

## 6 Pilgrimage as Muslim religious commemoration

### The case of Ajvatovica in Bosnia-Hercegovina

*Sara Kuehn*

The enduring need for a ritual framing of a sacred site was certainly one of the stimuli for the renewal of the public performance and collective pilgrimage of Ajvatovica in central Bosnia-Hercegovina in June 1990.<sup>1</sup> Allegedly the most attended Muslim gathering in Europe, there are factors in play around this event that go beyond just the religious. The revival and reinvention of narratives associated with Ajvatovica is a contested political-aesthetic process serving also to (re)define and (re)shape the authenticity and representation of the collective ethn-national and religious identities of the Bosniaks.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, I attempt to conceptualize the (re)creation of the religio-cultural event in its historical and cultural context and to point to its iconographic interpretation with a view to its symbolic and religious value as well as its significance for the cultural identity and political imagination of the Bosnian people. I thereby consider the (re)fashioning of various layers of collective and connective memory and desire, invigorated through a selection of traditions and cultural forms that are 'canonized' in the process (J. Assmann 2006, 9–16).

Located about eighty-five kilometres west of Sarajevo at the Ajvatovica plateau (the Šuljaga mountain) near the towns of Donji Vakuf and Bugojno, northwest of the small town of Prusac, the pilgrimage is an annual event. Taking place at the end of June with a two-week cultural, religious, and tourist programme, it culminates in a two-day procession to the holy sites in the remote mountains. In 1947 the practice was banned in Communist Yugoslavia.<sup>3</sup> In a post-Yugoslav context, the ritualization of the national history and heritage belongs to the domain of the national identity formation and re-Islamization process linking secular and religious elements.

The main impresarios involved in the memory recuperation and (re)appropriation of the site were the Islamic Community in Bosnia-Hercegovina (*Islamska zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini, IZ*) and the Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka demokratske akcije, SDA*), led at the time by the late Alija Izetbegović, a prominent pan-Islamic activist, who by association, was identifying himself as the bearer of that memory. Ajvatovica provided a stage for the selection and subsequent propagation of the familiar narrative of the pilgrimage with the tendency to demythologize it, although not without introducing new mythic elements

meant to elevate contemporary developments to the level of a salvation-historical development and to achieve a new sacred quality (cf. Coomans 2012, 210–11, 220–41). The powerful effect of this functionalist framing and its concomitant associated symbolism gave rise to a sense of the (half-remembered) tradition and to notions of identity-constitutive narratives, enmeshed with a growing sense of the presence of the sacred. The (re)definition, recognition, authentication, and reinforcement of the shared mythical and historical tradition and cultural memories allowed for the revitalization and mobilization of both religious and political power.<sup>4</sup>

Besides a religious programme – consisting of the canonical prayer (*salat*), the personal prayer of supplication or invocation (Bosnian *dova*, Arabic *du‘a‘*) in the open air at the *dovišta* (‘supplication sites’, see what follows), and the continuing remembrance of God and of the Divine Names (*zikir*, Arabic *dhikr*) – the festival of gathering and pilgrimage served as an opportunity for politicians to address the people.<sup>5</sup> On 16 and 17 June 1990, reportedly more than 100,000 people participated in the landmark commemoration of the sixteenth-century conversions to Islam in Bosnia – explicitly associating the pilgrimage with the Islamization of Bosnia and in so doing officially sanctioning and sacralizing the practice of open-air prayers. The appropriation of religio-cultural traditions into a new national frame led to a legitimization of power which was ritualized by combining elements of aesthetics and art, in addition to popular and religious rituals and celebrations, elevating the practice into the sacral realm.

Addressing the pilgrims after his *du‘a‘* and the midday prayer, the then acting former Yugoslav *reisul-ulema* (Arabic *ra‘is al-‘ulama‘*, ‘grand *mufti‘*) of the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the late Jakub Selimoski, hinted at the generative power of the symbolism initiated by the pilgrimage:

With the help of the Almighty Merciful Allah. With this is the time when we Bosniaks are restoring the right to express our religious identity in a dignified and humane way: this is the time when we restore our traditions and customs in liberty, though being aware of the responsibility and constraints the freedom we have acquired are imposing upon us. . . . Congregating here at Ajvatovica, as our ancestors before us did, we are paying tribute to literacy and education. . . . We are today also paying tribute to our history and our forefathers.

(Quoted in Perica 2002, 65)

In the following year, about 150,000 pilgrims and guests participated in the ritual procession. In addition to the march to the Ajvatovica Rock, a cultural programme was also organized (Perica 2002, 65). After the Bosnian War of 1992–1995, which brought about dramatic political, economic, and social change, accompanied by traumatic conflict and shifting borders, Ajvatovica developed into a pilgrimage site of national salience that attracts more than half a million pilgrims annually.

### The *dovišta* as ritual reinforcement of the mythical tradition

The polymorphic phenomenon of Ajvatovica involves not only the previously described protagonists but a distinct location together with its symbolic language and religious and ritual acts. During the drought-prone summer months, tens of thousands of Muslims from Bosnia and neighbouring countries, including Turkey, congregate. Some narratives trace the Ajvatovica pilgrimage site back to pre-Islamic times and associate it with Islamized elements of older folk practices. These ancient pre-Islamic ritual performances were clearly informed by the symbolism of the changing seasons (cf. Hadžijahić 1978, 301–28; Stegemann 1936, 580–4). However, the pre-Islamic rites were given new meaning commemorating historical events crucial to the community's identity.

In the Western Balkans remote places such as mountaintops, forest glades, caves, crevices, springs, wells, and so on have served as places of worship since pre-Islamic times. Known as *dovišta*, they function as supplication sites, or places where religious gatherings and congregational prayers are held, linked in local legends to legendary events. The annual production cycles composed a calendar based on the perceptions of the natural order; this cyclical perception of time is characterized by predictability and repetition related to the economic base of the community – agriculture and stockbreeding. Punctuated by devotions done in grottos, by rocks, near springs and sacred trees to overcome the vicissitudes of nature and thereby ensure the survival of the community, circuits are made to mountaintops during the summer to pray for rain, to ward off drought, and to ensure that the crops will grow and yield a plentiful harvest. From this perspective, rain-making rituals represent fertility cults and reflect the belief in the sanctity of life-giving water. They also mirror the life cycle of stockbreeders who migrate seasonally from the wooded foothills to mountaintop pastures as well as important passages of the agricultural year. This was particularly important for the Prusac plain, which was the granary of Uskoplje, extending along the valley below Prusac town. Pilgrimages to such sacred places are often associated with holy persons or saints (*awliya*) and their legends (cf. Bušatlić 2009, 97–101). All these propitious elements, geographical and natural, are united in the *dovišta* of Ajvatovica, a site of great natural beauty with associative spiritual value.

The Ajvatovica pilgrimage is the most important of the pilgrimages that traditionally occur in Bosnia between St George's Day (Đurđevdan/Jurjevo) and St Elijah's Day (Ilindan/Alidun) (see Clayer and Popovic 1995b, 353). The celebration of the return of springtime, on 23 April according to the Gregorian and on 6 May according to the Julian calendar, is marked by St George's Day, symbolizing springtime, fertility, and nature. By contrast, St Elijah's Day marks a turning point of the summer, the end to the harvest and the most difficult labour. It falls on 24 June according to the Gregorian and on 2 August according to the Julian calendar. Muslims call it Alidun, Alija's Day, and Christians Ilindan, Ilija's Day. According to popular tradition, Ilija (Elijah/Elias) comes before noon and Alija ('Ali) in the afternoon; the festivities are thus divided and connected when the sun is at its peak; indeed it is believed that 'Ali becomes Elijah at midday. Elijah is also known as 'the Thunderer' and according to legend, is held responsible for

summer storms, hail, rain, thunder, and dew. At the same time he is associated with mountaintops. Like other points in the sacred calendar, the feast day is much older than its name would suggest and associates the prophet with pre-Christian lightning gods. Slavic mythology is full of references to Perun, the supreme god of climatological phenomena such as storms, thunder, and lightning bolts, who after the arrival of Christianity, was amalgamated with St Elijah. The natural characteristics, pre-Islamic cultic reality, and local events thus lend sacredness to the Ajvatovica landscape and places of veneration.

Apart from Ajvatovica, the most popular *dovišta* in Bosnia are likewise to be found in often secluded and remarkable landscapes. These include Djevojačka Pećina near Kladanj, Karići near Sarajevo (see Bringa and Henig, this volume), Lastavica near Zenica, the Musalla plateau near Sanski Most, as well as the Blagaj *tekke* (a dervish gathering place) near Mostar containing the *turbe* (*shaykh's* or saint's tomb) of the hero and mystic saint Sari Saltuq Dede, credited with the propagation of Islam in the Balkans.

### **Ajvaz Dedo, the resonance of the sacred and ideas of 'origin' of place**

Closely linked to Ajvatovica are the miracles of the eponymous legendary figure of Ajvaz Dedo ('Grandfather Ayvaz'). Thought to have been a *ghazi* (Muslim warrior for the faith) from Anatolia who arrived in Bosnia and the city of Akhisar (present-day Prusac) after 1463, during the Ottoman conquest, he is similarly alleged to have been instrumental in the Islamization of the local population. The saint's appearance in the concrete setting of the Ajvatovica pilgrimage thereby relates a given 'transhistorical' religious landscape to the form of his 'historical' appearance and maintenance that is of significance with regard to the ongoing local political and social reconstruction. The associated mythical narratives allude to certain cosmic and social phenomena based on the intrinsic values of the Bosniak community with the purpose of ensuring its cohesion (cf. Schöpflin 1997, 19–35, esp. 20).

The legend that supports the pilgrimage exists in several versions, all of which focus on the theme of water. In Ajvaz Dedo's time the village of Prusac did not have a source of drinking water. Near the village at the foot of Mount Šuljaga, the holy man identified a spring obstructed by a huge rock. His forty days of prayer followed by a dream of two white rams fiercely butting horns miraculously split the rock in two, allowing the water to burst through the crevice (cf. also Bringa and Henig, this volume). Thanks to the 'marvel' wrought by this 'friend of God' (*karamat al-awliya'*), a wooden spring-water conduit (*tomruk*) was laid that distributed the water to the fortifications in Prusac and to its settlement below. According to a variant of the legend, Ajvaz Dedo brought water to Prusac's fortress during a Christian siege, as water began to be scarce, bringing much needed relief (Popovic 2011).

In commemoration and celebration of this event and in honour of Ajvaz Dedo, the site of the split rock with its spring was called Ajvatovica, and women and men began to visit it annually. Curiously, there is no reference to Ajvaz Dedo or the pilgrimage to Ajvatovica in existing Ottoman sources. Indeed the earliest

evidence of the pilgrimage dates to the travelogue of the erudite Austrian prehistorian, Moritz Hoernes (1888). It is interesting to see how in the framework of the contemporary pilgrimage the experience of saint veneration, Sufism, and mainstream Islam are linked to the broader realm of Bosnian politics and society.

Ajvaz Dedo's water supply system was rebuilt by the famous scholar and benefactor Hasan Kjafija Pruščak (1544–1615/16). He erected several public buildings and a *tekke* in Prusac and also built a domed *turbe* over Ajvaz Dedo's grave, thus memorializing the mythical history of the saint (Clayer 1994, 98). The complex around the Hasan Kjafija Mosque (1606–1607) with the *madrasa* and *tekke* (1612) includes both Hasan Kjafija's *turbe* and Ajvaz Dedo's *turbe* (Figure 6.1).

A focal point of the pilgrimage, the latter is an unassuming small building, built of sundried brick and timber with a four-sloped roof, covered with wooden tiles (cf. Mazalić 1951, 147–89), which has recently been completely reconstructed with modern building materials.

As a holy place the pilgrimage site is a visual and material manifestation of divine presence, in which the mystery of the divine is thought to resonate and reverberate still, and is linked to religious emotions. Before entering the *turbe* some visitors recite a *du'a* prayer and respectfully kiss the door frame of the *turbe*, symbolizing the threshold that separates the outer world from the sacred space. When entering they place the left foot first. Once inside the tomb chamber, they silently greet the tomb occupant and offer one or more prayers. Of note is the fact that the interior of Ajvaz Dedo's *turbe* has a wooden partition separating the first chamber (Figure 6.2) from the sanctuary which houses the draped, gabled cenotaph marking the grave of the saint.



Figure 6.1 *Turbe* of Ajvaz Dedo in Prusac.



*Figure 6.2* Interior of Ajvaz Dedo's *turbe* having a wooden partition separating the chamber from the sanctuary.

© Sara Kuehn

The latter is framed by a simply cut grave stele without inscriptions which, like the top of the cenotaph, is crowned with a three-dimensional representation of a *taj* (lit. ‘crown’, dervish headdress). After the completion of the prayers, visitors often kiss the partition or rub their hands on it and then upon their faces, thereby transferring blessings or benefits (*bereket*, Arabic *baraka*). Before leaving the tomb, some visitors sit for a while facing the tomb doing silent *zikr*, reading the Qur’an, or just contemplating the tomb. Most visitors place monetary donations in a wooden box. Others bring small gifts such as towels or prayer beads to be left as offerings.

Due to its location at a crossroads and on the main road leading from the Split region to Bosnia, numerous travellers and delegations passed through the town that was an important cultural centre. In the late sixteenth century Akhisar was a strong fort (Šabanović 1982, 151, 153, 205, 213). According to Evliya Çelebi, who visited Prusac in the mid-seventeenth century, there were three *tekkes* in Prusac at that time, of which that of ‘his Eminence Shaykh Kjafija’ was particularly notable (Čelebi 1996, 133). It belonged to the Khalwatiyya order of dervishes, which are specially connected with Prusac (cf. Clayer 1994, 98).

This legacy of the region as a ‘spiritual place’ was compounded by the fact that – as if through divine intervention – the site of the Ajvatovica pilgrimage was the *only* territory of the Donji Vakuf district that was under the control of the Bosnian army during the 1992–1995 war. Hence it acquired the symbolism of a ‘sacred land’ representing hope and permanence for the beleaguered Muslim community. Prusac, which plays a central role in the yearly gathering of Muslims at the Ajvatovica plateau, is thus often referred to as the ‘heroic city’ – a symbol of resistance and survival of all Bosniaks (cf. Dimitrijević 1999, 38–9).

It is particularly noteworthy that in comparison to the canonical hajj, Ajvatovica has been known as ‘the small hajj’, sometimes humbly defined as ‘pilgrimage of the poor’ or the ‘Ka’ba of the poor’ (Grđjić-Bjelokosić 1901, 38–40, see also Bringa and Henig, this volume). Writing in the late 1920s, the noted German scholar Franz Babinger described Prusac as the ‘Bosnian Mecca’ (Babinger 1929, 125–6). Especially in the case of poorer Muslims with no realistic prospect of ever seeing Mecca, Bosnian Muslims state that performing three times the pilgrimage to Ajvatovica is equivalent or will substitute for the obligatory hajj to the Holy Places and the Ka’ba (Clayer and Popovic 1995a, 346–7). In this way, the impact of the two locations is symbolically joined, the constitutive mytho-historical significance of the Ajvatovica pilgrimage not being understood in isolation. It is here important to note the symbolic dimension of the hajj and its commemorative quality. This includes the idea of purification and absolution of sins, combined with a new departure in life. In like manner, ‘the small hajj’ to the Ajvatovica Rock is a transformative experience infused with the idea of spiritual cleansing. The pilgrim thereby performs the visitation (*ziyara*) to Ajvaz Dedo’s *turbe* imploring the saint to find solutions to personal afflictions and, more generally, to attain prosperity, protection and blessings.

### **The Ajvatovica public performance/ritual and procession**

The main ritual of Ajvatovica, the two-day procession, consists of several parts beginning the day before with the arrival of the horsemen and a great number of visitors in Prusac. The starting point for the annual pilgrimage circuit is at the Handanija Mosque (1617). Located in the centre of Prusac, the mosque was heavily damaged in shelling that took place in the Bosnian War of 1992–1995, with restoration and conservation works still in progress. Here the standard-bearers leave their flags and banners and collect them again next morning before the procession departs for the Ajvatovica Rock.

Before 1995, it was common for guests to stay in local homes. After the 1992–1995 war, it became customary for the Bosnian Army to set up large tents to accommodate some of the pilgrims, the horsemen, and their horses. Until today the army fulfils this role, soldiers hand out drinks, and some communal meals are held before and after the main procession.

In the evening before the main procession, the evening prayer is held in the *musalla*, the open communal prayer place outside the mosque, which can accommodate a larger number of believers. This takes place in the so-called garden of what used to be the *mekteb* (school) of Hasan Kjfajija Pruščak, now housing his *turbe*. It is followed by the communal *zkr*, a constitutive part of the Ajvatovica event, demonstrating the inherent connection between Sufism and local traditions of sainthood and mainstream Islam (Figure 6.3).

More specifically, the collective performance plays a central role in the invocation of local tradition and the unfolding of local configurations. Organized by the Islamic Community, the long nocturnal ritual is attended by *shaykhs* (spiritual guides), their *vekils* (deputies), and dervishes comprising a few hundred people. It goes on well after the last prayer, which in summer falls around 3.30 a.m. The ritual



Figure 6.3 Communal *zkr* led by Šejh Sirri Hadžimejlić in the *musalla* in Prusac, 25 June 2011.



takes place in a *halka* (circle) with prominent positions allocated for the *shaykhs*. The pilgrimage thereby exemplifies the attraction of mystical brotherhoods and their teaching traditions embedded in a commemorative culture advancing the virtues of the Ottoman-Balkan era.

The Sunday procession begins in the early morning with a review of the horsemen who form the principal part of the procession.<sup>6</sup> It commences with the sound of the horsemen and then the roll call. After the equestrian parade, the ceremonial procession proceeds with a display of flags and tall, rectangular organizational standards. It is divided into the different *džemats* (the main 'unit' of the Islamic Community formed of about one hundred households), each headed by an imam and a representative carrying its flag and an Islamic banner inscribed with Qur'anic verses. The staging adopted by the standard-bearers clearly reflects the (re)possession of local identities. This segment of the performance, with flags from different parts of Bosnia as well as from around the world, often crowned by the emblem of the 'star and crescent', the official emblem of the Islamic Community, symbolizes a unifying function of the event. The 'star and crescent' iconography is interpreted as the ensign of Islam or the Muslim community, implicitly associating it with the Ottoman 'star and crescent' and hence the Bosnian-Ottoman legacy. Prominent among these are the flags of the Republic of Turkey carried by official delegations. This also reflects the increasingly influential role played by Turkey and Turkish-based religious and cultural organizations in Bosnia.

As a signalling or guiding device the horsemen, too, carry banners, long poles with tails fluttering in the wind, surmounted by ensigns and decorated by flowers and foliage. Banners of the Islamic Community with the gold 'crescent and star' on a green background are numerous; the most senior horseman carries the flag of Bosnia. As a mark of riches the horses are set at the front of the procession (Figure 6.4).

The harnesses and equestrian accoutrements are richly decorated with flowers and tassels. The parade involves passages, changes of pace, or any of the exercises which make up a fairly advanced equestrianism including some manoeuvres of riders as in tournaments as well as some jousting and arms play on horseback displaying the riders' levels of horsemanship. Many of the horsemen are dressed in national Bosnian attire, closely linked to the regulation on garments, colours, and types of shoes adopted in 1794.<sup>7</sup>

The procession towards the *dovišta* is the highlight of the pilgrimage, giving voice to the representations of the story of Ajvaz Dedo and thereby affirming Bosniak identity. It also defines the ritual space. As they march, the pilgrims raise their hands in supplications to God, 'appealing' for good fortune, the efficacy being enhanced by the liturgical *Amin* followed by the singing of devotional songs or *ilahis*, some of which are specially composed to be sung during the collective ritual supplications for rain.

A very important part of the pilgrimage occurs when the procession passes through the narrow crevice, the Ajvatovica Rock (Figure 6.5).



*Figure 6.4* Equestrian procession, 26 June 2011.

© Sara Kuehn



*Figure 6.5* Procession of pilgrims passing through the narrow crevice, the Ajvatovica Rock, 26 June 2011.

© Sara Kuehn

Many pilgrims break off small pebbles and recite appropriate formulae over these.<sup>8</sup> The pilgrims take the stones to spread them on their fields and meadows for the crops to grow better, to place them in front of their houses during storms for protection, or simply for the appropriation of blessings (*bereket*) and good fortune (*nafaka*). The taking away of such objects of course also functions as a permanent embodiment of the pilgrimage.

Arriving at the top of the crevice, the religious dignitaries and the standard-bearers surrounded by the pilgrims pause to recite the Surat al-Fath (Sura of Victory, Qur'an 48) in a seated position followed by a communal *kišna dova*, the ritual prayer appealing for rain (Figure 6.6).

According to Islamic tradition, the first three verses of the Sura were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad after his victorious entry into Mecca in 630, which secured his control over Western Arabia. The Sura is therefore commonly recited as a victory commemoration alluding to the survival of the people in the region and allowing for a remembrance of the victory of Islam (cf. Sarač Rujanac 2013, 120).

The path continues to a large forest glade, where the banners are deposited in front of a large tribune. A select programme – comprising concerts of spiritual music, *ilahis*, and Qur'anic recitation, performed also by official guests from Turkey and Iran – precedes the midday prayer (Figure 6.7).

This is followed by a special prayer for the *šehidi* (lit. 'witnesses of the Faith', believers who shed their blood or gave their lives for the faith, martyrs) of the Bosnian War of 1992–1995 (Figure 6.8).

After the war, the remembrance of the *šehidi* remained a central element of the IZ and the SDA (Bougarel 2007, 167–91, esp. 172). Led by the head of IZ, the *reisul-ulema*, the prayer symbolically marks the end of the Ajvatovica pilgrimage. During the prayer women place themselves behind the men.

In 2011, the programme of the present-day event of the 'Days of Ajvatovica' comprising religious, cultural, artistic, and athletic events held throughout central Bosnia was expanded to last for sixteen days. It is a festive celebration that at the end of the *dovišta* is marked by collective meals and picnics followed by a fair (*teferič*), the vitality and materiality of interface relationships of which link it closely to the process of local configuration.

There has been some opposition to the pilgrimage (see also Dimitrijevic 1999, 38–9). The Bosnian Wahhabi website [www.putvjernika.com](http://www.putvjernika.com), the title of which means 'path of the believers', denounced Ajvatovica as a 'forbidden innovation' (*bid'a*), a practice for which there is no precedent in the time of the Prophet. The most notable case in Bosnia took place in the early morning of 27 June 2010, the purported five hundredth anniversary of Ajvatovica, when extremists bombed a police station in Bugojno located on the circuit towards Ajvatovica. One officer was killed and six more wounded. Bosnian authorities arrested Haris Causevic, a follower of Wahhabi principles and practices, who admitted the attack, declaring he was motivated by opposition to Ajvatovica. The Bosnian police arrested four more alleged Wahhabis in the case.



Figure 6.6 Communal *kišna dova*, 26 June 2011.

© Sara Kuehn



Figure 6.7 Midday prayer of Ajvatovica pilgrims led by the *reisu-l-ulema* of the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Dr Mustafa Cerić, 26 June 2011.

© Sara Kuehn



*Figure 6.8* Special prayer for the *šehidi* of the Bosnian War of 1992–1995, 26 June 2011.  
© Sara Kuehn

### Gender politics of the Ajvatovica commemoration revival

Objections to Ajvatovica have also extended to the participation of women in the pilgrimage. This aspect has clearly been brought to the fore – and exaggerated – to devalue the mixed practice by condemning these ‘excesses’, that is, an occasion when men and women mingle. Indeed not only those associated with Wahhabi doctrine and its propagation, but also elderly Sufi *shaykhs* and their followers, who performed the pilgrimage to Ajvatovica in secret even after its prohibition in 1947, stressed the great difference between Ajvatovica now and then (personal communications with Bosnian Sufi *shaykhs* in 2011–2013; see also Dimitrijevic 1999, 47; Katić et al. 2014, 20), mainly because of the involvement of women. Although they had participated in the pilgrimage after its revival in the 1990s and again after the 1992–1995 war, they decided not to attend any longer.

Conversely, even though the pilgrimage is distinguished by the active presence of women (Figure 6.9), their dynamics of self-definition are still sometimes curtailed by restrictions and also in terms of their access to religious space, forcing them into religious margins.

In the pre-Yugoslav period women used to make the pilgrimage one week after the men. However during the first year of the Ajvatovica commemoration revival in 1990, some religious authorities suggested that women should stay in the Handanija Mosque in Prusac and should not go together with the men to the Ajvatovica Rock. About two thousand women used this as an opportunity to pray



Figure 6.9 Communal prayer of Ajvatovica female pilgrims separated by a cord from the male pilgrims at front, 26 June 2011.

the midday prayer in a women's congregation with a female imam and also performed *ziyara* to Ajvaz Dedo's *turbe* (F.F. 1990, 9; cf. Clayer and Popovic 1995b, 364). The following year, in 1991, the Islamic Community allowed women to perform the pilgrimage but organized a separate circuit for female participants to the Ajvatovica Rock (Perica 2002, 65). However as a result of conservative gender regimes and a tradition of gender segregation, the formerly banned female participation at the religious commemoration of Ajvatovica continued to be highly disputed. Two years after the 1992–1995 war, the male organizers of Ajvatovica once again forbade women to take part in the procession to the pilgrimage site. In response, Alija Izetbegović, at the time leader of the SDA, summarized his view of the role of women at Ajvatovica in a public speech in June 1997:

Women make up half of our nation (*narod*). In the midst of the war, together they shared with us [i.e. the male Bosnians] the burden of wartime misfortune: dying, starving and suffering. From them we expect that they bear and bring up a generation of Bosniacs [*sic*] who will preserve what we have elected and fight to rid themselves of what we are not. Such a proud and aware generation cannot be brought up by humiliated and excluded women.

(Krehić 1997, translated by Elissa Helms in Helms 2003, 83–4)

Alija Izetbegović is today still credited by many Bosnians to have upheld women's dignity and to have been instrumental to nevertheless accord them the right to participate at that time. This was done, as Elissa Helms points out, on the basis of their function as mothers with primary duties towards the home and family (Helms 2003, 84). Even so, since that year, women are permitted to take part in the Ajvatovica pilgrimage.

### **Ajvatovica and Srebrenica**

It is of particular significance that today Ajvatovica is seen by many as a symbolic counterbalance to the annual commemoration of the 1995 ethnic cleansing and genocide at the small town of Srebrenica.<sup>9</sup> After completing the Ajvatovica pilgrimage, many pilgrims choose to travel to Potočari near Srebrenica facilitated by the fact that both commemorations are in quick succession following one another after a short interval (end of June and early July). Located today in the Republika Srpska (the Serb Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina),<sup>10</sup> Srebrenica is generally regarded as one of the main symbols of the war and of the suffering of the Bosniaks, generating a powerful interaction of symbol and memory (J. Assmann 2006, 8–9). The genocide is annually commemorated on 11 July, as the official day of remembrance of the massacre. The first large-scale commemorative protest took place in Potočari in the presence of Alija Izetbegović, setting foot on Republika Srpska territory for the first time since 1995, on the fifth anniversary of the massacre in 2000. The political reframing of the Bosnian memory of suffering created public visibility and audibility, in turn aiding memory formation and transformation (cf. A. Assmann 2010, 39). The commemoration developed into



a March of Peace made by tens of thousands of people from across the world to mourn, honour, and pay respects to the victims of the atrocities and express solidarity with the families of the victims in a day of silence and remembrance with newly-identified massacre victims being laid to rest after a commemoration ceremony held at the cemetery and memorial complex in Potočari near Srebrenica.

Of central importance are the collective funeral prayers (*namaz-e janaza*, Arabic: *salat al-janaza*) for the *šehidi*<sup>11</sup> at the *musalla* in Potočari, an obligation which, as stressed by the present *reisu-l-ulema* of the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Husein Kavazović, is incumbent upon the community. In his speech on 11 July 2013 at the funeral marking the Eighteenth Anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide, Kavazović called Potočari ‘a place in which we can all constantly make *ziyara*, so that we may remember the dead and our painful past – and with this refine and reenergize ourselves, never losing sight of how much harm our *shuhada* (Arabic sing. *al-shahid*, pl. *al-shuhada*’; lit. ‘witnesses’, martyrs) had to endure.’<sup>12</sup> This is followed by a *du‘a* for the victims which is not said in a loud voice and does not have a fixed formula.

Many of those attending the annual remembrance of the massacre also partook in the Ajvatovica pilgrimage. A common link between the two commemorative *ziyaras* is certainly the remembrance of the 1992–1995 war, paradigmatically exemplified by Srebrenica as a generic symbol, and the *shuhada*, thereby rooting the Bosniaks in a collective experience. This also permits the forging of emotional links between *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory (cf. J. Assmann 2006, 8–9). Participation moreover allows for memories to be mobilized in the effort to come to terms with the losses and traumas of the atrocities, in this way demonstrating Muslim survival and unity resulting in a strengthened sense of national identity. As has been pointed out by Aleida Assmann, ‘to concede memories, both individual and collective . . . is to acknowledge the multiple and diverse impact of the past, and in particular a traumatic past . . . and also provides a repository for . . . identity formations’ (A. Assmann 2010, 39). It is well-known that the connection of collective trauma, collective memory, and trans-generational transmission of memory allows for the continuity of identity (A. Assmann 2010, 42–3), for, importantly, community healing involves self-definition (Winter 2006, 17–78; Winter 2010, 19; also Das and Kleinman 2001, 4).

## Conclusion

In a very specific way, the rite of commemoration of Ajvatovica is not only the outcome of a selection and ‘canonization’ of a selection of religio-cultural traditions but also mirrors the phenomenon of longevity of popular cults as well as the historical and political conditions in these parts of South-eastern Europe. Yet it also reflects the ambivalent and changing nature of interethnic relations in Bosnia.

In this chapter I have described the important role the pilgrimage plays in the process of (re)shaping and transforming national memories and identities in Bosnia today and its contributions to the composition of the nation’s history and heritage, a process which is not unchallenged. On the one hand, the pilgrimage

acts as a repository that conserves some of the multilayered aspects of traditional knowledge of Bosnian heritage, which may be defined as a cumulative body of knowledge, ritual practices, and representations in interaction with the natural environment. On the other hand, it provides a platform for ways to (re) conceptualize, (re)present, and (re)negotiate the past that is largely dependent on the permanent mutual exchange between the Bosnian religious and political leadership and the Bosnian population. More particularly, by transferring collective memory from one generation to another, it serves as a medium and setting for a continuous social-aesthetic process imbued with a sacrality that makes it appear both potent and authentic. In a symbolic way, the Muslim religious commemoration of Ajvatovica under green flags with the golden 'star and crescent' represents a powerfully evocative yet still 'emerging tradition' that thereby finds itself again in a stage of transformation attempting to organize the cultural memory of the Bosnian people, a polymorphic situation that cannot appear as a defined practice.

## Notes

- 1 Fieldwork in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2011 and 2012 was supported by the Österreichische Forschungsgemeinschaft (Austrian Research Foundation), which permitted me to attend the 501st 'Dani Ajvatovice' ('Days of Ajvatovica') in June 2011. Hereafter the term 'Bosnia' refers to the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- 2 In September 1993 the Bosnian Muslim Assembly in Sarajevo decided to replace the ethnonym 'Muslim' with the new national name Bosniak (*bošnjak*) that should not be confused with the designation 'Bosnian' (*bosanac*), which applies to all inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina. See Merdjanova 2013, 37 and n. 207.
- 3 For a discussion of the history of Ajvatovica, see Clayer and Popovic 1995b, 353–65; on the fate of Ajvatovica during the Yugoslav period; see also Rujanac 2013, 115–16.
- 4 The term 'collective memory' was introduced by Maurice Halbwachs in 1925. For a recent review of the term, see A. Assmann 2010.
- 5 In contrast to previous years when the event served as platform for political authorities who used this national commemoration for political demonstrations, most politicians now attend the event privately 'as believers'.
- 6 In the past, horse races were an integral part of the programme at Ajvatovica. It is of significance that even after the ban of the Ajvatovica pilgrimage in 1947, Prusac continued to annually host a so-called race – a feast for the people marked by a horse race – however without any religious or national symbolism.
- 7 This pertains to a shirt, wide trousers (*čakšire*), embroidered wide-sleeve shirt (*anterija*), vest, belt, fez, and shoes. The red fez by itself often symbolizes Bosnian clothing.
- 8 The use of stones that after a ritual ceremony acquire some power is a widespread method going back to ancient practices. Cf. Goldziher 1906, 311–12.
- 9 In July 1995, Serb forces killed about eight thousand Bosniak men and expelled the rest of the population. In 2004, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), located in The Hague, ruled that the Srebrenica massacre constituted genocide, a crime under international law.
- 10 In December 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement made official the existence of two distinct entities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Federation and the Republika Srpska.
- 11 Husein Kavazović declared that the victims of the Srebrenica genocide would have the status of *šehidi* (martyrs), and therefore the 'whole Muslim community has a permanent obligation towards them'. Wagner 2008, 216–17; [www.rijaset.ba/english/](http://www.rijaset.ba/english/)

index.php/template/latest-news/290-grand-mufti-of-bosnia-calls-for-remembrance-of-srebrenica-martyrs (accessed 23 March 2015).

- 12 www.rijaset.ba/english/index.php/template/latest-news/290-grand-mufti-of-bosnia-calls-for-remembrance-of-srebrenica-martyrs (accessed 23 March 2015). In March 1994, the Islamic Community declared the second day of the festivities marking the end of Ramadan (*ramazanski bajram*) as Day of *Šehidi* (*dan šehida*) in remembrance of the victims killed in the 1992–1995 war.

## References

- Assmann, Aleida. 2010. 'Re-Framing Memory: Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past'. In *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, edited by Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, and Jay M. Winter, 34–50. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Assmann, Jan. 2006. *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. Originally published as *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis* Munich: Beck, 2000. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Babinger, Franz. 1929. 'Prusac, das bosnische Mekka'. *Der Nahe Osten* 10, no. 8–9: 125–6.
- Bougarel, Xavier. 2007. 'Death and the Nationalist: Martyrdom, War Memory and Veteran Identity among Bosnian Muslims'. In *The New Bosnian Mosaic: Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-War Society*, edited by Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms, and Ger Duijzings, 167–91. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.
- Bušatlić, Ismet. 2009. 'Tradicija dovišta kao kontinuitet duhovnog trajanja Bošnjaka na ovim prostorima [The tradition of *dovišta* as a continuity of the spiritual existence of the Bosniaks in the region]'. *Naučni skup "Prirodno-Graditeljska Cjelina blagajske tekije i vrela Bune"*, 10. 05. 2007. *GODINE, Mostar*: 97–101. Mostar: Medžlis Islamske Zajednice.
- Čelebi, Evlija. 1996. *Putopis odlomci o jugoslovenskim zemljama* [Travelogue Excerpts on Yugoslav Lands]. Sarajevo: Svjetlost.
- Clayer, Nathalie. 1994. *Mystiques, État et société: Les Halvetis dans l'aire balkanique de la fin du XVIe siècle à nos jours*. Leiden: Brill.
- Clayer, Nathalie, and Alexandre Popovic. 1995a. 'Les Balkans'. In *Le culte des saints dans le monde musulman*, edited by Henri Chambert-Loir and Claude Guillot, 335–52. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient.
- . 1995b. 'Le culte d'Ajvatovica et son pèlerinage annuel'. In *Le culte des saints dans le monde musulman*, edited by Henri Chambert-Loir and Claude Guillot, 353–65. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient.
- Coomans, Thomas. 2012. 'Reusing: Introduction', 'Reuse of Sacred Places: Perspectives for a Long Tradition'. In *Loci Sacri: Understanding Sacred Places*, edited by Thomas Coomans, Herman De Dijn, Jan De Maeyer, Rajesh Heynickx, and Bart Verschaffel, 210–11 and 220–41. Leuven: Leuven University Press.
- Das, Veena, and Arthur Kleinman. 2001. 'Introduction'. In *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery*, edited by Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, and Margaret M. Lock, 1–30. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Dimitrijevic, Dejan. 1999. 'Ajvatovica. Analyse de la construction du mythe fondateur de l'identité bochniaque'. *Annales de la Fondation Fyssen* 13: 31–49.
- F., F. 1990. 'Biće i ženska Ajvatovica, inšallah [There Will Be a (Pilgrimage) to Ajvatovica for Women, God Willing]'. *Preporod* 13, no. 476, 1 July: 9.

- Goldziher, Ignaz. 1906. 'Zauberelemente im islamischen Gebet'. *Orientalische Studien Theodor Nöldeke zum siebzigsten Geburtstag gewidmet*, edited by Carl Bezold. Giessen: Töpelmann. 1: 326–9.
- Grđjić-Bjelokosić, Luka. 1901. 'Hajvatovača ili siromaška Čaba [Hajvatovača or the Ka'ba of the poor]'. *Karadžić: List za srpski narodni život, običaje i predanje* 3: 38–40.
- Hadžijahić, Muhamed. 1978. 'Sinkretistički elementi u Islamu u Bosni i Hercegovini'. *Prilozi zaorijentalnu filologiju* 28–29: 301–28.
- Helms, Elissa Lynelle. 2003. 'Gendered Visions of the Bosnian Future: Women's Activism and Representation in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina'. Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
- Hoernes, Moritz. 1888. *Dinarische Wanderungen: Cultur-und Landschaftsbilder aus Bosnien und der Hercegovina*. Vienna: Graeser.
- Katić, Mario, Tomislav Klarin, and Mike McDonald. 2014. 'Pilgrimage and Tourism in Southeast Europe'. In *Pilgrimage and Sacred Places in Southeast Europe: History, Religious Tourism and Contemporary Trends*, edited by Mario Katić, Tomislav Klarin, and Mike McDonald, 15–23. Zürich: LIT.
- Krehić, Edin. 1997. 'Dovišta bez žena [Pilgrimage without women]'. *Oslobodenje* 30 June: 4.
- Mazalić, Djoko. 1951. 'Biograd-Prusac stari bosanski grad [Biograd-Prusac old Bosnian town]'. *Glasnik Zemaljskog Muzeja u Sarajevu*, n.s. 6: 147–89.
- Merdjanova, Ina. 2013. *Rediscovering the Umma: Muslims in the Balkans between Nationalism and Transnationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Perica, Vjekoslav. 2002. *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Popovic, Alexandre. 2011. 'Ayvaz Dede'. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, third edition, edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_23978](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23978).
- Šabanović, Hazim. 1982. *Bosanski pašaluk, postanak i upravna podjela* [Bosnian Pashaluk, genesis and administrative division]. Sarajevo: Oslobodenje.
- Sarač Rujanac, Dženita. 2013. 'Ajvatovica: A Bridge between Tradition and National and Religious Identity'. *History and Anthropology* 24, no. 1: 117–36.
- Schöpflin, George. 1997. 'The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths'. In *Myths and Nationhood*, edited by Geoffrey A. Hosking and George Schöpflin, 19–35. New York: Routledge.
- Stegemann, Victor. 1936. 'Regen'. In *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, edited by Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli and Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer, volume 7: 577–86. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Wagner, Sarah E. 2008. *To Know Where He Lies: DNA Technology and the Search for Srebrenica's Missing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Winter, Jay Murray. 2006. *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press.
- . 2010. 'Thinking about Silence'. In *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter, 3–31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.