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**3 GOLDEN GLOBE NOMS****December 27, 2008**

## Islamic Revival Tests Bosnia's Secular Cast

By DAN BILEFSKY

SARAJEVO, [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) — Thirteen years after a war in which 100,000 people were killed, a majority of them Muslims, Bosnia is undergoing an Islamic revival.

More than half a dozen new madrasas, or religious high schools, have been built in recent years, while dozens of mosques have sprouted, including the [King Fahd](#), a sprawling \$28 million complex with a sports and cultural center.

Before the war, fully covered women and men with long beards were almost unheard of. Today, they are common.

Many here welcome the Muslim revival as a healthy assertion of identity in a multiethnic country where Muslims make up close to half the population.

But others warn of a growing culture clash between conservative Islam and Bosnia's avowed secularism in an already fragile state.

Two months ago, men in hoods attacked participants at a gay festival in Sarajevo, dragging some people from vehicles and beating others while they chanted, "Kill the gays!" and "Allahu Akbar!" Eight people were injured.

Muslim religious leaders complained that the event, which coincided with the holy month of [Ramadan](#), was a provocation. The organizers said they had sought to promote minority rights and meant no offense.

In this cosmopolitan capital, where bars have long outnumbered mosques, Muslim religious education was recently introduced in state kindergartens, prompting some secular Muslim parents to complain that the separation between mosque and state was being breached.

Bosnia's Muslims have practiced a moderate Islam that stretches back to the Ottoman conquest in the 15th century. Sociologists and political leaders say the religious awakening is partly an outgrowth of the war and the American-brokered Dayton agreement that ended it, dividing the country into a Muslim-Croat Federation and a Serb Republic.

"The Serbs committed genocide against us, raped our women, made us refugees in our own country," said Mustafa Efendi Cerić, the grand mufti and main spiritual leader of Bosnia's Muslim community.

"And now we have a tribal constitution that says we have to share political power and land with our killers," he said. "We Bosnian Muslims still feel besieged in the city of Sarajevo."

That resentment is evident. As several thousand worshipers streamed into the imposing King Fahd mosque on a recent Friday, a young man sat outside selling a popular conservative Muslim magazine with President-elect [Barack Obama](#) on the cover.

"Hussein, Will Your America Kill Muslims?" the headline asked, using Mr. Obama's middle name, a source of pride for many Muslims here.

Religious and national identity have long been fused in multifaith Bosnia.

It was tradition in villages to refer to neighbors by their religion — Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, rather than as Bosniak, Serb or Croat.

In the nation-building that followed Dayton, that practice has become stronger.

In Sarajevo, a predominantly Muslim city, dozens of streets named after Communist revolutionaries were renamed after Muslim heroes, and political parties stressing Muslim identity gained large constituencies.

Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs, meanwhile, cleave to their own religious and cultural identities. Church attendance is on the rise; in the Serb Republic, even ministries and police departments have their own Orthodox patron saints.

Muharem Bazdulj, deputy editor of the daily *Oslobodenje*, the voice of liberal, secular Bosnia, said he feared the growth of Wahhabism, the conservative Sunni movement originating in Saudi Arabia that aims to strip away foreign and corrupting influences.

Analysts say Saudi-financed organizations have invested about \$700 million in Bosnia since the war, often in mosques.

Wahhabism arrived via hundreds of warriors from the Arab world during the war and with Arab humanitarian and charity workers since, though sociologists here stress that most Bosnian Muslims still believe that Islam has no place in public life.

Dino Abazovic, a sociologist of religion at the University of Sarajevo, who recently conducted a detailed survey of 600 Bosnian Muslims, said 60 percent favored keeping religion a private matter; only a small minority prayed five times a day.

Still, violent episodes have occurred. Earlier this year, after an explosion at a shopping mall in the town of Vitez killed one person and wounded seven, Zlatko Miletic, head of uniformed police of the Muslim-Croat Federation Interior Ministry, warned that a group in Bosnia linked to Salafism, an ultraconservative Sunni Islamic movement, was bent on terrorism.

Nonetheless, Grand Mufti Cerić said Wahhabism had no future in Bosnia, even if more people were embracing religion.

“Children are fasting on Ramadan, going to the mosque more than their parents,” he said. “We had de-Islamification for 40 years during Tito’s time, so it is natural that people are now embracing the freedom to express their religion.”

Some critics of the mufti argue that he has allowed religion to encroach on civic life.

Vedrana Pinjo-Neuschul, who comes from a mixed Serb and Muslim household, has led the fight against Islamic classes in state-financed kindergartens across Sarajevo. Parents may remove their children from the religious classes, but Ms. Pinjo-Neuschul, whose husband is part Jewish, Catholic and Serb, said the policy would stigmatize non-Muslim children.

She recently withdrew her two young children from a public kindergarten and gathered 5,000 signatures against the policy, which has also been criticized by the [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe](#), the Vienna-based group monitoring democracy. “I do not want to explain to my 4-year-old son, Sven, who is in love with his Muslim classmate Esma, why they suddenly have to sit in different rooms,” she said at a Jewish community center in Sarajevo. “Nobody has the right to separate them.”

But she says she has been harassed by Islamic radicals on the street and has received hate mail in Arabic. “There are some people who want to turn Bosnia into a Muslim state,” she said.

Mustafa Effendi Spahic, a prominent liberal Muslim intellectual and professor at the Gazri Husrev-beg Madrasa in Sarajevo, went further, calling the introduction of religious education in kindergarten “a crime against children.”

“The Prophet says to teach children to kneel as Muslims, only after the age of 7,” said Professor Spahic, who was imprisoned under Communism for Islamic activism. “No one has any right to do that before then because it is an affront to freedom, the imagination and fun of the child’s world.”

Milorad Dodik, prime minister of Bosnia’s Serb Republic, has referred to Sarajevo as the new Tehran, and talks of a “political Islam and a fight against people who don’t share the same vision.”

But Muslim leaders and most Western analysts here counter such assertions, saying they do not correspond to Bosnia’s secular reality and are part of an attempt by Serb nationalists to justify the brutal wartime subjugation of Muslims by both Serbs and Croats.

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