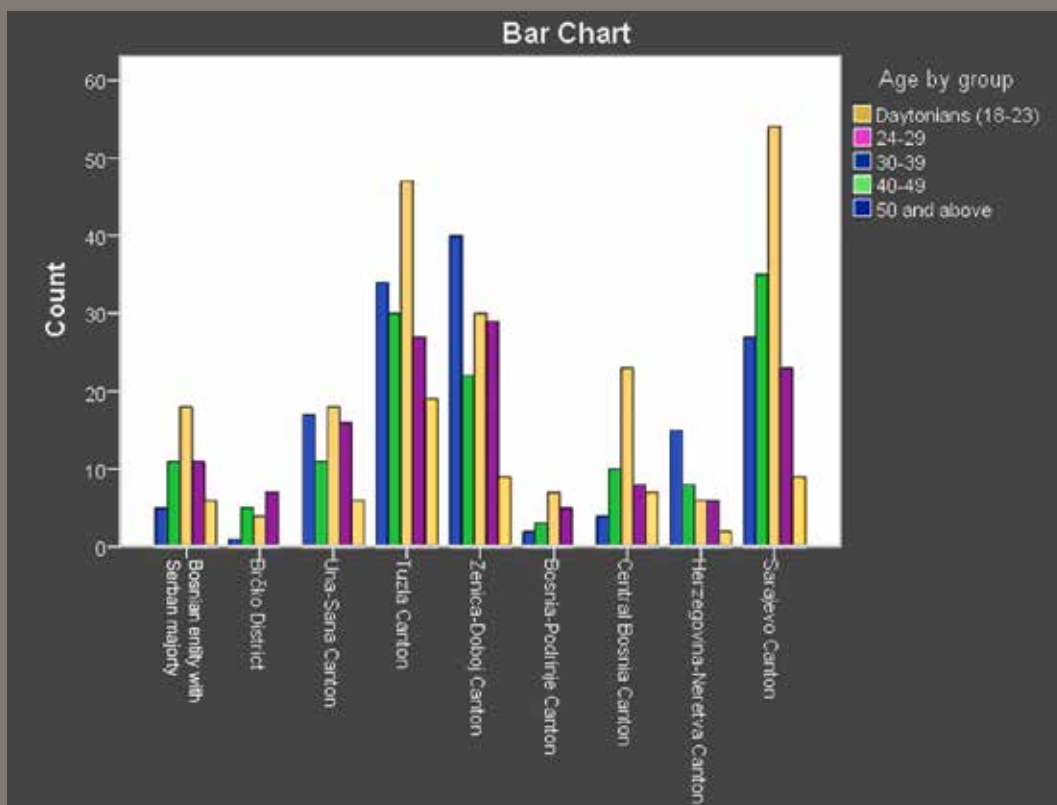


Table 4: Place of Residence

When it comes to the question related to the St George Day (Đurđevdan) majority of the Bosniaks find that this is not part of the Islamic tradition. Thus, 53.9% strongly disagreed with it. However, it is interesting that almost half are either not sure (31.2%) about the meaning of this holyday or they do not find it to be in collision with the Islamic creed (11.4% strongly disagree and 3.4. agree).

In the statement about reading “*talqīn*”<sup>14</sup> majority of the respondents are not sure about its status. (52.7% of them neither agree nor disagree). Also, the Bosniaks are divided when it comes to the marking of the specific days of the person death. Although the majority of Bosniaks do not consider the highlighting these days as the part of the memory of the dead (52% of them disagree or strongly disagree), nearly every fifth respondent was in favor of this practice. The overwhelming majority of Bosniaks (72%) find that talismans and fortune/future-telling is strictly forbidden in Islam, and around 20% of them do not know the status of it, while only 8.2% of them do not find it forbidden. The superstition about the raven and cuckoo, according

<sup>14</sup> „Talqīn” is Arabic term which means an instigation for someone to speak out or to repeat someone's dictation. The „talqīn” became an „Islamic tradition” in Bosnia as the Muslim *‘ulamā’* (scholars) introduced the idea of helping the diseased in his/her immediate grave to read the articles of faith when the angels Munkir and Nakīr ask him/her these questions in the grave: Who is your Lord? “Allah”! What is your religion? „Islam”! Who is your Prophet? „Muhammad”! What is your guide? „Qur’an”! What is your Qibla (direction in prayer)? „Ka’ba”! This tradition is still held up in Bosnia but not as it used to be in the past because some Muslim scholars questioned the validity of it.



to our respondents, is not widespread among Bosniaks as the only 8.2% of Bosniaks agree with it or every twelfth person. When it comes to the tradition of the visit to the sacred places of worship such as Ajvatovica, Buna, etc. 25.1% of Bosniaks find it not to be in the line with Islamic creed and tradition, while the *Mawlūd*<sup>15</sup> and *Tawhīd*<sup>16</sup> are considered to be the part of the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks as nearly 66% either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 18.6% is not sure about it. The custom of bride's holding the Qur'an and bread is the most diversified when it comes to our respondents. While 31.4% of the respondents disagree with such custom, 28.1% agree with the same while the 40.4% are neither agrees nor disagrees.

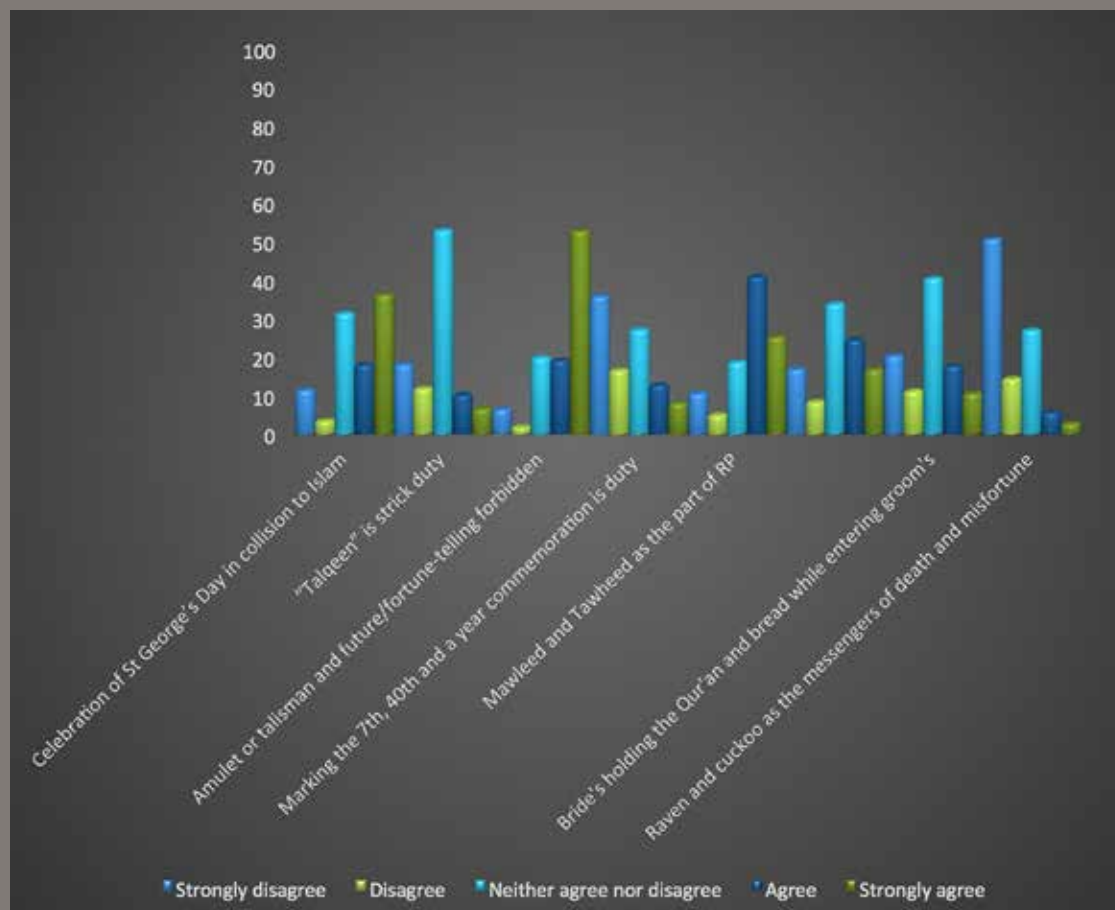


Table 5: Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks

<sup>15</sup> *Mawlūd* is Arabic term which means the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, a.s. The Islamic tradition in Bosnia is to celebrate the Prophet birthday not only on the exact day of 12 Rabi' u-l-awwal, but also on any happy occasion like the birthday of a child, building house, etc. This tradition was recently challenged by some students who studied outside of Bosnia.

<sup>16</sup> *Tawhīd* is Arabic term which indicates to the meaning of the core of Islamic doctrine of monotheism. It has a special meaning in Bosnia in terms of a commemoration of the diseased on the seventh and fortieth day of his/her death when the relatives and friends gather to read the *Yāsīn* chapter of the Holy Qur'an and perform the *Zikr- Tawhīd*, i.e., remembering and repeating the name of One God, Allah, and His other beautiful names as an invocation for the forgiveness and mercy for the diseased in the Hereafter. This practice has been challenged as well by students who studied outside Bosnia.

The only item that reported significant difference (in all three major demographical data, i.e. gender, age and place of residence) was the (7.17) "Reading the Mawlūd and Tawhīd is integral part of religious tradition of Bosniaks", according to which a significantly higher number of male Bosniaks found *Mawlūd* and *Tawhīd* as being the integral part of religious tradition of Bosniaks than female Bosniaks. The same item shows the difference, also when it comes to the regional distribution of respondents showing that *Mawlūd* and *Tawhīd* considered as the integral religious practices are the most widespread in Tuzla Canton, while the least in Bosnia-Podrinje Canton. However, when it comes to the age it reported no significant difference among the age groups.

Furthermore, the item on the visit and celebration at sacred places for supplication (dovišta such as Ajvatovica and Buna) is not in collision to the Islamic teachings, showed that there is significant difference among the age groups showing that the younger generations of Bosniaks find that such practices are in collision with Islamic teachings in contrast to the elderly Bosniak population. According to one-way ANOVA ( $F=6.234$ ,  $p=.000$ ) there was significant difference between the age groups. A Tukey posthoc test reveals that the significant lower support to the visit and celebration of sacred places is among the youngest generation of Bosniaks ( $2.96 \pm 1.2$ ,  $p=.016$ ) in comparison to the 50 and above ( $3.59 \pm 1.1$ ), while there was no statistically significant difference between the 41-49 and 50 and above age groups ( $p=.547$ ).

## Conclusion

Considering the outside pressure of deislamization during the Communist regime and the recent inside challenges of its revaluation by some students who studied outside of Bosnia, we may conclude that the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks has proven its steadfastness, sustainability and continuity in maintaining its core tenets and fundamental characteristics.

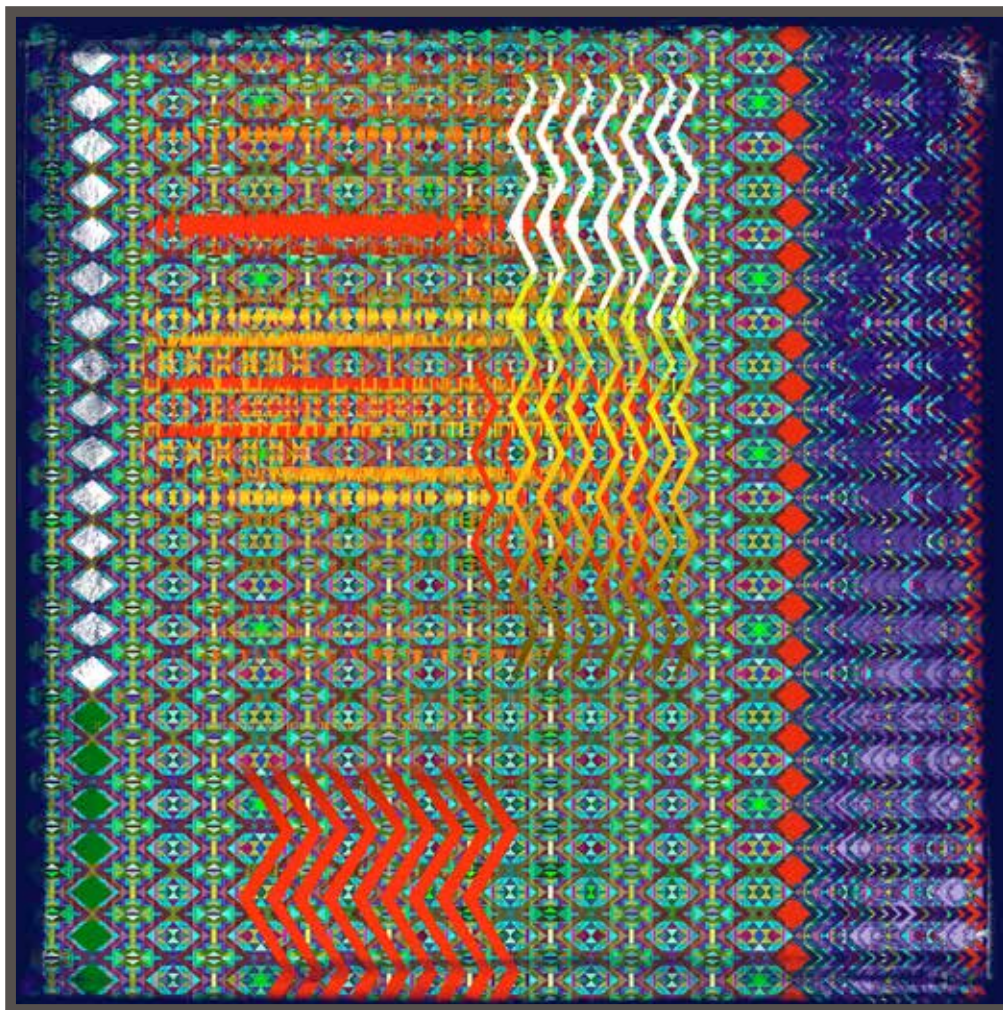
First, it remains loyal to the basic articles of faith and the traditional practice of morality with an additional voluntary devotion, which is characteristic to a mystical-sufi-dervish like tradition combined by some old practices of Bosnian folk customs.

Second, the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks is both an *ijtihād* free thinking in Islamic law and a *kalām* rational reflecting in Islamic theology.

Third, the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks is an open source process development whereby it takes what is suitable for its vitality and survival in a multireligious and multicultural environment of Bosnia and Europe, but keeping its divine origin and authentic prophetic legacy.

Forth, the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks is a peaceful and tolerant course for an interreligious and intercultural dialogue whereby it gives and takes for the sake of the peace of human spirit and the mind of all people of good will.





Mehmed Akšamija, Projekat: Ciklus „TRAGOVI BOSNE“, *Ornamentalna kompozicija XLII*, 1999.  
 Mehmed Akšamija, Project: Art Set „TRACES OF BOSNIA“, *Ornamental Composition XLII*, 1999.