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**AJVATOVICA AS A TRADITION BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS  
IDENTITY**

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## **Ajvatovica as a Tradition between the National and Religious Identity**

Dženita Sarać

### **Introduction**

Much has been written on the Ajvatovica manifestation, the greatest and most significant meeting of the European Muslims. In this paper, however, I do not intend to say what has already been said. My goal is to examine Ajvatovica as an official religious and cultural manifestation, by encompassing social and political movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The period examined in this study is the period of great changes, the destabilisation of the Yugoslav state, the emergence of the pluralistic political government, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the post-war period, and the period of gradual stabilisation. All these events have had a significant importance for this manifestation, which, over time, has endured explicit modifications. Today, therefore, Ajvatovica has developed into an organised manifestation with a clear ideological message. Despite the previous knowledge on this event, I have tried to keep my mind clear from media depiction of Ajvatovica. Rather, I plunged into the material offered by the archives and libraries, which I had hoped, could provide some interesting new insights. I have found articles in the magazines printed in the period between the two world wars (*Narodna uzdanica*, *Novi behar*). Ajvatovica and its revival from 1990 has been written about in many Bosnian and Herzegovinian magazines, especially in the magazine *Preporod*. As a special topic, Ajvatovica was presented in the historical works of Bosnian history, the history of the Uskoplje Valley, or Prusac itself. I would especially like to point out the work of Husein Čepalo who, in a number of his articles, wrote about the tradition of Prusac, often putting the legend of Ajvatovica in the first place.

The second part of this study refers to the results I have gathered through “fieldwork”. This year’s manifestation was held on June 24. During the manifestation I conducted participant-observation and tried to record its content and specificities. In addition, I interviewed the leaders of the Islamic Community in this region, as well as organisers, participants and visitors.

## **The Historical Changes at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century**

The process of destabilisation of state and political institutions after Tito's death in 1980, coupled with severe economic crisis, led to the disintegration of the Yugoslav state. This period was also marked with efforts to change the federal constitution of 1974, by providing conditions for changing the constitutions of individual republics. One of the key changes was the decision to allow the possibility of coalition and political pluralism, which was supposed to be the way out of the political crisis that was especially strong after the Fourteenth Congress of the Communist League of Yugoslavia in January 1990. The Tenth Congress of the Communist League of Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 1989 approved the decision of pluralistic government formation. This congress, however, deemed citizens' gatherings of a national and religious basis against the law. However, the decision of the Executive Council of the Assembly of the Federative Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina about the prohibition of citizens' coalition on religious and national basis did not stay in force for a long time, and on June 12 1990 the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina reported that there was no legal act which could forbid the citizens from merging on any basis, including national and religious.<sup>1</sup> Following the official prohibition, the first national party in Bosnia and Herzegovina had a democratic and civil name: "Stranka Demokratske Akcije (SDA)" (*Party of Democratic Action (PDA)*).

Soon after the formation of this party, new parties were formed with explicit national marks in their names. The pre-election campaign of the national parties aimed for the mobilisation and homogenisation of the nations, using traditional (religious and national) symbols and assistance from religious institutions.

With the slogan "Muslims, Come Together!" acting as the protector and representative of Muslims, *SDA*, assisted by a number of *ulema* (Islamic scholars) and skilfully using the religious factor, began to gain the trust of the Muslim masses.<sup>2</sup> During the summer and autumn of 1990, *SDA* held 50 meetings and organised a number of committees and regional branches.<sup>3</sup>

At that time of radical political changes, there were fundamental reconsiderations of the position of the Islamic Community, its status, scope of activities, and re-introduction of

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<sup>1</sup> *Oslobođenje*, May 26 1990 and June 13 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Duraković, Nijaz, *Prokletstvo muslimana* ("The Curse of Being Muslim"), Tuzla 1998, p 278

<sup>3</sup> Bojić, Mehmedalija, *Historija Bosne i Bošnjaka* ("History of Bosnia and Bosniaks"), TKD Šahimpasić, Sarajevo 2001, p 280.

Islamic institutions - *vakufs* (“a Muslim co-operative serving in the Islamic, cultural, educational and humane causes; Muslim religious property”), and Islamic tradition.<sup>4</sup>

In April 1990, The Supreme Islamic Seniority in Yugoslavia adopted a new constitution which proclaimed that the Islamic Community was independent from the state, and its selected, high-ranking officials, were responsible for the voters selecting the Community’s local seniorities.<sup>5</sup>

The activities of the *SDA* and the Islamic Community were supposed to raise the awareness of being a Bosniak, and also to unite and group Bosniaks in a community which is neither political, purely religious, cultural, or only traditional.

The Ajvatovica manifestation was revived at the time of national unification, of mass meetings, and at a period of reclaiming the past and common tradition. Abuse (misuse) of religious elements, replacing and using religious and national symbols to strengthen collective identity became common landmarks of this period of national consolidation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## **The Relation between Religious and National Identity**

The meaning of national belonging in the Balkans and Bosnia and Herzegovina, follows a similar trajectory as the rest of nation-building projects, where belonging to a nation is considered to be a naturalised, given and prestigious right. An important feature in nation-building in the Balkans however, is the great religious influence on the formation of the nation. The relation between nationhood and religion, and *vice versa*, is very often represented as one of important questions in the national development study. Shortly, their relation could be explained as an interaction, and it is reflected in the religious influence on the formation of the cultural and social entities which would develop into peoples and nations and vice versa. The influence of the nation on religion serves as a divide of people, bringing to it cultural and social contents.<sup>6</sup> Due to this close correlation between nation and religion, one should consider the close overlap of these two concepts. One of the most indicative examples of this complex relation between religious and national identities is the Ajvatovica manifestation.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibrahimagić, Omer, *Bosna i Bošnjaci između agresije i mira* (“Bosnia and Bosniaks between Aggression and Peace”), Sarajevo 1998, p 89

<sup>5</sup> Perica, Vjekoslav, *Balkanski idoli I* (“The Balkan Idols I”), Belgrade 2006, p 205.

<sup>6</sup> Bakić, Ibrahim, *Nacija i religija* (“Nation and Religion”), Sarajevo 1994, p 23.

## **The Ajvatovica Revival of 1990**

In 1990, identity, nation, religion, tradition are concepts constantly subjected to redefinition and revival. They had been used as historical justification, but also as indicators of change. The changes were supposed to vindicate the elements from the past used in contemporary times, and their revival was supposed to represent the beginning of better times which would enable better freedom of existence for the people. Defining identity in those conditions was an existential question inextricably linked to the notion of survival.

The new leadership of the Islamic Community began a dynamic program of reviving religious celebrations and tradition between 1989 and 1990, becoming an active participant in the events along with two other Christian churches.<sup>7</sup>

The Ajvatovica manifestation was not the only revived manifestation. However, in a very specific way, it represented a manifestation in which the elements of tradition, national, and religious identity have merged together. The Ajvatovica could be seen as a custom, a way of thinking and behaving of the Bosniaks in these areas, which is also a close marker of their identity.

The Ajvatovica event was prohibited in 1947 and it did not take place during the socialist period. Its prohibition could be viewed as an indicator of change of the ideological course of the Communist party which was pushing strongly for the idea of equality and affirmation of the Muslims as a separate nation. The party tried to maintain control over many events and eliminate every kind of a harmful nationalism. By 1949, many national and cultural institutions in Bosnia were eliminated with the explanation that they were, in their early national polarisations, bringing in national particularity and serving as means of ethnocentrism in the national relations.<sup>8</sup>

One could find the first signs of the revival of Ajvatovica in the magazine *Preporod*. This magazine was strongly affected by the political situation of the 1990s influencing the content of its articles.

In this period, several articles of this Islamic and informative magazine wrote about the rehabilitation of certain individuals from the Muslim history, and about the need of the Islamic Community to talk about its sins. Through *Preporod*, the *Rijaset* ("the residency of the reis-ul-ulema") of the Islamic Community sent messages about the voting commit-

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<sup>7</sup> Perica, Vjekoslav, *Balkanski idoli I* ("The Balkan Idols I"), Belgrade 2006, p 207.

<sup>8</sup> Bojić, Mehmedalija, *Historija Bosne i Bošnjaka* ("History of Bosnia and Bosniaks"), TKD Šahimpasić, Sarajevo, 2001, p 234.

ment at the forthcoming elections. On April 15 1990, the magazine published an article titled “Ajvatovica”, emphasising the question “*Shall we revive the oldest and most famous Muslim “dovište” (“a place where a du’a is said, a du’a site”) in Bosnia and Herzegovina?*” In this article, illustrated with two photographs, the story of Ajvatovica, Ajvaz- dedo (“Ajvaz-grandfather”) and the pilgrimage was narrated, posing the question “*Why is Ajvatovica prohibited?*”. Together with the Muslims of Prusac, the President of the Seniority and Committee of the Islamic Community Donji Vakuf, the editor of the *Preporod* magazine extended their support and willingness to assist the effort of reorganising Ajvatovica. This article represents the first mention of the revival of this manifestation of which many had never heard before.

Around the same time (1990) a group of activists formed the Ajvatovica Organisation Committee. The members of this committee were the Prusac inhabitants, initially only a group of enthusiasts, who soon would receive support for their intentions from the *Mešihat* (“the residency of the shayh-ul-islam in Istanbul”) of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Committee of the Islamic Community of Donji Vakuf, and the Mosque Committee of the Islamic Community in Prusac.

On May 15, the last page of the *Preporod* magazine published the invitation to the manifestation, where the organisers, the Mosque Committee of the Islamic Community in Prusac, and the Committee of the Islamic Community in Donji Vakuf and the *Mešihat* of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, invited everyone to attend the oldest and the most famous *dovište* in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Ajvatovica, which would be held on June 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> 1990.

In May 1990, the Assembly of the Donji Vakuf District received a demand for the approval to hold Ajvatovica there, and later, required security and support during the days of the event.<sup>9</sup> Although the demands and requests clearly stated that this was a religious manifestation, by assessing the organisation process, the protagonists, the committee members, the support, we can see that the Ajvatovica organisation and its revival was a well-planned and organised process which can be put in a wider religious and political discourse.

With a close co-operation between the Islamic Community, the Organisation Committee and the *SDA*, Ajvatovica was not supposed to be only a continuation of tradition, but also a gathering place which will testify to the unity, mass attendance and homogeneity of the people present there.

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting that in the *Preporod* magazine the invitation appeared before the demand for the organization approval

The aim was to strengthen the feeling of belonging to a group of people from an educational and early-development process. It seemed that Ajvatovica was a perfect opportunity for that.

As many scholars have successfully argued, nationality and identity are not given but they are acquired, taken, enriched and shaped in complex processes. A nationality is a product of cultural inheritance, and not a generic one, since national predispositions are inside of a national and cultural background.<sup>10</sup> A person does not have a nationality of his biological, but social parents, since a membership is not a biological, but social category.<sup>11</sup> In a symbolic way, the mass pilgrimage under green flags, promoted the revived Ajvatovicas a revival of the national and religious spirit of the people, who besides a certain affirmation in the recent period, was subject to many political malversations and deviations.

The manifestation generated great public interest, especially that of the press media which brought the manifestation records. For instance, the *Preporod* magazine on July 1 1990, and *Oslobođenje*, the most prominent mass-circulation newspaper of Bosnia-Herzegovina of that time, on June 23, published a reportage of the renewed Ajvatovica. The articles reported on every detail: the organisation, its procedure, summarising the legend of the event, etc. The main highlight however was placed on the mass attendance, stressing that 100,000 people had visited the manifestation. The religious and political leaders gathered at one place sitting at the head of the procession. Besides, *reis-ul-ulena* (“the highest religious leader of the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina”), the *SDA* leaders were also involved in the procession, along with the members of the Muslim Protection Forum, the members of the Muslim Cultural Society *Preporod*, the President of the Muslim Bosniak Party, and many other prominent Bosniaks.

The *reis-ul-ulena*, Jakub Selimovski, addressing the believers after his *dova* (“a prayer to God”) and the noon-prayer, stressed that this is the time of re-gaining the right for expressing religious feelings in a way worthy of man, and renewing the tradition and customs in their full freedom.<sup>12</sup> This kind of impressive gathering, with an extraordinary Islamic atmosphere, numerous associations, intimate testimonies, and re-awakened memories, promoted Ajvatovica to become a pilgrimage towards the good, towards freedom,

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<sup>10</sup> Suljević, Kasim, *Nacionalnost Muslimana između teorije i prakse* (“Nationality of Muslims between Theory and Practice”), Otokar Krasovani, Rijeka 1981, p 78.

<sup>11</sup> Ćimić, Esad, *Politika kao sudbina* (“Politics as a Destiny”), Velika edicija ideja (‘Great Edition of Ideas’), Belgrade, p 93.

<sup>12</sup> *Preporod*, No. 13\476, July 1 1990, p 8.

religious prosperity.<sup>13</sup> By gathering the religious and political leaders, the manifestation was supposed to represent a parade of the two intertwined factors of national being: national and religious belonging. It seemed that the recently-introduced democratic conditions allowed celebration of both these factors in their full strength in Ajvatovica. It would be misleading however to draw explicit distinction between the religious and national factors, or to view them only from one point of view, since Islamic religiousness and Muslim nationality are represented as complementary and inseparable factors for the integrity of the Muslim historical and cultural existence in these areas.<sup>14</sup>

The *Preporod* magazine continued to write about the manifestation and published numerous “thank you” letters. In the one sent to the Organising Committee of Ajvatovica of 1990, it was stressed that the organisers themselves did not have an idea of the significance of Ajvatovica (July 1 1990). In the same issue of the magazine, in the feuilleton *The Journal of the Imam* (“a Muslim clerk whose main duty is to lead the common prayer in a mosque”), Ajvatovica was pointed out as the event testifying the true rehabilitation of religious dignity and pride.<sup>15</sup>

The interview with the *Hafiz* (a person who knows the whole Koran by heart) Zakir *efendi* (a title of a Muslim clerk or religiously educated person) Kaniža contributed to the popularity and significance of Ajvatovica. He speaks of his involvement in Ajvatovica of 1947, and the incident that took place on the bridge in Donji Vakuf, when he was arrested and received a five-year prison sentence. It was a personal recollection of the repression of the Communist government towards the Muslim population and its tradition, an era which was supposed to be finished with the revival of Ajvatovica in 1990.<sup>16</sup>

That Ajvatovica was indeed a successful revival of tradition and Islamic spirit is made evident by the fact that it was mentioned in the discussions of the non-integral Muslim intellectual corpus. Namely, Nenad Filipović in a debate with Rusmir Mahmutćehajić about the name “Bosniaks” or “Muslims” said that during a prison interrogation, the imprisoned Zakir *efendi* Kaniža, said that *he was a Bosnian since he was not breastfed by a Serbian or Croatian woman, but by a Muslim one, although they do not let him say so*. On the investigator’s statement that he cannot be a Bosnian since there is no historical evidence for the exis-

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<sup>13</sup> Kadribegović, Aziz, *Obnovljena Ajvatovica* (“Ajvatovica Renewed”), *Glasnik Rijaseta Islamske Zajednice u SFRJ*The Herald of the Rijaset of the Islamic Community of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, no. 3, Sarajevo 1990, p 74.

<sup>14</sup> Cerić, Mustafa, *Islam između religije i nacije*, (“*Islam between Religion and Nation*”), *Glasnik Rijaseta Islamske Zajednice u SFRJ*The Herald of the Rijaset of the Islamic Community of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, no. 5, Sarajevo 1990, p 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Preporod*, No. 13\467, July 1 1990, p 14.

<sup>16</sup> *Preporod*, no. 14\477, July 15 1990, p 15.



tence of the Bosnian nation, Zakir *efendi* Kaniža referred to the existence of Stjepan Tomašević and the existence of his headquarters in the neighbouring town of Jajce.<sup>17</sup>

Bearing in mind that social changes do not occur in a vacuum, but in concrete political, cultural and historical contexts, this, so-called, *period of self-cognition and self-realisation*, was marked by the renewal of many other manifestations and associations following the example of Ajvatovica. The Muslim Cultural and Educational Association *Preporod*, abolished in 1949, along with *Prosvjeta* and *Napredak*<sup>18</sup>, were renewed in Sarajevo on October 5 1990. They were supposed to confirm the affirmation of the Muslim cultural and national being “who were the only European people without their cultural institutions in the period between the abolition to the renewal of *Preporod*”.<sup>19</sup>

## **The Ajvatovica Development after 1990**

The development of Ajvatovica as a manifestation follows an interesting trajectory. Bearing in mind the attempt of many political (or social) movements and systems to justify their agenda by drawing on tradition and its rituals, the link between politics and religion should not be surprising at all. Therefore, the progression and the shaping up of Ajvatovica is not at all accidental. Today’s manifestation represents a combination of contemporary elements and a more static religious structure. A manifestation like this could be viewed as an *the emerging tradition*, or invention of tradition relying on selectively including or rejecting new and old elements depending on how much they are needed in a wider political and cultural frame. The old tradition creates new forms that are designed and produced when the old ones are no longer productive, pliable or flexible enough.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, the other traditional elements, folklore, *sevdalinka* (“typical Bosnian love song”), sports, and competitions *are institutionalised* and fitted into new national purposes. The Ajvatovica manifestation, held in 1991, must be viewed in the context of extreme political and state turbulence: the collapse of the state, the Croatian war, discussions about the survival of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the existence of the Muslims, and

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<sup>17</sup> Filipović, Nenad, *O jednom pokušaju nacionaliziranja Bošnjaka* (“About an Attempt to Nationalize Bosniaks”), *Islamska misao (The Islamic Thought)*, No. 140, Sarajevo 1990, p 68.

<sup>18</sup> Rizvić, Muhsin, *Integracija muslimanskih stvaralačkih snaga* (“Integration of the Muslim Creative Forces”), *Glasnik Rijaseta Islamske Zajednice u SFRJ* The Herald of the Rijaset of the Islamic Community in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, no. 5, Sarajevo 1990, p 97.

<sup>19</sup> Filandra, Šaćir, *Obnova Preporoda (“Preporod Revival”)*, *Glasnik Rijaseta Islamske Zajednice u SFRJ* The Herald of the Rijaset of the Islamic Community in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, No. 5, Sarajevo 1990, p 95.

<sup>20</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric, Ranger, Terence, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1983, p 5.

the determination of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Muslims, *bošnjastvo* (“a feeling of a national belonging to Bosniaks”), etc.

In an interview, the organiser specifically emphasised that the second edition of the revived Ajvatovica in 1991 was a strictly religious manifestation, and that only the Islamic Community flags would be carried. However, the manifestation turned into an ambitious religious, educational, political, as well as a tourist project. Besides the religious program consisting of the prayer, the *zikr* (“a religious pronouncing, appealing of the God’s name”) and the *dova*, the manifestation served as an opportunity for politicians to address the people by delivering various speeches. These speeches, stressed the Muslim commitment to peace along with the readiness to defend what is theirs. They also emphasised the impossibility of dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina, after which the *SDA* and its leader, Alija Izetbegović, were greeted with thundering applause.<sup>21</sup> The second manifestation welcomed a smaller number of believers, and the reason for this was, most likely, the uncertain political situation.

Ajvatovica during the war of 1992-1995 gained a whole new dimension. It was maintained despite the difficult conditions. The involvement of the leading political and religious personalities during the war, and their presence at the manifestation, was supposed to raise morale, strengthen the Bosniak power, and testify that the tradition was being maintained. The Ajvatovica of 1994 reflects the spirit of the war. It had a clear and concise organisation containing educational, religious, economic, cultural, and military content. The manifestation of 1995 and the scientific conference accompanying it, had as their main *leitmotif* the *ajet*, a sentence from the Holy Koran: “Allah shall not change the condition of a people until the people does it itself.” This motif had a national and religious significance, but it also referred to a military aspect during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina at this time.<sup>22</sup> The task of Ajvatovica in the war to support the *feth* (“victory”) is also seen in the following quotation: “*Ajvatovica was the first look of the awakened Muslim people. Today, Ajvatovica is a mirror of the Bosniak feth. The Bosnian land under the feet and Allah’s sky over the head. This is why I am visiting Ajvatovica.*”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Preporod*, No. 14\501, July 15 1991.

<sup>22</sup> Hadžić Mulo, *Prusac i njegovo dovište* (“Prusac and Its *Du’a* Site”), *Reportaža u Ljiljanu* \ A Report in the *Ljiljan* magazine, Refija Kulašin, Sarajevo 2005, p 690.

<sup>23</sup> Hadžić, Mulo, *Prusac i njegovo dovište* (“Prusac and Its *Du’a* Site ”), *Sjećanje Zilhada Ključanina* \ Memories of Zilhad Ključanin, Sarajevo 2005, p 686.

## Ajvatovica after 1995

The first post-war Ajvatovica of 1996 had a special significance. However, psychological and material consequences of the war left visible imprints on its organisation. The manifestation represented a counterpart to Srebrenica, which was the symbol of the Bosniak suffering. Ajvatovica, in contrast, was supposed to be the place where the Bosniak people, who survived the war, should gather in one place where they could show their spiritual and physical strength. The main organisers were the Organisation Committee of Ajvatovica, the *Multijstvo* of the Islamic Community of Travnik (“an office of a *mufti* -- the oldest Muslim clerk in a county”), and the sponsors were the *Rijaset* of the Islamic Community, and the *SDA*. The presence of scholars, political and religious personalities as leaders of the Bosniak people, was supposed to emphasise that Ajvatovica should be an assembly of all Bosniaks, illiterate and more educated alike, who would discuss different questions of religion, family, state and *ummet* (“a people”).<sup>24</sup> Their speeches especially emphasised the religious strength of the Bosniak people who now have their own language, system of education in Bosnian, and thus should be aware of their continuity and belonging to a state.<sup>25</sup>

The content of the 1996 edition of Ajvatovica, in addition to the religious, was expanded to include cultural, sport and artistic fields. Round tables were held on Bosniak literature, art performances, performances by the Sarajevo philharmonic orchestra, the *Preporod* chorus, the Muslim chorus from Sarajevo, the Sarajevo Opera, etc. took place in 1996. Another novelty was that it was not only Prusac that was the only host. *The Days of Ajvatovica* were held in other cities of the Central Bosnian Canton.

This expanded (including cultural and sport events) concept of Ajvatovica continued to develop in the following years. The next year, one of the topics of the round table in Bugojno was “*The Bosniak and Islamic Identity -How to Preserve and Develop It*”. The topic of the second round table was “*Hadžijahić's Contribution to the Affirmation of the Bosniak Identity*”. That same year, an official *Ajvatovica* stamp was promoted. Alija Izetbegović in his speech emphasised that Ajvatovica was a connection with the past, but with the future as well.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Preporod*, No. 9-10\592-593, July 15 1996, p 17.

<sup>25</sup> *Preporod*, No. 9-10\592-593, July 15 1996, p 18.

<sup>26</sup> Hadžić, Mulo, *Prusac i njegovo dovište* (“Prusac and Its *Du'a* Site”), Ajvatovica, Sarajevo, 2005, p 750.

In the following years, the organisational concept has remained the same, only the content has been enriched with new cultural and sport events (chess tournaments, street ball tournaments, football tournaments, car and motorbike races, etc.). Great attention was given to the organisation and promotion of the manifestation which resulted in a great number of guests.

In addition to the high religious officials, the later editions of Ajvatovica experience more and more politician visiting the event to give political speeches. In addition to the ministers of education and science, for instance, there are also politicians who are representatives of the Cantonal government. According to the *Mufti* of Travnik, however, the speeches of politicians belong now again to the past. This element has been surpassed today and most of the politicians attend Ajvatovica “as believers and in private arrangements”.

### **Ajvatovica 2007**

The Ajvatovica manifestation held in June 2007 was celebrated as its 497<sup>th</sup> edition. By having the opportunity to attend this year’s event, I noticed that the program followed a similar layout as its earlier editions of which I had read during my research. Its content was not only religious, but it also contained many cultural, artistic, and sport events held in the whole Central Bosnian Canton. *The Days of Ajvatovica* lasted for ten days. The day before the beginning of the manifestation, horsemen and a great number of visitors arrived in Prusac where they spent the night. The horsemen were placed in special tents.

One day earlier, *the Night of Sevdah* (tur. “love”) at *musala*<sup>27</sup> was organised where this year’s guest was Omer Pobrić, a musician and the founder of *The Institute of Sevdah* from Visoko, who came together with his guests. There were two flags on the stage: the flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the green flag with a moon and a star. The audience consisted of people from different age groups and social backgrounds. At the end of the concert, the visitors danced the Bosnian “kolo”. The event resembled typical Bosnian merriment.

Sunday commenced with the sound of the horsemen and then the roll-call of flags and *džemats* (association, assembly, or gathering) who carried flags with a moon and a star. The horsemen also carried the green flags and the oldest horseman carried the flag of

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<sup>27</sup> *Musala* is a prayer-place under the open sky and for a larger number of believers. In Bosnia, *musalas* were used for the common rain prayer, *džuma* (“Friday’s obligatory prayer for all Muslim men”)-prayers, the send-offs of the pilgrims and such, and the permission for having a *musala* was granted from *sejh-ul-islam*. The mentioned *musala* in Prusac belongs to *musala*-graveyards with a built *mihrab* (“a place in a mosque wher an *imam* leads a prayer”) and *nimber* (“a speaker’s place in a mosque”) where usually the Eid morning prayer was held. Bojanić, Dušanka, *Musala u Balkanskom gradu* (“A *Musala* in a Balkan City”), *Islamska misao (The Islamic Thought)*, No. 138, Sarajevo 1990, p 39.

Bosnia and Herzegovina. I also noticed red flags, the flags of the Republic of Turkey, whose delegation was a guest of this year's manifestation. After the roll-call, the procession proceeded for the *dovište*

I was surprised to notice that the procession was diverse in terms of the pilgrims' age, but even more so in gender terms. It was non-sensical to pose the question whether women were allowed to go to Ajvatovica, since more women than men visited the *dovište* "Traditionally", however, this was not the case. From conversation I had with many people, I learned that these were people from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the local population, and the population from the neighbouring places, was rarely present. The dress code of the pilgrims varied. The horsemen were mostly dressed in Bosnian national clothes, while only a small number of women respected the religious rule of dressing. It was a rather disorganised procession that, despite the keepers of order along the road, could not proceed smoothly and people waited long to pass through the stone and reach the Ajvatovica meadow. A great number of people gathered on the meadow itself, and a small number of them prayed (*nafile* --voluntary-- prayer) before the noon-prayer. Only the *Mufti* of Travnik, Nusret efendi Abdibegović, addressed the pilgrims before the prayer, with his very clear and penetrating voice. In his speech he stressed: "*It is our right to have a faith and we must practice our faith. It is our right to have a homeland and the homeland must be defended. We know who we are and what we are. The Bosniaks with their faith, culture, the Bosnian language, a millennium-old tradition are the autochthonous people of this area. They testify this here and now.*"

Although there was a large number of religious officials, the *reis-ul-ulema* was absent. There was also a significant number of politicians, who despite the special treatment they received, did not address the pilgrims. By the end of the noon prayer, this part of the manifestation, the ritual at the meadow, was officially over and the visitors went back to Prusac by themselves. Many of them rested and had lunch at the stalls arranged along the road, and a free military meal was also set at the Han meadow. The visitors stayed for a couple of hours in Prusac, and before the evening-prayer, Prusac was empty.

In addition to participant-observation, I also conducted a number of interviews, which I divide into three groups, according to the profile of the people:

Firstly, I held interviews with the organisers of Ajvatovica. They are mostly people who organised Ajvatovica in 1990, and who are even today included in its organisation under the Organisation Committee of Ajvatovica. In the interviews with these people I was es-

pecially interested in why Ajvatovica was renewed, what were the conditions, what was the basic aim of Ajvatovica revival, how was it received, what was their feeling about it. From these interviews I realised that Ajvatovica 1990 was renewed by young, educated forces who learned about Ajvatovica from their parents. The fact that the event was prohibited, posed a challenge for these people in the period of intensive social changes. They tried to use these change and the *political climate to revive Ajvatovica*. At the same time, they had the support of the Islamic Community, the *Preporod* magazine and the SDA.

Interviews with the second group were made with elder people who remember Ajvatovica and its customs before the prohibition of 1947. I asked them about the significance of Ajvatovica then, the customs and procedures, the prohibition and their feeling, the consequences, etc. From these interviews I could see that those who remember Ajvatovica, immediately emphasised the great difference between Ajvatovica now and then. They stressed: "*It was not like that, I do not know this is today.*" Their testimonies revealed that we need to question the idea of the continuation of tradition and to always look out for the imminent modification and changes which appear in every new edition of Ajvatovica.

The third group of interviewees was that of visitors and pilgrims, i.e. ordinary people who came to Ajvatovica. During these conversations I was especially interested in their reasons for coming, their personal experience of Ajvatovica, their views on the events as a religious or a national manifestation, reasons for their attendance, what they liked the most, what they would change, did they intend to return next year, etc. In the conversation with Ajvatovica visitors, I received different answers to same questions. Generally, the visitors do not want to be taped or to introduce themselves. They gave me the shortest possible answers. The rare speakers gave a wider explanation repeating the legend of Ajvaz-grandfather, who had his prayer answered, and more often I got an answer that they were happy and enjoyed their time during the event. From the answers, we could conclude that a significant number came there out of curiosity, but also out of religious belief and respect for God. However, there are many who know little of the legend or religion, and the manifestation for them represents a picnic or an opportunity to see a new region of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## **The Symbolism of the Ajvatovica Manifestation**

In many regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we can see the practice of regular and occasional *dova* in the open, usually on Tuesday. This is why they are often called *utorkuše* (the Tuesday's du'a).<sup>28</sup> Ajvatovica is one of the rare *dovas* which is held every seventh Monday after St. George's Day. It is interesting that the Ajvatovica ceremony, as well as the other saint's days of all denominations, is set according to the Julian calendar, after St. George's Day.

The central manifestation consists of several parts. The manifestation could start even one day before the arrival of the horsemen and the guests in Prusac. The guests would stay in houses, with their hosts, which by now has become a common practice. The institution of *musafir* (tur. "guest") is grounded on Islamic teaching. However, after 1995, great tents are now set at one place for guests, horsemen and horses where they can spend the night.

The manifestation starts in the early morning with a review of horsemen. The horsemen constitute the main part of the procession. The horse, a symbol of wealth and power, is set at the front, richly decorated with flowers. Most of the horsemen wear the Bosnian national clothes with a fez on their heads and they also carry mortars. The cavalry represents strength and military parade, and it also symbolises the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia.

After the horsemen, the roll-call of flags is performed. The flags represent *džemats* by their name and they are carried by selected men. This part of the manifestation, with all the flags from all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as *džemats* from the whole world, symbolises the unity at one place. After this part, the procession continues to the *dovište*, which is seven kilometres away from Prusac. During the journey, pilgrims utter *dovas* ending in "Amin" and sing *ilahis* ("religious songs").

A very important part of the manifestation is the passing through the stone and uttering the *dova* in the stone. Traditionally, the *dova Feth* (Victory) is said at that place by a selected *imam*. The name of the *dova* itself points out to the victory of Islam, the realisation of the answered prayer, as well as survival in these regions. The passing through the rock,

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<sup>28</sup> Mulahalilović, Enver, *Vjerski obiçaji muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini* ("Muslim Religious Customs in Bosnia and Herzegovina"), Istanbul, 1995, p 95.

whose temperature is in high contrast with the temperature outside, can be connected with the *Sirat*-bridge, the passing-way for the believers to *Džennet* (“Heaven”).

The final gathering place is in the Ajvatovica meadow. The difference in program in this place indicates that this manifestation has drastically changed over time. A long time ago, the pilgrims gathered at that place to have a lunch, talk, to check their physical readiness, and to pray the noon-prayer. After the revival, many religious and political speeches could be heard from this place and these are supposed to convey a support, instructions and directions to the people gathered, but to all Bosniaks as well. During the last year’s edition, the meadow ceased being a political speaker’s stand, and this year, as I already mentioned, there was only one -- the speech of the *Mufti* of Travnik.

After the *dova*, the noon-prayer is prayed, which in a symbolic way marks the end of the manifestation.

## **The Ajvatovica Specificity**

In Bosnia and Herzegovina there are many *du’a* sites. Some of them, according to tradition, look like Ajvatovica.<sup>29</sup> Today, Ajvatovica is an Islamic custom, which is believed, came out of the Bogomilian prayers for rain, fertility and protection of the summer crops. It is held at the peak of the agricultural season, and represents an opportunity to wish for good crops. After the *dova*, many pilgrims crack and pick the rock dust from the Ajvaz-grandfather rock in order to spread it on their fields and meadows for the crops to grow better. However, one can question, why Ajvatovica has such a special status and remains to be the most significant and most visited manifestation. For that reason, we need to place Ajvatovica in multiple contexts of place, time, people and religion.

The main specificity of Ajvatovica, I argue, is related to the very place where it is held – the town of Prusac, first time mentioned under this name in 1478. The Ottomans called it Akhisar (*The White Town*).<sup>30</sup> In time, it developed from a village into a centre of a *nahija* (“a canton”), *kadiluk* (“the official county of a *kadi* (“a judge”)), *muftij: tvo* and from that it became an important administrative and cultural centre of this area. A great number of significant people of the Ottoman epoch were born or worked in Prusac. Especially important is Hasan Kjafija Pruščak (1544-1616), a philosopher, historian, writer, poet, theo-

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<sup>29</sup> The Proboj well, between Radišić and Vitina near Ljubuški, has a similar tradition as Ajvatovica. See: Hadžijahić, Muhamed, *Sinkretistički element u islamu Bosne i Hercegovine* (“The Syncretistic Element in Islam of Bosnia and Herzegovina”), *POF* No. 28-29 of 1978-1979, Sarajevo 1980, p 307.

<sup>30</sup> Čepalo, Husein, *Prusac-istorijski spomenici* (“Prusac-The Historic Monuments”), Mala biblioteka, Zenica 1990, p 5.



logian, lawyer, and philologist. He is considered to be the most significant person of the scientific, cultural and intellectual life of these areas in the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century. The subject of the scientific assemblies within The Days of Ajvatovica is very often the personality and work of Hasan Kjafija Pruščak.

Ajvaz-grandfather symbolises the purity of faith and the strength of *iman* (“the belief in the only one God-Allah”), while Hasan Kjafija Pruščak represents a symbol of erudition, science and education. For this reason they are very often compared to each other as two prominent scholars who contributed to the community in their own ways.

The other segment which connects these two personalities is the tradition in which Hasan Kjafija Pruščak emphasised the significance of Ajvatovica and introduced the visit to the rock, renewed waterworks and built a *turbe* (“domed burial site”) to Ajvaz-grandfather. The *ilahis* of Ajvatovica sung by the procession moving to the rock are considered to be the work of Hasan Kjafija Pruščak.<sup>31</sup>

If we go a few years back, we must notice that Prusac is very often called the heroic city. This town, which is bigger today and has a well-set infrastructure, was during the war of 1992-1995 the only territory of the Donji Vakuf District that was under control of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because of its specific position, population, long and rich tradition, to which Ajvatovica belongs as well, the new legend of *the heroic city* emerged. In the speeches at the Ajvatovica meadow, Prusac was very often mentioned as a symbol of resistance and survival of the Bosniaks. The exposed rich cultural past, administrative and geological significance, and its role in the recent war, could offer an answer to the question asked above.

## **Conclusion**

The previously mentioned facts indicate that Ajvatovica, with its folk elements and tradition has been maintained for centuries. The syncretistic elements are interpreted by some that this event has been founded on the Bogomil tradition, and gained a different shape with the arrival of Islam to these regions. It was criticised even from the Islamic religious circles as a manifestation not founded on Islamic teaching. Its religious and cultural significance was disputed, and Ajvatovica was viewed as a folk picnic prone to desecralisation. Especially during the second half of the nineties, it was criticised as an over-politicised assembly used by politicians for their own political aims. These attitudes to-

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<sup>31</sup> Čepalo, Husein, *Pisana tradicija Prusca i okoline* (“The Written Tradition of Prusac and Its Surroundings”), Prusac 2000, p 52.

wards the manifestation were extreme, because at the same time Ajvatovica was called “the *small Kaba*” (Kaba refers to “the black cube” in Mecca around which Muslims walk and pray), and a commercialised picnic. However, it is obvious that the organisers have been trying to find the best possible solution. Its modification is seen as an acceptance of the new, and removal of old or unnecessary elements. For that reason, it is an “emerging tradition”.

An important question is posed as to what the overall representation of Ajvatovica within the Bosnian social discourse is. In trying to grasp the significance of Ajvatovica for the religious and national identity, it is important to emphasise the specific relationship that exists between religion and nation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

While certain authors argue that the three elements are the basic characteristics of the Bosnian nation: the Bosnian ground, the ethnic origin and language, and Islam, we have to examine the important role that religion has.<sup>32</sup> If we consider the theory that religion is a divide of people,<sup>33</sup> and also that Islam does not represent only religion, but also creates life and forms about the ways we see the world, it is important to understand the correlation between Islam and the Bosniak’s identity. The specific quality of “*bošnjaštvo*” is that religion represents an inseparable factor of the nation. Religion and nationhood permeate and complement each other. For that very reason, there is the belief that Muslims who attend Ajvatovica are Bosniaks and vice versa, so the speakers at this manifestation address everyone as “Bosniak brothers”. The Islamic Community, the organiser of the manifestation, is seen as the only national institution of the Bosniak nation. The words of the *reis-ul-ulema* pointed that out clearly: ... *Well, with our attempts of becoming greater Bosniaks, after all these hard temptations, we are at the same time becoming even greater Muslims, since our Bosniak and Muslim identity is the same.*<sup>34</sup>

My research has revealed that religion, often viewed as the oldest and most static element of society, very often gets priority over nation which is a product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and whose elements differ according to time and space. In the conversation I had during 2007 Ajvatovica, ordinary people first pointed out the importance of their religious identity and only then, the very vague national identity. The religious identity was pointed out but not as conditioned by religious piety.

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<sup>32</sup> Imamović, Mustafa, *Islamska zajednica je prva i osnovna institucija bošnjačkog naroda* (“The Islamic Community is the First and Basic Institution of the Bosniak People”), *Preporod* No. 10\636, Sarajevo May 15 1998, p 9.

<sup>33</sup> Ćimić, Esad, *Osobnosti nacionalnog formiranja Muslimana* (“Particularities of the Muslim National Formation”), *Pregled* (“The Review”), No. 4, Sarajevo 1974, p 396.

<sup>34</sup> Cerić, Mustafa, *Vjera, narod, domovina; hutbe, govori, intervjui* (“Faith, People, Homeland: *hutbas* (“a speech of an imam on prayers on Fridays and holidays”), speeches, interviews”), Sarajevo 2002, p 367.

We could conclude that Ajvatovica is a national manifestation, an all-*Bosniaks* yearly assembly using explicit religious elements. At the same time, the religious identity of this event dominates the national. This event has provoked heated discussions about whether the claim that the nation came out of the sacral element and grew into a separate subject, elevating national conscience above the religious one holds grounds in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>35</sup> The celebration of Ajvatovica through different time shows that identity - national, as well as religious, is a process of the constant nationalisation of the religion and consecration of the nation.

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<sup>35</sup> Bakić, Ibrahim, *Nacija i religija* ("Nation and Religion"), Sarajevo 1994, p 26.

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