

Croatian Muslims – Immigrant Community of Indigenous Europeans

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ABSTRACT

Subject of this paper is muslim population in Croatia. Its unique position as community of muslim immigrants with indigenous European origin give us plenty of research opportunities. Long history of contacts between muslims and christians on Croatian-Bosnian border evolved in many ways and resulted with today's reality that muslims are part of Croatian society. In modern age, since austrian occupation of Bosnia in 1878. bosnian muslims came to Croatia as workers, refugees, members of state apparatus, students etc. Their descendants are now Croatian citizens in third and fourth generation. Muslims managed to establish formal islamic community. On the personal level, they mix their feeling of belonging with feeling of origin. They act as equal part of croatian society on whole range of social levels.

Key words: Islam, Europe, Croatia, migration, Bosnia

Introduction

When we think of Muslims in Europe, our first associations are connected with immigrant communities made of people of non-European origin. Turks, Arabs, Pakistanis and other Muslims originating from former European colonies, mainly political and economic immigrants, are the first association of non-Europeanism of Islam. Judging from the discourse of average observer, indigenous European nations are not followers of Islam. Consequently, Islam is not European religion.

These prejudices are broken by public discovery of existence of the indigenous European nations which are followers of Islam: Albanians and Bosniaks, with the ethnic groups of Torbesh/Pomaks and Gorani – Slavic ethnic communities whose religion is Islam.

In this population there are also Muslim groups of non-European origin – Roma, Tatars and Turks – who in continuity live in Europe for centuries (5–7 hundred years) and we can also consider them as European peoples. According to the available data about European Muslim ethnicities we can come to conclusion that Islam is European religion for centuries, as European Muslims are neighbors of other native Europeans.

In the nation-building process of European nations Islam was defined as religion of the »others«, primary

Turks and it is often called »Turkish religion«. In the content of the every nationalism as political ideology, there is defining of the borders of the group and the creation of the nation-state as a realization of the national ideal – the ideal of the group which we define as nation. The rise of the modern ideologies based on nationalism in 18th and 19th century also defined the existing European empires (British, Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian Empire) as conquerors from which nations should free themselves so that they can articulate themselves in nation-states.

During the rise of the nationalisms in Europe, the borders of the communities towards the non-members were defined according to the differences to the *others*, which were linguistic, ethnic and religious. So Muslims in Southeastern Europe became collateral damage in the battles of the various nationalisms for the creation of the nation-states¹. During these clashes European Muslims were treated as Turks and Asians who »came to Europe from Asia and should return there«. One of the goals of the national-liberation movements was to »return the Turks to Asia« or, in the case of the »native« /domaćih / Turks to »return them to the religion of the ancestors«. Those ideological phrases served as battle cry for ethnic

cleansing and genocide which took place in southeastern Europe toward Muslim populations in 19th and 20th century.

During the process of »nationalization« large groups of Muslims in southeast Europe became publicly visible, with characteristics different from the traditional knowledge and prejudices about Muslims. They were not Turks, although they shared the same religion with Turks. They were Slavs but they didn't consider themselves Serbs, Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins or Bulgarians. In cases where they lived as a minority in a larger Muslim community, they refused to accept national identity of the larger group (i.e. Pomaks and Turks in Bulgaria, Gorani and Albanians at Kosovo and in Macedonia).

Turbulent history of European Muslims in 20th century is still waiting to be written. The attention of the European public was drawn to the problems of the immigrants from the former European colonies and Turkey. Nation building, World wars and Cold war that followed didn't left much space for the scientific observation of the ethno-religious groups of the European Muslims. Also, living in the socialist countries like Albania, Bulgaria, Poland, Soviet Union and Yugoslavia only helped pushing their problems aside.

Muslim ethnicities emerged in western media after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. and the socialist system in the Eastern Europe. For the researcher and the public in Western Europe they were something new. The traditional European discourse in the past formed a view about Muslims as »others« who live in the distant countries and in the distant cultures. They come to Europe only occasionally, as warriors, in diplomatic missions, political or economic immigrants. Idea that Muslims live in Europe as indigenous culture was new, strange and contradictory to imagined modern European identity.

Due to militant tendencies in Sunni Islam in 1990s and 2000s, ethno-religious groups of the European Muslims became more publicly visible. European Muslims are trying to differentiate themselves from various middle-eastern and central-asian interpretations of Islam. In that differentiation process, two groups of European Muslims emerged: immigrants and indigenous European Muslims.

These socio-demographic differences, primary made for scientific analysis, are often used in daily and political purposes. Motives are various. Muslims want to show that Islam is not monolithic as it is perceived, but there are many differences inside that religion. One of them is »European« Islam. Purpose of the promotion of the »European« Islam was to show Europeans that in the community where the Muslims are minority (20–30 million of people) compared with Christian (protestant, catholic, orthodox) majority (app. 400 million of people) Islam is not a threat. European Muslims are using that term to show that Islam is a European religion. The existence of Islam as a religion of the European peoples was also used in the circles which were hostile toward Islam. Besides those borderline situations, Muslims are confronted with large number of obstacles in everyday life. Necessities for

the specific nutrition and specific clothing are creating some of them.

Today's fact that Islam is religion of some European nations is disturbing the established order of the things and it is asking Europeans to create different attitude toward Islam and put aside their prejudices toward it. In comparison with the majority of the population, we can compare the position of the European Muslims with a position of the European Catholics century ago.

Disregarding the motives for the classification of the European Muslims still remains the fact that we have two large groups of the European Muslims: immigrants of non-European origin and the indigenous European Muslim nations and ethnic groups. In the first case, Islam arrives in Europe as a consequence of the European colonial rule and the necessity for the labor force. In the second case, Islam arrives in Europe during the Ottoman rule and was accepted by indigenous populations.

We consider Islam as an organized religion, which is acting through Islamic »church« in Durkheimian sense – Islamic communities that are, although Islam, similar to other world religions, has a supranational character, organized through national »churches«. Organizationally, we can compare them with orthodox and protestant churches, also organized on the national level.

»Men, I separated you on tribes and peoples so that you can better know each other«, say the verse from Koran, which explains to us paradox of national organization of supranational religion. That paradox is also in the essence of unity of Muslims disregarding numerous differences. It helps us in understanding the »simultaneity« of the global Muslim reactions on the present-day events that are disturbing them in the world today.

When we observe Islamic communities in Europe, we categorize them as »old« (indigenous, ethnic) and »new« (immigrant) Islamic communities. In that kind of categorization existence of the »old« Islamic communities is measured by centuries (300–600 years of existence). The »old« communities are located mainly in Southeastern Europe and they are established during the Ottoman rule in Europe. »New« communities are consequence of the European colonial conquest. They are located mainly in West and North Europe in traditionally Christian lands, which are today forming European Union.

In all of that, there is one exception – Croatia. If we observe community of Muslims in Croatia by the time of its creation it is one of the European Islamic communities which are made of immigrants and their descendants. Its creation falls during the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina after the Berlin Congress in 1878. It is immigrant community, but in contrast to the other *new* European Islamic communities, it is formed mainly of Europeans – Bosniaks and Albanians – who made 90–95% of Muslim population in Croatia. The remains are Roma, Turks and the members of diplomatic staff, students and immigrant workers.

According to 2001 Census² 57 687 citizens of Croatia, or 1,3% of population, declared themselves as Muslims.

According to Islamic community unofficial estimations, 100–150 thousands of Muslims are permanently living in Croatia. Geographically, Muslims live in all parts of Croatia, mainly in urban areas. Village-type settlements are rare. This shows us immigrant character of the community.

Croatia and Muslims through the History

The encounters of Croats and Islam are spread far back in history³. The first memoirs can be found in the time of Arabian breakthrough to the Mediterranean. Pirates from coasts of North Africa made raids to islands in South Adriatic, plundering villages and taking native population into slavery to Muslim North Africa, Sicily and Spain.

While first wave of Islamic penetration to Europe has taken place mainly through sea routs, second wave came to Europe using land routes, under leadership of Ottoman Turks. This period of confrontation has created some of today's basic perceptions of Islam in Croatia.

For modern Croatian identity the most important period is that of Ottoman rule in Hungary and Croatia from Battle of Mohacs at 1526 until Siege of Vienna at 1683. After the Battle of Mohacs Ottoman Empire conquered large parts of Croatia (regions of Slavonia, Dalmatia and Lika). Although large parts of the native population under Ottoman rule accepted Islam, that religion didn't incorporate into Croatian modern national identity. In that view, Islam was religion of the »others«. Those who are not Croats and Catholics are enemies of Croatia and Catholicism as Croatian national religion.

The situation changes⁴ in the period after the Great Turkish war (1683–1699) and the break of the last Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683. Vienna and Budapest as the symbols of the ruling Austria and Hungary in Habsburg Empire became the main enemies of the Croatian nationalism as the ideology of the emerging capitalist class.

The newly formed Croatian capitalistic class in a search for a common identity which can unify south-Slavic ethnic communities in resistance to Austro-Hungarian imperial tendencies took part in creation of the Yugoslav state and identity⁵. Alternative identity was »croationism« as a counterpart to Yugoslav ideology. Croats claimed Bosnia-Herzegovina as a part of the Croatian national territory and Bosnian Muslims as a part of the Croatian national corpus. The Serbian national ideologists also claimed Bosnia-Herzegovina as a part of Serbian national territory and proclaimed that Bosnian Muslims are actually Serbs who »betrayed a religion of Serbian ancestors«. Third strain in that ideological conflict was that of Bosnian Muslims. They claimed separate Bosniak identity and continuity of Bosnian state from medieval times and through Ottoman Empire to present. That ideological »war for the soul of Bosnia« lasted through XIX and XX century until 1993 when Bosniak Congress acclaimed Bosniak as the official national name of Bosnian Muslims.

Muslims in Croatia in Modern Times

The immigration of Bosniaks and other Muslims to Croatia in modern times⁶ is now entering the third century with different intensity and motives. First mezar (Muslim grave) is situated in Zagreb on Mirogoj cemetery. According to the sign, it is a grave of Omer, tailor from Bosnian town of Banja Luka. On his journey he got sick and died in Zagreb in 1881.

Until First World War 1914–1918 the presence of Muslims in Croatia was sporadic and rare. Primarily, they were males who came to Croatia in a search for work. Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina after 1878 were in same state, Austro-Hungarian Empire, and communication of men and goods was much easier. Croatian and Bosnian language are similar languages from the same south-Slavic root, which also helped communication.

During the First World War due to the needs of the Austro-Hungarian military, in 1916 the office of military imam was established in Zagreb. In the same year, Croatia, as the one of the kingdoms of the Habsburg monarchy, officially recognized Islam.

The immigration of the Bosnian Muslims to Croatia speaks a lot about basic motives for immigration, which differs in various segments of time. Surely, we must differ between periods of war and peace. Economic reasons are the first motive for the immigration in the times of peace. Bosnian Muslims are arriving to Croatia as workers and merchants. The workers came prepared on the hard physical labor for the lower wages than their Croatian counterparts. Successful merchants who opened shops in Croatia are the other kind of immigrants. The migrations on account of education are rare until the end of the First World War. The richest Bosniaks had an opportunity to send their children to the best education centers of Habsburg Monarchy (i.e. Vienna, Budapest, and Prague). Those centers had many advantages compared to Zagreb and they used them.

In the evening of the Second World War in Zagreb and some other Croatian towns (i.e. Dubrovnik) there is a small Islamic community, which held religious services for the settled and traveling Muslims.

Croatian Muslims in the Second World War

For the Muslims in Croatia⁷ situation rapidly changed when the Kingdom of Yugoslavia entered the Second World War in 1941. After few days of fighting, Yugoslavia capitulated and it was dispersed among the Axis occupation forces. Bosnia/Herzegovina became part of new state – Independent State of Croatia. Political leadership of Bosnian Muslims joined new state⁴. But soon, showed the criminal and fascistic character of the new state which ignited the armed resistance.

Antifascist resistance has two strains – civil and communist. Civil Muslim strain united various groups of religious and urban Muslims, using different forms of civil resistance. In rural areas civilian strain helped establishing the Muslim self-defense militias, which protected ru-

ral Muslim population against attacks of chetniks (Serbian fascist nationalistic movement).

Bosnian Muslims fought on all sides during the war. Partly, they joined partisan movement under the leadership of Communist party. Others joined German and Croatian military formations. Confronted with the chetnik's threat of physical extermination, Bosnian Muslims were ready to accept any government that would give them arms for defense against chetniks – Serbian nationalistic. Bosnian Muslims in large numbers joined anti-fascist partisan movement and participated in armed resistance against German occupation.

The result of the war atrocities on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina were migrations of the Bosnian Muslims to Croatia, especially into Zagreb, as the capital, economic and social center of the state.

Immigration after the Second World War

After the end of the Second World War, Bosnia Herzegovina and Croatia are again in the same country, this time in the socialist Yugoslavia. Migrations continued, with three main reasons: economic, educational and political.

As a more economically developed than Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia is a traditional destination for Bosnian economic emigrants. In socialist Yugoslavia, Zagreb became educational center, and attracted students and intellectuals who preferred more liberal climate in Zagreb's political circles.

The Bosnian War (1992–1995)

Croatian Declaration of Independence on the June 25th, 1991 marks the beginning of the Croatian War for the Independence⁸. After the Croatian Parliament cut off all remaining relations with Yugoslavia on the October 8th, 1991 war erupted with full intensity. Croatian citizens Muslims (notably Bosniaks and Albanians) joined Croatian Armed Forces and fought in their ranks mainly as soldiers and non-commissioned officers.

Bosnian war erupted after the referendum for the independence from February 29th till March 1st, 1992, and the declaration of independence in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Serbian rebels with the help of Yugoslav People's Army occupied large parts of Bosnian territory and started mass killings, ethnic cleansing and expulsion of non-Serb population. Bloody war lasted for four years and produced vast number of refugees.

Because of its neighboring geographical position Croatia became a transit point for refugees. Some of them temporarily settled in Croatia.

Islamic community in Croatia was direct participant of the Bosnian war. This participation was most obvious in the first part of the war (1992–1993) when Muslim population, mainly through strong family connections, accommodated large number of refugees from neighboring country.

Especially at the beginning of the war large numbers of refugees came to the mosque in Zagreb. It represented first destination in a search for help. This was a time of the creation of the institutions of the Bosnian state which Islamic Community in Croatia helped in many ways.

After the end of the war in 1995 most of the Muslim refugees returned to Bosnia-Herzegovina or moved further to the countries of the European Union, USA and Canada. The population stabilized around 1.5%.

Croatian Muslims – Experience of Acculturation

If we observe the development of the Islamic community in Croatia we notice that 130 years after the first Muslim funeral in modern times in Croatia and 90 years of recognition of the religion of Islam in Croatian parliament, it represents successful community which became a part of Croatian political system.

What do we find when we are talking about community of Muslims in Croatia? According to ethnical origin, majority of Croatian Muslims are Bosniaks (70–75%). Second largest group are Albanians (15–20%), then Roma (5–10%), then Muslims of other ethnic origin (Turks, Arabs, Asians...). Content of the Islamic community in Croatia is defined by neighboring Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bosniak majority. Islamic community in Croatia is organizationally independent but it accepts spiritual leadership of reis-ul ulema of Bosnian Muslims.

Croatian Muslims are going through process of acculturation. With the rise of number of Muslims born in Croatia compared to number of immigrants from Bosnia-Herzegovina, there's been a change in value priorities. In the first generation of immigrants the relationships inside the family reflected traditional Bosnian Muslim family relationship. In second generation, born in Croatia or arrived in early age, we witness »generational rebellion« and acceptance of values of society in which they were born or immigrated. We often find membership in Communist party or »mixed« marriages (marriages with non-Muslims) as pillars of new identity against traditional values which their parents represented.

In third generation of Muslim immigrants⁹ to Croatia we find a breaking point. There are several possible outcomes. In first, Muslims are completely assimilated into the Croatian environment. They are giving their children non-Muslim names, they don't follow the tradition any more, they consume (eat and drink) things that are forbidden for Muslims etc. Their Muslim background can be traced only by searching for ancestors, origin of family names and so on.

Second possible outcome is to choose identity based on religion, as the basic identity topic. They consider themselves as Croats of Muslim faith. They don't belong any more to the traditional patterns of identity which their ancestors brought from Bosnia-Herzegovina. But, they feel that in some way they are different from Cro-

atian majority, which is mainly Catholic by tradition. In the third generation of the Croatian Muslims from Bosnia, we can detect the rebellion of the new generation. Muslim children, born and raised in Croatia, in resistance to parental values, are renewing values of their grandmothers and grandfathers, accommodated to present circumstances.

Third possible outcome is acceptance of renewed Bosniak identity. Children born in Croatia accept modern Bosniak identity with the religion as a part of Bosniak

tradition. They are modern, they use advances of new technologies, they behave like their Croatian peers, listen to same kind of music, share the same generational values.

When we observe Muslims in Croatia, we can find them in all parts of society. When we read the media, we can find Muslims in various social positions, from members of parliament to the actors of criminal scene. We locate them in media, politics, government offices, business, science and art. Key question is their public visibility.

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HRVATSKI MUSLIMANI – USELJENIČKA ZAJEDNICA AUTOHTONIH EUROPLJANA

SAŽETAK

Tema ovog rada je muslimanska populacija u Hrvatskoj. Njena jedinstvena pozicija zajednice muslimanskih imigranata europskog podrijetla nudi nam mnoštvo istraživačkih mogućnosti. Duga povijest susreta muslimana i kršćana na hrvatsko-bosanskoj granici evoluirala je u mnogo smjerova i rezultiralo današnjom stvarnošću da su muslimani dio hrvatskog društva. U modernom dobu, od austrougarske okupacije Bosne 1878. godine, bosanski muslimani dolaze u Hrvatsku kao radnici, izbjeglice, pripadnici državnog aparata, studenti itd. Njihovi su potomci danas hrvatski državljanji, rođeni u Hrvatskoj u trećoj i četvrtoj generaciji. Muslimani su uspostavili formalnu islamsku zajednicu. Na osobnoj ravni miješaju svoje osjećaje pripadnosti i porijekla. Danas nastupaju kao ravnopravni dio hrvatskog društva u cijelom rasponu društvenih nivoa Hrvatske.