Post Scriptum: Good People

“God loves His friends, and they love Him.”

The term *dobri*, “the good,” used to denote holy individuals, is key to understanding the Bosnian Muslim tradition. It survives in that side of our collective memory that preserves its links with the past, but no full discussion has ever been published on the term. By “the past” we mean the perennial wisdom that exists at all times and in every tradition — a tradition neither Jewish nor Christian nor Muslim, but Jewish and Christian and Muslim, and more, both in and above every language and time.

The term, like many others, is warp and weft of oral Bosnian sacred tradition. Religious in origin, and moreover Muslim, this tradition has seen its language, meanings and symbols systematically and persistently passed over in silence or denied or vilified by modern forms of Islamophobia, with their rationalistic and political dimensions. Not only those who would construct history in terms of truth versus myth engage in this, but even those who, despite their roots in the tradition, have nonetheless preferred to position themselves in the modern mainstream through rationalistic denial of it and so assented to its banishment from reality into fantasy.

The fate of the term “the good” is much the same as that of “Recitation,” “laying on of the Book,” *shahīd* (martyr), *fath* (opening), *somun* (a round, leavened flatbread) and so on, relegated to antiquarian discussion of religious feasts from the solar calendar and prayer gatherings on mountain and hill tops, in caves, at springs and the like. Yet these are key elements of a complex Bosnian identity that includes Muslims who believe in what was sent down to them and what was sent down before them as revelations of one God.

This rift in individual selfhood and folk identity may instructively be represented through the fate of the term “the good.” Hardly anyone denies it as part of his or her heritage and practically every Bosnian can give at least some

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1 This chapter deals with the topic of holy people. It cannot be dealt with from within the forcible separation of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other sacred traditions. Looked at from the context of the Muslim tradition regarding the friends of God, one cannot but agree that “research on the origins and the development of doctrines concerning holy men and Friendship with God still remains at an early stage.” (Radtke, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 7).

2 See Qur’an, 29:46.

3 This is also discussed in Mahmutčehajić, “Good people: A goal reached by many paths.”
account of it: The good are witnesses to the unconditional obligation to do what is good and beautiful, unconditional because essential to the self or heart through which the Creator speaks to all the worlds. For most people, therefore, the good seem strange, present and absent, untameable, their deeds miraculous and potent, making them appear like stranger-guests come to remind the majority of what they have forgotten and may redeem them. There are stories of them everywhere, always different. These good are like shadows, but their presence is remembered just like real times and places. They belong to all generations thanks to language. The stories have common features, but differences in representation. They live on in discourse meant for all of us, men and women, children and elderly, witness to their response to the Praised, who said: “Be in this world as if you were a stranger or a traveller.”

The stories of the good are gentle and quiet, respectful of the dignity of the listener. They are simple and so more powerful than any didacticism. Their simplicity helps them spread among the speakers of a given language, without suffering damage in transmission: their mysterious nature tends to be preserved, without accretions beyond those that gentle speech and confidence call forth in the listener's authentic ready and open receptiveness. Concise and rounded, language reveals and receives them as though always already a part of it.

That the term “the good” has such a presence in language, faithfully reflecting the Bosnian world-view that holds our reason and purpose in the world to be metaphysical and elusive of matter’s deadening grip, confuses and disturbs those who would, in their ideologized histories, be lords of the boundaries they determine for things, so that they may allocate their purpose.

For example, it is claimed that how the terms *dobri ljudi* (good people) and *dobri Bosnjani* (good Bosnians) were used during one particular period has absolutely no connection to the use of the same terms at any other period of that language’s history and in particular during the past five centuries, in which Bosnian identity has included the bearing of witness to the Praised as seal of the prophets. This is a very clear case of the construction of

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4 Bukhārī, 8:284.

5 Džaja argues that the terms “good Bošnjani” and “good people” which feature in Bosnian written documents prior to the late fifteenth century are unconnected to anything in the centuries marked by a Muslim presence. Such attempts to construct discontinuity in Bosnian history, as a rule ideological and anti-Muslim, are not rare, but Srećko Džaja’s is more instructive than most. He attempts to demonstrate that something immediately evident to every speaker of Bosnian is not in fact the case, claiming that his approach is “scholarly” and “scientific.” See Džaja, “Dobri Bošnjani” and “Boni Homines.” On the *dobri/Good* in Bosnian