**Seeking blessing and earning merit: Muslim travellers in Bosnia-Herzegovina**

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This chapter considers the significance of journeys and the forms of veneration to Muslim sacred sites in contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina. We specifically focus on the sites that have been elevated in various degrees to the status of “national sites”, and fallen into an embrace with the realm of post-war Muslim identity politics in the past two decades. Yet we attend to these changes with caution. We argue that despite the ongoing process of "nationalisation" of these sites in the public discourses — the process that is also often taken as a proxy and starting point in the scholarship — more attention needs to be paid to the complex affective and historical intertwinements of Bosnian Muslims with the sites. Throughout the chapter, we argue that a more nuanced ethnographic attention needs to be paid to the rich Bosnian Muslims’ conceptualisation and practices associated with both journeys and the forms of veneration to Muslim sacred sites to fully appreciate the complex engagement with these sites.

In their seminal volume *Muslim Travellers,* Eickelman and Piscatori[[1]](#footnote-1) prefer the word “Muslim traveller” to pilgrim since Islamic traditions encourage specific forms of travel. Our chapter similarly focuses on Muslim travellers and sojourners and the forms of veneration to local or regional sites that are recognised in the Islamic traditions as *ziyaras* (see the Introduction). In Bosnia-Herzegovina the notions of *zijaret* along with *dova* (prayer; pl. *dove*) and *dovište* (outdoor prayer site) are widely invoked by Muslims when engaging with the sacred sites. When considering the notion of Muslim pilgrimage in Bosnia-Herzegovina, we therefore suggest to engage with these vernacular concepts in the context of affective and historical intertwinements of Bosnian Muslims with the sites. In what follows we focus on a form of religiously inspired travel where the destination is local and regional shrines but where, at the same time, the visits are large annual gatherings of Muslims who perform communal prayers at the sites. Although Muslims may also visit these sites individually or in smaller groups at other times, these larger ritualized gatherings are in form somewhere between the highly formalized Hajj pilgrimage and the informal visits, in Bosnia often covered by the term *ziyaras* (*zijaret*, Bosnian).

We examine two specific collective gatherings, two sites, namely Ajvatovica and Karići, that are important to the villagers in Central Bosnia where both Bringa and Henig have conducted longterm ethnographic fieldwork. Both sites are considered by Muslims locally as *mali hadž*, or small hajj, and sometimes humorously as the poor people’s hajj. The two sites discussed here are both referred to in the vernacular, and more recently also in the calendar (*takvim*) of “significant dates”, and prayer times of the *Islamska Zajednica*, (i.e. the Islamic Council) as *dovište* (a place for prayers)*.* The word for “pilgrimage” — *hodočašć* — is rarely used in relation to Muslim sites in Bosnia. This particular form of veneration is recognized by some sojourners as *zijaret*, although not all are familiar with this word, most commonly, however, people simply talk about going to the *dova* at Ajvatovica, Karići and so on

Regarding the study of Muslim pilgrimage, we would like to make two points. First, we believe the study of pilgrimage should be opened to a discussion of sacred landscapes, and how pilgrimages are often part of a larger sacred geography of visitations and ritual activities. The term “pilgrimage” tends to focus on the most spectacular individual sites, and in studies of pilgrimage in Islam this is perhaps particularly so because of the strong position of the hajj pilgrimage (see the Introduction). But this strong focus on travelling to one — for most Muslims — faraway site (see Karić, this volume) ignores the place of travel to smaller local sites where Muslims seek blessing and earn merit as part of a larger dynamics of vital exchange between people, the sacred and the land forming in turn the sacred landscape. Second, and as an extension of the first point we would like to go against the grain of the almost exclusive attention to identity politics in recent studies of Islamic practices, sacred sites, and pilgrimage in Bosnia (see for below), and focus on the religious and social significance for the individuals of travels to sacred sites as constitutive parts of a sociality and ontology which reaches beyond this world (*dunjaluk*) to the other (after) world (*ahiret*). Put differently, we agree with Coleman who suggests that the religious and therefore pilgrimage “should not be seen as an isolated realm of human activity” but instead “see travel to sacred sites as a way for individuals and groups to orient themselves in space, time and history”.[[2]](#footnote-2) An important part of this orientation in “space, time and history” is knowledge of the history of a site and its origin as a site of pilgrimage. We therefore start by situating each pilgrimage site historically before placing them within a wider web of relations between Bosnian Muslims’ ontology and ongoing histories of sacred spaces.

**Situating Ajvatovica and Karici in a sacred landscape**

In Bosnia-Hercegovina, Ajvatovica and Karići are part of larger Muslim pilgrimage complex associated with *dovište* and *zijaret*. In Central Bosnia, the veneration of multiple sacred sites, including tombs, caves, water springs, hills, and trees, is closely associated with Muslims’ personal notions of well-being. The actions carried out on the sites, such as visitation, praying, or maintaining the sites, bring Muslims individual blessing (*berićet/ bereket*), fortune (*nafaka*), luck (*sreća*), and the good life as such. This applies for large-scale pilgrimages such as Ajvatovica or Karići, as well as for more localised forms of veneration such as village prayers for rain or individual visits to *dovište* situated around villages.

These outdoor sites for prayers vary along several variables such as scale (a continuum of national-local), gender (male-female), historical trajectory, official or state involvement, commercial elements, and secular “folklore” elements such as folk dance performances. But they all share a feature that has perhaps been poorly understood in the literature on the Bosnian Muslims and their interaction with venerated sites, namely what Bringa has referred to as “seeking blessing and earning merit”[[3]](#footnote-3), and Henig in his forthcoming book refers to as “vital exchange”.[[4]](#footnote-4) With these expressions we want to convey the mutual and triangular relationship between the individual and Allah and significant others (relatives, neighbours, fellow Muslims) mediated by the landscape. The point is that Muslims’ ritualized visits to sacred sites help constitute a social world which include both the sacred and the secular. In addition to the interaction between individuals and Allah that takes places at such sites, there are the more visible social exchange elements of offering and receiving hospitality and maintaining relationships with fellow Muslims from other villages, expressed through the idioms of respect (*poštovanje*), and friendship (*prijatelstvo*).

While Ajvatovica has come to dominate the image of Muslim pilgrimages in Bosnia-Hercegovina, and has been promoted as the largest Muslim pilgrimage in Europe, Karići is an example of relatively lesser known site which shares key features with Ajvatovica as a *dovište*. These are sites that the local Muslims will visit annually on a fixed date to say prayers, and may be identified with an *evlija* (holy person), a *šehit* (a martyr)*,* a *tekija* (a dervish lodge) or a physical formation where miracles or extraordinary events (*keramet*) are said to have taken place. Not least Karići and Ajvatovica share with many smaller sites, some still active, others not so, yet others being revived, that they are or once were sites for prayers of rain.[[5]](#footnote-5) In what follows, we firstly outline the key moments of recent history that have impacted the sacred sites in Bosnia-Hercegovina. This will be followed by a closer examination of Ajvatovica and Karići dovište respectively, and finally situating them as part of a larger landscape of venerated sites.

**Visits to annual *dove* and the recent past**

Communist Yugoslavia (1945-1990), which Bosnia-Herzegovina was a part of, allowed people to practice their religion in private, but excluded any display of religiosity in public. Thus the larger traditional annual gatherings at various *dovište* which take place outdoors ended but there were some exceptions. Ajvatovica is an example of a site where people individually, and in smaller groups, living near the site continued to visit, but the large pilgrimages with its outdoor gatherings and procession stopped in 1947 while Karići is an example of a site which perhaps because of its less accessible location people continued to visit from further afield and gather outside, albeit in smaller numbers of hundreds. In the second half of the 1980s the authorities relaxed its antireligious stance, and allowed among others the building of numerous new mosques and churches. With the development of the Catholic pilgrimage site at Medjugorije in Herzegovina into an international pilgrimage center during the same period[[6]](#footnote-6), the Islamic leadership in Bosnia was eager to promote some traditional Bosnian Muslim sites of veneration to claim legitimate public visibility for Muslim religiosity and to perhaps increase the popular appeal of practicing Islam.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In 1990, the end of Communism and one-party rule, brought new freedom to express religiosity in public, but increasingly religious symbols became part of the competing nationalisms which fed ethnic antagonisms and ultimately a war. The war caused displacement of the population, destruction of villages and their social fabric, and travelling became difficult (due to damaged road infrastructure, hostile territory and/ or landmines).[[8]](#footnote-8) People’s interaction with sites of veneration had become difficult, and in some instances impossible. For Muslims in particular, religious rituals, and not least the travel to and participation in the annual, larger *dove*, took on new meanings in light of the “ethnic cleansing” campaigns, massacres and genocide committed against Bosnia’s Muslims. They became a vehicle for remembrance as well as for the celebration of survival. At the same time they continued to play a vital role in people’s spiritual connection with the landscape in their search for blessing and religious merit, a search which consist of visiting various sites noted above and that involves not only interaction and thus maintenance of a person’s relationship with the sacred and Allah, but also exchange which maintain horizontal relationships with relatives, in-laws and fellow Muslims in neighbouring villages. Because of the social, emotional and moral dimensions of such larger sites they lend themselves as vehicles for identity politics and nationalist purposes, and many analysts see only this aspect and are fail to see beyond and behind the obvious political instrumentality and thus ignore fundamental aspects of the pilgrimage that are integral to Bosnian Muslims’ orientation to self, place, family and the sacred. In juxtapositioning Ajatovica with Karići, we hope to bring out this absolutely critical aspect of venerating *dovište* in Bosnia, where Islam and Muslim practice have an over 500 year presence and history.

**A landscape of *dovište:* KARIĆI**

*Dova na Karićima* is the annual three-day pilgrimage during which Bosnian male Muslims gather to commemorate Hajdar-dedo Karić at the place of the wooden mosque called Karići. The place is situated right at the top of the plateau at the intersection between Selačka, Budoželjska and Zvijezda highlands. Although there are no written historical records about Hajdar-dedo Karić, he remains alive through a vivid oral tradition, the annual *dova*, and Muslims’ individual visits (*zijaret*) in search of blessing (*bereket*). It is narrated that Hajdar-dedo Karić was one of the messengers of Islam who were brought to the Balkan peninsula during the early Islamization. These narratives portray Hajdar-dedo Karić as a wise, knowledgeable Islamic scholar, effendi, a dervish sheikh (*dedo* is often used as a diminutive of dervish) and a holy man (*evlija*) who performed miracles (*keramet*) during his life. The very first tomb (*mezar*) next to the mosque, situated so as to face in the direction of Mecca is venerated not only during the pilgrimage but during individual visits throughout the year.

There are many stories of divine power associated with the site as there are with the Ajvatovica site. During the Second World War, the Četnik troops tried to burn down the wooden mosque, but were unable to set it alight by any means. Another story claims that no Muslim community has dwelt on the plateau for the last 150 years, and that the mosque and pilgrimage site were used only during the annual gatherings and individual visits. The nearest residents were a few Serbian (Orthodox) households who became very respectful caretakers of the pilgrimage site until the Bosnian war broke out.

During the socialist Yugoslavia period the Karići pilgrimage was neither sanctioned by the state power, nor banned by the Islamic Community. In 1993, during the Bosnian war (1992-1995), a Yugoslav National Army tank drove through the ancient wooden mosque. At the time, the region was barely accessible because of the many landmines scattered around the pilgrimage site during the war. Local Muslims temporarily organized the annual gathering in a nearby provincial town mosque. After the war, the landscape was slowly de-mined, the wooden mosque was eventually rebuilt in 2002 by using the timber from surrounding forest, and the pilgrimage fully restored again.

Although the restoration of the mosque was initiated by a group of local Muslim patriots, the land and the mosque are officially owned and maintained by the Islamic Community. The Islamic Community is also responsible for organizing and setting the dates in July for the Karići annual gathering. The date is counted according to the old Julian calendar as the week of the 11th Tuesday after *Jurjevdan* (6th May). The gathering usually begins with Friday’s noon prayer and lasts until the Sunday midday prayer.Only male Muslims are allowed to attend the Karići gathering. The gathering involves reciting the *Qur’an*, singing *ilahija* (songs in praise of Allah), and other performances, such as reciting verses from *mevlud* both in Turkish and Bosnian, *tevhid* [[9]](#footnote-9)for the Ottoman as well as Bosnian martyrs (*šehide*), and a collective devotional prayer, *kijam zikr* (*qiyam dhikr* in Arabic). *Kijam zikr* is performed by dervishes and led by a dervish sheikh. Other pilgrims usually observe rather than take part in this form of prayer because dervishes in the territory of the former Yugoslavia have been historically perceived ambivalently as the Islamic ‘other-within’.[[10]](#footnote-10) The devotional *zikr* prayer was also performed as part of the pilgrimage under socialist Yugoslavia which is worth mentioning as all dervish orders in Bosnia-Herzegovina had been officially banned in the 1950s by the Islamic Community itself, with the Yugoslav state’s assistance, for being ‘devoid of cultural value’[[11]](#footnote-11), and this ban lasted until 1989.

The organisation of the Karići pilgrimage according to the old Julian calendar brings us to the question as to how the Karići pilgrimage site is situated in a larger Muslim pilgrimage complex associated with *dovište* and *zijaret,* that is, with sacred landscape*.* There is a number of annual local outdoor prayers in Central Bosnia, that are scheduled according to the old Julian calendar, and are recognised as prayers for rain (*dove za kišu*). The prayers have historically been correlated to the cycle of agricultural production, with its corresponding fertility rituals and regenerative symbolism, and the dates of the outdoor collective *zijaret* continue to be pivotal for the pastoral and agricultural work schedules in many Central Bosnian villages and shape the local sense of belonging and identity. The Karići pilgrimage therefore needs to be situated within this wider network of sacred sites that constitute what we describe in this chapter as a sacred landscape. There were approximately sixty sites in use in the Central Bosnian highlands before 1945, including the Karići site. After 1945 the restrictions imposed on various religious practices by the socialist state had caused nearly half of the sites to no longer exist. Nonetheless, many of these sites, like the Ajvatovica, continued to be venerated semi-clandestinely in defiance of the restrictions. In the wake of the post-Yugoslav religious liberation and the war in the 1990s, the veneration to these sites significantly resurfaced, and there are now over thirty just in the region of Henig’s fieldwork that are being venerated individually and collectively. However, in his recent work Henig[[12]](#footnote-12) has documented how the post-socialist liberation of religious conduct along with the proliferation of ethnonational identity discourses in Bosnia have affected the very *dovište*, including the Karići site, and fuelled the contest over appropriation of these sites between multiple actors involved in the sharing of the sites, as diverse as the Islamic Community, foreign Islamic aid agencies, imams educated abroad, Salafists who direct an “anti-idolatry” rhetoric against sacred sites, dervishes with links throughout the Balkans, and village Muslims. In particular, Henig showed how the sites such as Karići but also Ajvatovica among others, are increasingly and intricately entangled in the state-level bureaucratic field as their administration involves the state religious body politics - the *Islamska Zajednica* (Islamic Council) cooperating with ethnoreligious politics represented by the SDA party (Party of Democratic Action). Being in charge of organisation and control of the annual *dova* thus gives considerable power to the Islamic Council to influence and intervene into the very choreography of the collective veneration and pilgrimage. This is often done in a manner which does not take into account the complex affective, historical, and relational character of sites such as Karići and Ajvatovica within a wider sacred landscape. This is of a great concern for many of the participants at the annual Karići gathering who live nearby and feel close to a long tradition of locally controlled and orchestrated *dove*. Put differently, these increasing interventions in post-Yugoslav period into the very choreography of the dove (e.g. changing dates, relocating from outdoor sites to the mosques) are often perceived as further dis-embedding rather than re-embedding the sacred sites from the larger pilgrimage complex of *dovište*. Paradoxically, these recent interventions, as the following section on Ajvatovica further illustrates, have meant that many of the participants for whom *dovište* like the Ajvatovica or Karići is to seek blessing and earn merit, prefer to visit at other times, outside of the bureaucratised and controlled tradition, as they did during the socialist period.

**A landscape of *dovište: AJVATOVICA***

In this section, we first trace the development of the Ajvatovica pilgrimage, before we describe the different movements of people on the day of the *dove*, and finally place it within a larger landscape of *dovište* and *zijaras* in Central Bosnia which also connects it to the Karići site.

Ajvatovica – the myth of origin and a short history

Ajvatovica has a long history as a religious site for Bosnia’s Muslim. In the 1980s, it was only whispered about among the villagers in Central Bosnia where Bringa was then conducting anthropological field research. By 2008 it was being referred to as the largest Muslim religious site and pilgrimage in Europe. Ajvatovica has been coined the **“**Mecca of the Balkans” by European journalists, and in Bosnia, local scholars have referred to it as “little Mecca”. It has become the most spectacular of the annual *dove* in Bosnia, in terms of the number of people who attend, the number of busses that bring people from the various Muslim communities (*džemat*) around the country, the media exposure and the participation and involvement of national politicians; such as official representatives of the Islamic community, and official participation from abroad (with official guests typically from Iran and Turkey).

Ajvatovica datesbackfrom the time of the Ottoman conquest and rule of Bosnia (approx. 1463-1878), and is in honor of a dervish and Islamic scholar called Ajvaz-dedo who settled in the town of Prusac (then a major fortified city on the main trading route between Dubrovnik (on the Adriatic coast) and the East. Prusac was one of the biggest towns in Bosnia in the Middle Ages and under the Ottomans it became a center of Islamic learning. The most prominent Islamic philosopher and writer in 16th century Bosnia, Hasan Kjafija ef. Prusack, was born in Prusac. Both scholars are considered *evlija* and have their own *turbe*[[13]](#footnote-13) in Prusac. According to the official history of Ajvatovica, Ajvaz-dedo is credited with converting a whole village in one day and otherwise being responsible for many conversions to Islam in the area. Through this history the site connects to the Ottoman past and the islamization of Bosnia over 500 years ago. But it is also a site of miracle and the testimony to the potency of faith and the religious merit earned by prayers and patience. As with Hajdar-dedo Karić, there is a rich oral tradition pertaining to Ajvaz dedo’s life and ministry. The legend has it that the inhabitants of Prusac did not have a reliable water supply so Ajvaz-dedo started looking for one in the hills around Prusac. He found a source on the Suljag mountain about 6 km above Prusac, but a huge rock was blocking the free passage of the water and the building of a pipe-system to bring the water down the mountain to Prusac. Ajvaz-dedo was determined to make it work and went to pray at the water source every morning for forty days. On the fourtieth day after the morning prayers, he fell asleep and in his sleep he dreamt that two billy-goats were fighting and the rock split.[[14]](#footnote-14) When he woke up he found the rock had indeed split in two, allowing access to the source. The gorge, is indeed formed by what looks like a rock split in two. The Ajvaz-dedo’s rock thus became a site of marvel and veneration and the object of pilgrimage.[[15]](#footnote-15)

During Communist Yugoslavia the Ajvatovica procession of horsemen (*konjanici*) and flagbearers (*bajraktari)* and the *dove* were banned like other similar public displays of religiosity. But the story about what led to the ban has made the Ajvatovica procession in particular a powerful symbol of repression and defiance. In 1947 the procession was stopped by police before they reached Prusac. The police asked the participants at the head of the procession for official documentation for permission to proceed. They had no such documentation and refused to stop, they were then attempted stopped by physical force and the Imam at the head of the procession was arrested a few days later. He received a six year prison sentence. (For a detailed account of the event see Hadžić, 2005). However, like other banned religious activities a lower key and more secretive *dova* took place without the procession throughout Communist times. Prusac inhabitants and a small circle of trusted relatives and friends would continue to celebrate Ajvatovica out of sight of the public and the government’ s watchful eye, and dervishes would hold a *mevlud* and a *zikr* at the site.[[16]](#footnote-16) In the mid-1980s *džemat*s in Central Bosnia started organizing travels by bus to the annual *mevlud* at the *tekija* in Buna in Hercegovina, not far from the increasingly popular Catholic pilgrimage site at Medjugorje, and local imams and others were talking about organizing the procession again in 1988s when the Communist authorities had started relaxing its restrictions on the public expression of religious traditions.

In 1990 Ajatovica was held for the first time since 1947 and it became a huge manifestation of Bosnian Muslim cultural liberation which was eagerly encouraged and embraced by the political and religious leadership in Sarajevo.[[17]](#footnote-17) It was repeated in 1991 with war raging in neigbouring Croatia, and it then consisted of numerous cultural and religious events. The program was running from 19 to the 30 June and constituted a considerable cultural-political manifestation in a climate of competitive nationalisms (Croat, Serb and Bosnian Muslim or Bosniak) anchored in religious traditions. Only the two last days were dedicated to the Ajvatovica pilgrimage itself. The official program for what was now called the “Ajvatovica days’ program” announced that this was the “biggest religious manifestations of Muslims in Yugoslavia”.[[18]](#footnote-18) In 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995 the Ajvatovica procession was again interrupted, this time by the war when the town of Prusac itself came under attack and several of its religious buildings were destroyed. When the celebrations picked up again in 1996, it continued with the expanded religious-cultural program introduced in 1991. In the years since then, Ajvatovica programs have spread to other cities of Bosnia-Herzegovina beyond Donji Vakuf and Prusac, and under the umbrella of “program dana Ajvatovice” there are “cultural, religious, and sports programs” in at least 7 cities, including Sarajevo.

Ajvatovica has become many different things to different people, and the spectrum of activities accommodates many different needs and interests, but some elements have remained constant and in the next section we will focus on Ajvatovica as *dova*, and people’s interaction with the religious sites in Prusac.

The Ajvatovica *dova*

Prusac is a small town consisting of a village-like settlement of about 1.500 inhabitants and a complex of religious sites and objects, among these, three historic mosques and several turbe of which Hasan Kafija Prusack and Ajvaz-dedo’s are the most significant. The Ajvatovica *dova* and its many elements are perhaps best understood by looking at the movement of people between the different sacred sites and objects. On the eve of the Ajvatovica, the horsemen and flagbearers from village and town *džemata* in north-central Bosnia make their way to Prusac where they will stay the night. In the evening there is a *mevlud* and *zikr* (see above) in one of the mosques, with the procession of horsemen starting out the day before as men from different municipalities join the procession along its route from outside Donji Vakuf. The next morning, men and horses will set out in a procession from the Handanje (Handanagine) mosque (this characteristic 17th century mosque was destroyed during the war, but reopened in 2005 after being carefully rebuilt).

The visitors and pilgrims line up along the main route for the procession. For a Bosniak to be present at Ajvatovica where Bosniaks from all over Bosnia-Herzegovina and from the diaspora gather, has become an expression of national survival and pride both after the end of Communism, and again after the end of the war in the 1990s. (For a more detailed description of the procession, and the religious and commercial activities surrounding the event, see Kuhn this volume)

The procession joined by thousands of people continues to the Suljag mountain and the site of the split rock with the water source running through. This is the natural wonder and miracle facilitated by Ajvaz-dedo’s prayers. The narrow gorge where the water source is located is where a group of imams lead the prayers (*dove*), and in the tradition mentioned above it ends with a prayer for rain. At the same time, there are crowds inside and outside the mosques in Prusac performing the noon-prayers. In one of the mosques there is a *mevlud* for women. Until 1997 women did not go to the Suljag mountain on the day of the pilgrimage, like Karići the dova was only attended by men, instead they would stay in Prusac, have a picknick in the town meadow, visit the *turbe* and attend the women’s *mevlud*. The women’s *mevlud* is a continuation of this tradition but in addition women also attend the prayers at the split rock and the noon prayers in the nearby meadow.[[19]](#footnote-19) While for some sojourners the reason for travelling to Ajvatovica may be the spectacle of the procession of men on horses, the market stalls and the folkdance/music entertainment, for many others it is an occasion to fulfil religious duties on behalf of oneself but not the least on behalf of one’s household. This can also be done by visiting and praying at various sites in Prusac, it is not dependent on making the hike to the Suljag mountain (although to hike up there to pray at the water-source is considered particularly meritorious). Throughout the morning and away from all the commotion at the various *turbe* you can find quietness and serenity and women (and a few older men) praying, seeking blessing or help through prayers and other forms of interaction with the site. The most visited and potent *turbe* are those of Ajvaz-dedo and of Hasan Kjafia.

Seeking blessing and earing merit for one’s household.

For most of the women in the cluster of villages in the area of central Bosnia where Bringa has mainly worked, Ajvatovica has been included in their ritual calendar as one of many *dovište* they will travel to during the summer months to seek blessing and earn merit. It is considered as one of the most potent sites, potent from being saturated with the prayers of generations of Muslims, potent for the presence of a sentient *evlija[[20]](#footnote-20)*. The women’s season of visiting *dovište* starts with a *dova* whichdraws women from surrounding villages as well as from further away, many of whom have relatives or in-laws in the village and will be staying overnight as a guest in one of the village homes. After the communal prayers when women pray for the souls of dead relatives and neighbours, they may visit the *turbe* individually to say prayers and ask for good health and fortune, i.e. for blessings (*berićet/bereket*) for themselves or often for a child, parent, or spouse.[[21]](#footnote-21) On the same site three weeks later the women from the various hamlets in the village will return to hold prayers for rain (see above) but they will also include two or three other sites in different parts of the village where there are Muslim graves, believed to be the graves of martyrs and therefore where one’s prayers will be considered more potent. The prayers for rain is also a way of seeking blessing as rain will secure a fertile land and good harvest and thus the well-being of all the members of the household, neighbours and co-villagers.[[22]](#footnote-22)

For the women, to travel to participate in the *dova* is an occasion to visit relatives and in-laws in the village and for the villagers to offer hospitality, and it is thus important to social relationships, but it is primarily an act of religious and moral duty to take care of the souls of dead relatives, the health and well-being of one’s family and household members, and to earn religious merit for oneself and one’s household members. By doing so, the woman herself gains merit (*sevap)* which may help her in her transition to “the other side”. In turn, when that time come, this may benefit her surviving family members.[[23]](#footnote-23) The *dovište* is a potent site where critical relationships which define and orient the visiting person are enacted and affirmed through various forms of exchange. At Ajvatovica some of the same relationships that we have just seen in the much smaller, women’s *dove* are affirmed, but there are also others of a more recent date. The Ajvatovica *dovište* is a site with a historical continuity which connects it through a network of *dovište* via its sojourners throughout central Bosnia. But it also is a site where contemporary collective concerns situated in a particular political-historical context are expressed. The Ajvatovica has in this respect become the iconic post-war *dovište*.

**Conclusion**

As the annual Ajvatovica pilgrimage has grown in size and visibility since the end of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-95) it has also received, unlike the Karići, increased interest from both the media and from local and above all from foreign scholars. Local scholars have been concerned with the history of the pilgrimage, and Islamic scholars have been concerned with developing more Qur’an focused activities.[[24]](#footnote-24) While foreign scholarship is completely dominated by an analysis of Ajvatovica as national events and political acts[[25]](#footnote-25) which focuses on the Ajvatovica as a spectacular platform to reinventnot only the ritual pilgrimage itself but also to (re)inventaBosniak national identity, or more recently as a site for religious tourism.[[26]](#footnote-26) This is part of a growing literature on Islam in Bosnia more generally which almost exclusively ascribe Muslims’ more visible, and well attended public ritual activities since the end of the 1992-95 war, to a rise in a “new” Bosniak nationalism driven by an Islamic revival.[[27]](#footnote-27) Such instrumental views, first, completely miss the continuity in people’s reasons for travelling to Ajvatovica that needs to be situated with other visits to other sacred sites, including the Karići. During the course of the history of Ajvatovica, it has taken on new layers of meaning with changing political and often dramatic historical circumstance that have affected Bosnia’s Muslims. Yet, through all this Ajatovica and the Karići have for generations of Bosnia’s Muslims been sites of a life-giving miracle and a testimony to the power of prayer. Both sites are part of a meaningful landscape of venerated sites that local Muslim interact with through what Henig calls vital exchange, and Bringa refers to as seeking blessing and earning merit.[[28]](#footnote-28) These aspects are harder to spot under all the cultural, religious, and sports programs wrapper around the public images of Ajatovica *dova.* The Karići *dova* has avoided such an expansion and looks more like Ajvatovica would have looked like in 1947 when the *dova* was locally organized and controlled and the main religious events, the zikr in the old mosque and the prayers at the site of the water source were exclusively attended by men. For the men in the villages Bringa and Henig have studied Karići, retains an aura of authenticity they feel Ajvatovica has lost and it therefore remains as we saw above the preferred *dove* for men in central Bosnia .

To conclude, this focus on political instrumentality in the study of Muslim pilgrimage in Bosnia-Herzegovina also misses the fact that Ajvatovica is just one of many sites in a network of sites which Bosnia’s Muslims interact with to seek blessing and earn merit, many of which form part of annual calendars of ritualized visitations to hold collective prayers. Clusters of villages have traditionally had their specific calendars, but during the last couple of decades an increasing number of these sites have been incorporated into a centrally organized Islamic calendar which fuses the religious and the national. As sites become both more national and more international with the participation of diasporas and promotion of so-called religious tourism, they are increasingly dis-embedded from the complex pattern of movement and of sacred exchanges described above, and thus from the intimate mutual interdependency between dwellers and land, and thus perhaps take on more of the characteristic of popular pilgrimage sites elsewhere.

1. Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, “Social Theory in the Study of Muslim Societies,” in *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination*, edited by Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (New York: Routledge, 1990), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Simon Coleman, “Do you Believe in Pilgrimage?”, *Anthropological Theory* 2 (2002): 363. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 160-169. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Henig, David. *The Embers of Allah: Cosmologies of Vital Exchange in Central Bosnia highlands*. Book manuscript. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, 172; Henig, David. “'This is Our Little Hajj': Muslim Holy Sites and Reappropriation of the Sacred Landscape in Contemporary Bosnia.” *American Ethnologist* 39 (2012): 752-766; Henig, *The Embers of Allah*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Belaj, Marijana. *Milijuni na Putu: Antropologia Hodočašća i Sveto Tlo Medugorja.* Zagreb: Jesenski i Turk, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Henig, David. “Iron in the Soil: Living with Military Waste in Post-war Bosnia.” *Anthropology Today* 28 (2012): 21-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In Bosnia, tevhid (from Arabic tawheed, via Turkish tevhid) are ritualized collective prayers said for the souls of the dead, see Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, 187-194. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, 221; Ger Duijzings, *Religion and the politics of identity in Kosovo* (London: Hurst&Company, 2000), 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Hamid Algar, “Some Notes on the Naqshbandī Tarīqat in Bosnia,” *Die Welt des Islam* 13 (1971): 196; Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, 221; Duijzings, *Religion and the politics of identity in Kosovo*, 112) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Henig, “'This is Our Little Hajj,’’’. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The *turbe* is mausoleum for a particularly blessed dead. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This legend has now become part of the official historiography of the Islamska Zajednica and the Ajvatovica organizing committee, and the year for when Ajvaz-dedo split the rock with his prayers has been set to the year 1467. See [www.rijaset.ba](http://www.rijaset.ba), last accessed 20 December, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This story about Ajvaz dedo and the rock may now be found on the many websites that explain Ajvatovica. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Hadžić, Mulo. *Prusac i Njegovo Dovište*. Sarajevo: Centar za Promociju Civilnog Društva, 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Traditionally, Ajvatovica had been held on the seventh Monday after Jurjevdan (see above). In 1990 it was held on a Saturday and postwar it has been held on Sundays to accommodate people who are working, but it is always held in the second half of June. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Hadžić, *Prusac i Njegovo Dovište*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In the speech he gave at the 1997 Ajvatovica, the late Bosnian Muslim political leader and member of the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegovic, suggested that in the future women should also be able to visit. He draw a parallel with Mecca where he had seen women pray together with men, cf. Hadžić, *Prusac i Njegovo Dovište,* 761. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. In Bosnian as in Turkish the Arab plural form is used in singular. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, 171-177. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The fair with dance, music and food-stalls which used to take place in a field on the outskirts of the village in the evening was disrupted by the 1992-95 war and has not been revived. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The mufti of Travnik Nusret Abdibegovic is also the leader of the organizing committee for Ajvatovica. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See for instance Clayer, Nathalie and Alexander Popović. “Les Balkans, Le Culte d’Ajvatovica et Son Pèlerinage Annuel.” In *Le Culture de Saints dans le Monde Muselman*, edited by Henry Chambert-Loir and Clande Gillot. Paris: Ecole Franҫaise de Extrěme Orient, 1995; Dimitrijević, Dejan. “Ajvatovica. Analyse de la Tentative de Construction d’un Mythe Fondateur de l’Identité Bochniaque.” *Annales de la Fondation Fyssen*, 13 (1999): 31-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Rujanac, Dženita Sarač. “Ajvatovica: A Bridge between Tradition, National and Religious Identity.” *History and Anthropology* 24 (2013): 117-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Bougarel, Xavier. “Death and the Nationalist: Martydrom, 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,167–191. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007. Duijizngs, Ger. “Commemorating Srebrenica: Histories of Violence and the Politics of Memory in Eastern Bosnia.” In *The New Bosnian Mosaic: Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-War Society,* edited by Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms, and Ger Duijzings,141-166. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Bringa, *Being Muslims the Bosnian Way*, 160-196; Henig, *The Embers of Allah.* [↑](#footnote-ref-28)