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## Making Muslim Women European

Fabio Giomi

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CEU Press Studies in the  
History of Medicine

Fabio Giomi

# Making Muslim Women European

*Voluntary Associations, Gender, and Islam  
in Post-Ottoman Bosnia and Yugoslavia (1878–1941)*



The traveler passing through the Bosnian landscape from a wide range of postcards to seascapes depicted diverse aspects of the landscape, ruined fortresses, men and women, and the newly-built infrastructure that was part of the Bosnian landscape: iron bridges, factories, and in particular affords a glimpse of Sarajevo of Banja Luka. The Hotel Austria and



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## LISTS OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ABiH *Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine, Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- AHNK *Arhiv hercegovačko-neretvanskog kantona, Archives of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton*
- AJ *Arhiv Jugoslavije, Archives of Yugoslavia*
- ARS *Arhiv Republike Srpske, Archives of the Republic of Srpska*
- FG *Fond Gajreta, Gajret Records*
- GOG *Glavni odbor Gajreta, Gajret Central Branch*
- GONU *Glavni odbor Narodne Uzdanice, Narodna Uzdanica Central Branch*
- HAS *Historijski arhiv Sarajevo, Sarajevo Historical Archives*
- IAB *Istorijski arhiv Beograda, Belgrade Historical Archives*
- JMD *Jugoslovenska Muslimanska Demokracija, Yugoslav Muslim Democracy*
- JMO *Jugoslovenska Muslimanska Organizacija, Yugoslav Muslim Organization*
- MGS *Muzej grada Sarajeva, City Museum of Sarajevo*
- MONU *Mjesni odbor Narodne Uzdanice, Narodna Uzdanica Local Branch*
- MNO *Muslimanska Narodna Organizacija, Muslim Popular Organization*
- MPG *Mjesni pododbor Gajreta, Gajret Local Branch*
- MRS *Muzej Republike Srpske, Museum of the Republic of Srpska*
- MŽONU *Mjesni ženski odbor Narodne Uzdanice, Narodna Uzdanica Local Female Branch*
- MŽOŠ *Muslimanska ženska osnovna škola, Muslim Female Elementary School*
- MŽPG *Mjesni ženski pododbor Gajreta, Gajret Local Female Branch*
- MŽZM *Muslimanska ženska zadruga Mostar, Muslim Women's Association in Mostar*
- PDS *Personalni dosije službenika, Officials' personal files*
- SANU *Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts*
- ZM *Zemaljski muzej, Provincial Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- ZV *Zemaljska vlada, Provincial Government for Bosnia and Herzegovina*



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*To my grandmother  
Lorena 'Rudi' Mantelli (1924–2010),  
hat manufacturer,  
who would have loved to study.*



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# INTRODUCTION



The traveler passing through the Bosnian town of Banja Luka circa 1910 could choose from a wide range of postcards to send home. While a considerable number of these cards depicted diverse aspects of the region's rich cultural heritage—picturesque villages, ruined fortresses, men and women dancing in folk costumes—others showcased the newly-built infrastructure that was becoming an increasingly prominent part of the Bosnian land-



Figure 1: Postcard depicting Banja Luka, circa 1910.

Source: Magbul Škoro, *Pozdrav iz Bosne i Hercegovine. Greetings from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Gruss aus Bosnien-Herzegowina*, vol. 1 (Sarajevo: Dom, 2009), 132.

scape: iron bridges, factories, grid-iron streets, railroads, etc. One postcard in particular (see figure 1) affords a glimpse of Savior Street, one of the main roads in the city center of Banja Luka. The Hotel Austria and Elliot Café are clearly recognizable in the background, places which were at the heart of the Central European, middle-class sociability that was gradually spreading in town. At the center of the composition a couple can be seen sitting in the front seat of a car. The couple is dressed according to European upper-class fashion; the gentleman wears a suit and cap, and the lady, who is immediately obvious thanks to her white dress, wears a corset, a small cap and holds a parasol. Distributed in a semicircle around the car, the urban crowd seems to observe with curiosity this gendered performance of modernity, so unusual in early twentieth century Bosnia.

At first sight, the postcard could be a sketch of one of the many minor towns of the Habsburg Empire. Yet there are elements that undoubtedly point to the postcard's Bosnian origin; the presence of three veiled figures—three Muslim women. Indeed, as a region that had only recently come under the control of Vienna in 1878, and had been a part of the Ottoman Empire for four centuries before that, Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>1</sup> boasted a large Muslim population—a unique case in the Habsburg Empire. The three veiled women's position at the front of the stage is rather meaningful; they are isolated from the background context, hidden beneath heavy *feredža*, a type of Muslim garment worn by women in Bosnian towns outside the domestic space at the beginning of the twentieth century. Slightly removed from the rest of the composition, these three figures are the best proof of Bosnia's recent Ottoman, and thus Oriental past, and of its persistent exoticism in the eyes of the Habsburg observer. Looking at this postcard, one might be tempted to think that European modernity, entering the town in the form of a bourgeois couple riding a car, has touched all but Muslim women.

The assumption that Bosnian Muslim women remained for a long time removed from social transformation has enjoyed a great deal of popularity, inside and outside the perimeter of academia. In 2009, when as a doctoral student I first started thinking about focusing on Muslim women in the first decades of the post-Ottoman period—roughly speaking, after the sultans

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1 In order to make the text more readable, in this book I refer to the historical region of "Bosnia and Herzegovina" for the most part simply as "Bosnia."

and before the communists—several colleagues kindly suggested I drop the subject, and not just due to the risk of being accused of speaking on behalf of women and stealing their voices. The reasons given to me were both of a general nature, and specific to the research. General, because there often appears to be something improper about a male historian deciding to focus on women’s and gender history—dealing with women’s history is a job for women, and doing so implies that either you are not a real historian, or that you are not a real man. Specific, because—as I was told by several Bosnian colleagues—for the period before 1945 there was just not enough archival material for a serious PhD dissertation, and more importantly there was nothing in them that was interesting enough to be told. As I will show in the second part of this Introduction, the existing scholarship seems indeed to suggest that after 1878, Muslim women continued to lead more or less the same lives as they had in the late Ottoman period; they rarely went to school or entered the salaried job market, and they were mostly confined to the domestic space. At least until the triumphant Communist state empowered them with its emancipatory policies in the aftermath of the Second World War. I was also told that, if I really wanted to know more about Muslim women, I ought to listen to *sevdalinka*, a kind of folk music closely associated with Ottoman Bosnia, which even today has a lively cultural scene.<sup>2</sup> These songs often tell the story of urban Muslim women, their cry for unrequited love and desire for their loved ones.<sup>3</sup> The female protagonists in *sevdalinakas* are often described as hidden from the public eye behind a veil or *mušebak*, the wooden grille covering the windows of a house to guard against the eyes of onlookers. Even though there are exceptions, the majority of these female characters are represented as confined to the house, sometimes walking in the narrow streets of the *mahalas*, or residential neighborhoods that made up the urban mosaic of the Ottoman town. At first sight, these songs implicitly reinforced my first impressions gleaned from the current state of research; Muslim women were entities removed from the public space.

According to this line of reasoning, Bosnian Muslim women represented a kind of anomaly, both in comparison with women in other Muslim societ-

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2 The term is possibly from the Ottoman Turkish *savda* (“passionate love”), which in turn comes from the Arabic *sawda*, one of the four humors of ancient medicine controlling emotions.

3 Recent scholarship is attempting a more nuanced reading of the way women are portrayed in *sevdalinkas*. On this topic see Damir Imamović, *Sevdah* (Zenica: Vrijeme, 2017), 149–52.

ies, and in comparison with non-Muslim women in the Yugoslav region. As a great deal of research has already convincingly shown, the decades at the turn of the twentieth century represent a period of major change for Muslim women around the world. At a time when the Ottoman Empire was becoming a vast testing-ground, where competing “imagined communities” were being forged and contested, the enforcement of appropriate gender roles—and in particular appropriate femininity—turned out to be on extremely contentious ideological ground. In Istanbul, but also in Egypt, the Maghreb, and the Mashrek, the developing public concern for the so-called “woman question” involved secular and religious public figures, the colonizers and the colonized, as well as men and women.<sup>4</sup> In the Yugoslav region, roughly during the same decades, the history of non-Muslim women is no less charged with change. At a time when the state defined itself as a promoter of progress and modernity, women began to be considered unfit to accomplish their role as mothers and educators of future generations, and then became an object of reform and regeneration. Christian and Jewish Women of the Yugoslav region—whether they lived in the Ottoman or Habsburg Empire, or in the Serbian and Montenegrin states—experienced new forms of education, learned to write and speak in public, joined the paid workforce, transformed their consumption practices and everyday life, and took part in the political struggle amidst the ranks of nationalist, socialist and feminist movements. In close relation with what their counterparts were doing in other European states, women imagined competing projects of social reform, took to the streets to demand better work and living conditions, and the right to vote.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, research from the last few decades has shown

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4 The research on Muslim women between the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries is extensive. Several volumes, which already make up the canons of Women’s and Gender History, helped to shape my approach on this topic: Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Lila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987); Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Beth Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). Additional literature will be referenced throughout this text.

5 On women in the Yugoslav region see in particular Jovanka Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije u radničkom pokretu i ženskim organizacijama 1918–1941* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1978). An irreplaceable tool for the study of the history of women in the Yugoslav region is Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi, eds., *A Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movements and Feminisms: Central,*

us the extent to which women forged the course of their own lives, respecting or transgressing the boundaries imposed by class, age, political, ethnic and religious affiliations. How was it then possible to imagine that Muslim women in Bosnia were completely removed from all of these changes?

### GENDERING ASSOCIATIONAL CULTURE

This book is an attempt to tell a different story and to contribute to the history of Bosnian Muslims in the first decades of the post-Ottoman era, by putting women and their experiences in the picture. In a historiography traditionally focused on national, class, and ethno-confessional categories, the goal is to shift the major interest to gender and explore its heuristic power.<sup>6</sup> More concretely, the book covers a period that falls between 1878, when the Congress of Berlin assigned this Ottoman province to the Habsburg Empire, and 1941, when Axis troops invaded Yugoslavia. In the space of approximately six decades, this region was integrated into two continental empires, the Ottoman and the Habsburg, and into a state based on the national principle, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. In order to explore the history of Muslim women and the evolution of a debate on Muslim, post-Ottoman gender relations, this book focuses on a specific social organization: the voluntary association. Usually associated with urban middle-class Western Europe and North America, voluntary associations became more prominent in the Yugoslav region from at least the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In a region that was at that time shared between Vienna and Istanbul, they turned up in virtually all of the languages in use—*Verein* in German, *cemiyet* in Ottoman Turkish, *udruženje* or *društvo* in Serbo-Croatian,<sup>7</sup> not to mention the

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*Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2006) and Jelena Petrović, *Women's Authorship in Interwar Yugoslavia. The Politics of Love and Struggle* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

6 On the lack of gender-sensitive scholarship in Balkan Muslims studies, see Ina Merdjanova, *Rediscovering the Umma: Muslims in the Balkans between Nationalism and Transnationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 82–102.

7 At present, in the countries of former Yugoslavia, the official state languages include Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, Macedonian, Montenegrin and Albanian. Without engaging in any of the sensitive political debates among Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and Montenegrins, it can be stated that Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrinian are mutually intelligible. In the period under study in this book, this language was referred to by the state under several terms: *zemaļjski jezik* (provincial language), *srpski* (Serbian), *hrvatski* (Croatian), *jugoslavenski* (Yugoslavian), *srpsko-hrvatski* (Serbo-Croatian) *državni*



kaleidoscope of local idioms that would later be called “minority languages.” Several generations of philosophers, historians and social scientists have already stressed the primary role played by associations in the making of what we are now used to calling modernity.

The term “voluntary association” generally refers to an organization that is contractual in nature, which distinguishes it from other forms of “traditional” organizations based on an assigned status, such as place of origin or blood-ties. Researchers often consider these institutionalized groups to be characterized by two principal markers, i.e. their non-governmental nature and their non-profit orientations, traits that have led scholars to consider voluntary associations as intermediary bodies that are autonomous from both the strictures of the state and family control. Thanks to this specific position, associations are usually considered as a kind of free space where individuals with spare time—men and progressively women as well—can express their beliefs, and promote their interests in coordination with their fellow members. The relationship between these communities of interest and the making of the public sphere has long been underlined; the French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville had already observed in the early nineteenth century that “newspapers make associations and associations make newspapers.”<sup>8</sup> Voluntary and selective membership, statutes laying out limited and explicit goals, self-government through written acts, and the appointment of roles through an elective process: these other key elements are usually associated with voluntary associations. It goes without saying that historical research has shown the extent to which this is just an ideal type; once associations leave the World of Ideas and enter into human history they undergo transformations, diversions, misappropriations, and they are not necessarily synonymous with liberal modernity.<sup>9</sup>

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*jezik* (State language), *narodni jezik* (popular, or national, language) or even *naš jezik* (our language). For the sake of simplicity, this language will be referred to as the “Serbo-Croatian language.” The approach adopted by this book is to cite the form used in the primary or secondary source. For an overview on these issues, see in particular Robert D. Greenberg, *Language and Identity in the Balkans: Serbo-Croatian and Its Disintegration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

8 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (London: Fontana Press, 1969), 518.

9 Several texts have contributed to shaping my perception of associations, and in particular: Graeme Morton, Boudien de Vries, Robert J. Morris, eds., *Civil Society, Associations and Urban Places: Class, Nation and Culture in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 1–16 and Maurice Agulhon, “L’histoire sociale et les associations,” *Revue de l’économie sociale*, no. 14 (1998): 35–44. For more definitions of associations, see Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580–1800: The Origins of an Associational Word* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2000), 16; Joseph Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia:*

At first glance, the idea of focusing on voluntary associations in the Yugoslav region may seem bizarre or misinformed, to say the least. The Bosnian people and the inhabitants of the Balkans in general are not usually considered to be—to quote Arthur M. Schlesinger, speaking about the United States—“nation(s) of joiners.”<sup>10</sup> At least since the beginning of the twentieth century, journalism, literature and scientific research have converged to reinforce an image of the Balkan peoples as the European continent’s “savages,” a sort of “internal Other” as Maria Todorova put it, or “semi-Orientals,” to quote Larry Wolff, only capable of mobilizing themselves through common ancestral bonds such as ethnicity, blood-ties and religion.<sup>11</sup> The gory collapse of Socialist Yugoslavia in the 1990s, a process that in Bosnia took on a particularly dramatic turn, has only contributed to engraining this image; their associational culture, and by extension their civil society in general, has been branded as intrinsically incomplete, defective, or even entirely missing. The reason for this historical failure is most often assigned to the *longue durée*; at the root of this impossibility to adhere to an idealized Western European modernity, what is most often mentioned is the prevalence of rural societies dominated by autocratic empires, weak economic growth, a lack of cultural unity, and individualistic rational ethos.<sup>12</sup> Built upon several years of research across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia, this book aims first of all to contribute to clearing the field of these Balkanist assumptions, and to demonstrate that Bosnian associational culture was neither absent nor defective, but vital, dynamic and deeply interconnected with the development of voluntary associations on a global scale.<sup>13</sup>

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*Science, Patriotism and Civil Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5–6. On voluntary associations in the Yugoslav region, see also Fabio Giomi and Stefano Petrunaro, “Voluntary Associations, State and Gender in Interwar Yugoslavia. An Introduction,” *European Review of History* 26, no. 1 (2019): 1–18.

- 10 Arthur M. Schlesinger, “Biography of a Nation of Joiners,” *The American Historical Review* 50, no. 1 (1944), 1–25.
- 11 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).
- 12 Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994); George Schöpflin, “The Political Traditions of Eastern Europe” *Daedalus* 119, no. 1 (1990): 55–90. For a criticism of this position, see Anastassios Anastassiadis and Nathalie Clayer, eds., *Society, Politics and State-Formation in South-Eastern Europe during the 19th century* (Athens: Alpha Bank Historical Archives, 2011), 11–32 and Bojan Bilić, “A concept that is everything and nothing: Why not to study (post)Yugoslav anti-war and peace activism from a civil society perspective,” *Sociologija* 53, no. 3 (2011): 297–322.
- 13 For a global history of voluntary associations, see in particular Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Civil Society: 1750–1914* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

In a region where Muslim women remained largely illiterate, and therefore first-person literature written by them was very rare, this book focuses on voluntary associations for a specific reason. As has already been noted by scholars who have taken this subject seriously, such as French historian Maurice Agulhon,<sup>14</sup> associations are graphomaniac actors who leave behind a plethora of written traces. At least when they have survived the injuries of time, turmoil and war, associations' archival and printed sources represent a largely unexploited goldmine of information where gender historians can hope to discover the names, choices and ideas of the Muslim women who navigated the decades between the empire(s) and the nation-state. What I am particularly interested in understanding is how Muslim women potentially used—if at all—the new space of possibilities opened up by voluntary work in post-Ottoman Bosnia, and later Yugoslavia, be this in philanthropic, cultural, feminist or revivalist associations. How did they engage in existing associational networks? Did they establish their own associations? How did they legitimize volunteering? What really interests me here is gaining a glimpse, through the associational prism, of Muslim women in their relationships with the rest of society and how that changed over time. How did they engage in voluntary activities that challenged, at least to some extent, the prescribed separation between men and women, but also between Muslims and non-Muslims, still common in the Bosnian Muslim urban strata? What kinds of gendered divisions were established around their associational labor? How was the line separating men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims, moved, renegotiated and contested? How did Muslim women manage to gain access to the public space, and how did they learn to interact with the state and religious institutions? Whenever possible, this book seeks to reassess Muslim women's "capacity to exercise their will, to determinate the shape of their own lives, and to partake in the shaping of their culture and society"<sup>15</sup>—in a word, to give them back their agency, and get rid once and for all of the Orientalist stereotype portraying them as silenced and oppressed. In a historical period in which virtually every journal dedicated dozens of articles to debating gender relations, usually framed according to the well-known formula *žensko pitanje* (the woman question),

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14 Maurice Agulhon, *Pénitents et Francs-Maçons de l'ancienne Provence* (Paris: Fayard, 1984), i-xiii and 1-20.

15 Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3.

special attention will be assigned to how this debate developed among Bosnian Muslims. What kind of political and cultural references did Muslim intellectuals of both sexes have? Is there any specificity to the domestication of this debate among Bosnian Muslims? How did Muslim women engage in this debate? How did class, age, level of education and religiosity shape their ideas, the circulation of these ideas, and participation in the debates that regularly exploded in the Bosnian, and later Yugoslav, public sphere?

It would be impossible to give a comprehensive image of the multitude of associations that were established in Bosnia in the period from 1878 to 1941. This research has adopted two selection criteria. First, associations in which Muslim women directly took part have been taken into account; as members, donors, sympathizers or beneficiaries (e.g. scholarship holders, students hosted in association dorms, public lecture attendees, etc.). Secondly, the group of associations that engaged with Muslim women and with the Muslim woman question is taken into account here. The information I was able to collect on these associations varied a great deal from one case to another. Many associations will only be given a brief mention in this book, either because they were short-lived or because I was only able to obtain fragmentary information about them. Other associations will make regular appearances throughout this work; the largest organization that can be associated with the pre-1945 period is without a doubt *Gajret* (Effort). Established in Sarajevo in 1903, this association rapidly extended to many other Bosnian towns, and even beyond the province; for example, in the Sandjak of Novi Pazar, Southern Serbia (modern-day Macedonia), and Serbia, especially in Belgrade. Besides its main mission—allocating scholarships to Muslim students of both sexes—the association expanded to a diverse range of other activities: printed journals and pamphlets, recreational and leisure activities, public lessons and literacy courses. As this book will attempt to show, *Gajret* became one of the main forums for Muslim (mostly male) public figures to develop a discourse on the Muslim woman question. Attended only by men in the beginning, during the interwar period the association's doors were also opened to Muslim women.<sup>16</sup> In order to distance themselves from *Gajret*'s openly pro-Serbian and pro-government-

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16 Ibrahim Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta u društvenom životu Muslimana Bosne i Hercegovine: 1903–1941* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1986).

tal stance, other members of the Muslim male elite established *Narodna Uzdanica* (Popular Mainstay) in 1924, with the same goal and structure as their rival association, but with pro-Croatian leanings.<sup>17</sup> Each according to their national alignment, these two Muslim cultural associations systematically cooperated with Croatian and Serbian associations working out of Belgrade and Zagreb. Given their similar structure and agenda—working toward educating the Muslim youth—in this book I refer to these two associations as “Muslim cultural associations.”

Besides these two large-scale Muslim associational networks, a different kind of organization was also developing in Bosnia: philanthropic associations. Usually established at the town level, the main preoccupation of these associations was the care of the urban poor. As was usually the case in both the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, these associations were set up along confessional lines. In some isolated cases, Muslim women chose to establish their own philanthropic associations, such as *Osvitanje* (Dawn) in 1919, based in Sarajevo.<sup>18</sup> However, in most cases, Muslim women participated in philanthropic associations through specific female branches of mixed associations.<sup>19</sup> Unlike cultural associations, in which Muslim and non-Muslim women often worked together in the name of national sisterhood, the confessional homogeneity of these philanthropic associations remained unchallenged. Though Muslim cultural and philanthropic associations remain the principal focus of this book, it will also take a look at the case of *El-Hidaje* (The Right Path), an association established by revivalist Islamic religious scholars in the second half of the 1930s. Before the Second World War, *El-Hidaje* had managed to establish a network of local branches in the principal towns of Bosnia and Serbia. Even though, until the beginning of the war, membership to this association was reserved to men, this association made an original contribution to the debate on post-Ottoman Muslim gender relations, and this is why it has its place in this book.<sup>20</sup>

Muslim associations were not the only institutions where Muslim

17 Ibrahim Kemura, *Značaj i uloga Narodne Uzdanice u društvenom životu bošnjaka: 1923.–1945.* (Sarajevo: Bošnjački Institut, fondacija Adila Zulfikarpašića i Institut za Istoriju u Sarajevu, 2002).

18 Nusret Kujraković, “Osvitanje. Prvo udruženje muslimanki u Bosni i Hercegovini,” *Prilozi Instituta za istoriju*, no. 38 (2009): 145–164.

19 Uzeir Bavčić, *Merhamet (1913–2003)* (Sarajevo: Muslimansko dobrotvorno društvo “Merhamet,” 2003).

20 Muharem Dautović, *Uloga El-Hidaje u društvenom i vjersko-prosvjetnom životu bošnjaka (1936–1945)* (M.A. diss., Faculty of Islamic Sciences Sarajevo, 2005).

women became visible and that took on the Muslim woman question. This research would be severely undermined if it omitted two other poles: the feminist associations and the communist movement which, in particular in the early 1920s and late 1930s, spread their ideas in Yugoslavia, building their networks across different national and confessional groups. As regards the feminists, among the various associations of this kind that became prominent in the Yugoslav public sphere, special attention has been given to *Ženski Pokret* (Women's Movement), an association based in Belgrade that in the aftermath of the Great War expanded to establish sister branches in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As for the communist sympathizers, special attention will be assigned to the ephemeral but vocal groups of Muslim university students in Zagreb and Belgrade, as well as their presence in several associations in Bosnia, thanks especially to the involvement of secondary school students. Even though, as this work will show, Muslim women only exceptionally got close to feminist and communist groups, both groups spoke out loudly and in public about their "Muslim sisters," or the "working Muslim woman"—as they often called them—countering the almost complete monopoly of Muslim men on the discourse that defined the terms of the Muslim woman question.<sup>21</sup>

In research, like in every other domain, to choose is to renounce. Choosing voluntary associations as a privileged site of analysis raises problems and projects new shadows that must be addressed in an Introduction. First of all, in a multiconfessional society such as that of Bosnia, where the borders of different religious communities were far from impermeable, how should we identify Muslim women? Muslim given names and surnames were for me primary indicators in considering someone as sociologically Muslim, even if it this does not necessarily tell us anything about their degree of personal religious feeling and practice. Although this method can be most effective, this is not always the case, and sometimes people used names and surnames that are common to both Muslim and non-Muslims in the region. Even if I of course did my best to double-check all of the information I used to support my research, there is a thin margin of error, especially for names which are mentioned in the sources only once. Besides this general caveat, choosing

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21 Thomas A. Emmert, "Ženski Pokret: The Feminist Movement in Serbia in the 1920s," in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 33–50.

to work on voluntary associations also necessarily pushes other segments of Yugoslav society to the background. First of all, associations were an eminently urban and middle-class phenomenon; they involved mostly teachers, students, white-collar workers, sometimes landowners and shopkeepers of both sexes, distinguished from the rest of the population by their level of education, working conditions and consumer habits.<sup>22</sup> Muslim women who belonged to the small but growing working class, and especially the peasantry (80% of the Yugoslav population on the eve of the Second World War) will remain in the very background of this book. The same is true for Muslim women of non-Slavic origin, in particular those who belonged to the minorities of Turkish- and Roma-speaking populations, and Slavic-speaking Muslims living outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who are mentioned only episodically and fall outside of the perimeter of this research. Last but not least, it is worth recalling that associational sources do not allow us to reconstruct Muslim women's presence in the public space in its entirety. There was doubtless much more going on in these women's lives than what can be gleaned from written and visual archives. In particular, informal, oral interactions, which generally did not enter into the records, no doubt represented a significant segment of their experience, and remains terra incognita, and will probably remain that way.

### MORE HORSES THAN WOMEN, STILL

Before moving on to a description of the book's structure, it seems necessary to say a few more words about the achievements and gaps in the existing research on Muslim women at the turn of the century. My hypothesis here is that the history of Bosnian (and even Yugoslav) Muslim women in the first decades of the post-Ottoman period is located in a sort of blind spot between different historical—and political—discourses.

After the Second World War, the dominant Yugoslav historical narrative considered the National Liberation to be the “year zero” of Muslim women's access to the public space. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia, and more

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22 A. Ricardo López and Barbara Weinstein, eds., *The Making of the Middle Class: Toward a Transnational History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 1–28, 107–20; Jürgen Kocka, ed., *Les Bourgeoisies européennes au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Belin, 1996) and Pamela M. Pilbeam, *The Middle Classes in Europe: 1789–1914 France, Germany, Italy and Russia* (Basingstoke and London: MacMillan, 1990), 1–22.

particularly the *Antifašistički front žena* (Women's Antifascist Front, an organization established in December 1942), represented the driving forces of this emancipatory process. According to the official narrative, emancipation was a three-step process: Muslim women's participation in the War of National Liberation, women obtaining the right to vote, and the banning of the veil by the newly established federated socialist republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina on September 28, 1950.<sup>23</sup> As had already happened in other countries during the interwar period, especially in the Soviet Union, the public ceremonies in which Muslim women publicly abandoned the headscarf became symbolic of the end of the timeless patriarchal oppression of Muslim women, and at the same time symbolic of the Socialist palingenesis of the whole society (see figures 2 and 3).<sup>24</sup>

All that had happened "before" this moment is therefore often downplayed, even though groundbreaking research, such as Vera Erlich's work on Yugoslav rural families in the 1930s,<sup>25</sup> has pointed out that, even before 1945, a deep and ongoing transformation in gender relations had been taking place. Examples of this kind of dominant socialist narrative are abundant. "The Fighting Path of the Yugoslav Woman", a book published in Belgrade in 1972 and written to celebrate the role of women in the War of National Liberation, briefly recognized some changes in Muslim women's lives during the interwar period: access to voluntary associations, the development of a debate on Muslim femininity, the transformation of veiling practices, etc. "In any case," the author writes, "the difficult conditions for women, as workers, could not be improved through appeals, petitions and philanthropic initiatives. The roots [of their terrible condition] went deeper, and for this reason a transformation in women's lives could only be brought about through their integration into the revolutionary workers' movement and into the fight against the capitalist order."<sup>26</sup> The message is clear; there was no space for the emancipation of Muslim women before, and outside

23 On this topic, see in particular Senija Milišić, *Emancipacija muslimanske žene u Bosni i Hercegovini nakon oslobođenja (1947–1952)* (M.A. diss., University of Sarajevo, 1986).

24 For a comparative approach to anti-veiling campaigns, see in particular Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World: Gender, Modernism and the Politics of Dress* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

25 Vera S. Erlich, *Family in Transition: A Study of 300 Yugoslav Villages* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966).

26 Dragutin Kosorić, ed., *Borbena put žena Jugoslavije* (Belgrade: Leksikografski zavod "Sveznanje," 1972), 45.





Figures 2 and 3: Muslim women publicly abandoning the headscarf at the 1948 *Antifašistički front žena* Conference.

Source: MGS, photography collection.

of, the path traced by the Communist Party. Celia Hawkesworth, who almost two decades ago contributed her groundbreaking work to the study of female public writing in Serbia and Bosnia, summarizes this process very well, stating that “the first forty years of the twentieth century represent a real ‘golden age’ for women throughout the region, but this was virtually forgotten in the aftermath of the Second World War as a result of the distorting effects of communist ideology.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Celia Hawkesworth, *Voices in the Shadows: Women and Verbal Art in Serbia and Bosnia* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), 123.

Nonetheless, even the most orthodox socialist Yugoslav history book has its merits and thus has a place in the building of this book. Eager to show how men and women of every ethno-national group had contributed to the establishment of the socialist state, in each federal republic the Institute of the History of the Worker's Movement collected information on a number of women who had distinguished themselves in the War of National Liberation. These women had fought in the war alongside their male counterparts, in many cases losing their lives against Axis and *ustaša* forces. According to some estimates, around 13% of war combatants were women, of which 93% entered the socialist pantheon after the war, having received the Order of National Hero, as opposed to 1,241 men (or 7.03% of combatants).<sup>28</sup> Often based on archival research and interviews, these books are an opportunity to explore the lives of several Muslim women, to reconstruct their educational and social backgrounds in the 1930s, and the different ways in which they became a part of communist organizations. A good example of these *žene-heroji*, or “women heroes”—as they are called in a 1967 book<sup>29</sup>—is Vahida Maglajlić, a Muslim from Banja Luka who, after Yugoslavia was invaded by the Axis powers in April 1941, entered the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and joined the growing Partisan resistance movement. Vahida, who in the 1930s played an important role in different city associations, was killed by German troops. As the only Bosnian Muslim woman to receive the Order of National Hero, her name is still engraved on stone monuments and given to kindergartens and parks.<sup>30</sup>

Since the late 1970s, the study of women in Yugoslavia has undergone important changes. This new approach to writing women's history is emblematic of a “shift,” according to Ivana Pantelić and Biljana Dojčinović, “from the socialist understanding of feminism, regulated by the state, toward a more individual and theoretical approach”<sup>31</sup> that has made its way into Yugoslavia. Women historians such as Jovanka Kecman, Lydia Sklevicky and

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28 For a discussion on these figures, see Ivana Pantelić, “Yugoslav Female Partisans in World War II,” *Cahiers balkaniques* 41 (2013): 239–50.

29 *Žene heroji* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1967), or “Women Heroes,” is the title of a book by Mila Beoković that focuses on the lives of nine women who died in the National Liberation War.

30 Barbara Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia: 1941–1945* (Denver: Arden Press, 1990) and Marko Attila Hoare, *Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 66.

31 Ivana Pantelić and Biljana Dojčinović, “Women's and Gender History: The Case of Serbia,” *Aspasia* 6 (2012): 136.

Neda Božinović were the main agents of this significant change in historical research, nourished and influenced by the discipline's evolutions at a transnational level. As Biljana Kašić said of Sklevicky's work, "one of [the] motivations for carrying out this research was to decode the demagogy at work in revolutionary ideology and analyze the gap between the declarative and the real, particularly the proclaimed emancipation of women alongside the maintenance of patriarchal structures in socialist Yugoslavia."<sup>32</sup> In their pioneering work, these women historians expanded their research to cover what was called at the time "bourgeois organizations," that is middle class women's/feminist voluntary associations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>33</sup> In the following decades, and especially after the end of the Yugoslav federation, new historians expanded this research, introduced new methodological approaches and considerably broadened our knowledge of women and gender history in the Yugoslav region.<sup>34</sup> However, this scholarship only marginally included Muslim women. Mostly operating from the main academic centers of the country—Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana—these researchers mainly focused on the country's northern, post-Habsburg regions—Slovenia, Serbia, Vojvodina, and Croatia. The post-Ottoman south—Macedonia, Bosnia, and Kosovo—where the majority of Muslims historically lived, remained at the very margins of this research effort.<sup>35</sup> As a result, Muslim women were only ever included in this narrative incidentally, mostly mentioned as the object of (unrealized) emancipation by their "unequal sisters," i.e. non-Muslim female/feminist activists. From the beginning of the 1980s, some articles seemed to announce a rise in interest specifically for Bosnian Muslim women in post-Ottoman times, in particular for

32 Biljana Kašić, "Sklevicky, Lydia (1952–1990)," in *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms*, 517.

33 Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 5; Neda Božinović, *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji u XIX i XX veku* (Belgrade: Žene u crnom & Devedeset Četvrta, 1996); Lydia Sklevicky, "Karakteristike organiziranog djelovanja žena u Jugoslaviji u razdoblju do Drugog svjetskog rata", *Polja: časopis za kulturu, umetnost i društvena pitanja* 30, no. 308 (1984): 415–7 and 30, no. 309 (1984): 454–6 and Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi* (Zagreb: Ženska infoteka, 1996).

34 Miroslav Jovanović and Slobodan Naumović, eds., *Gender Relations in South Eastern Europe: Historical Perspective in Womanhood and Manhood in the 19th and 20th Century* (Belgrade: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 2002); Svetlana Stefanović, *Žensko pitanje u beogradskoj štampi i periodici (1918–1941)* (M.A. diss., University of Belgrade, 2000); Magdalena Koh, *Kada sazremo kao kultura: stvaralaštvo srpskih spisateljica na početku XX veka: (kanon - žanr - rod)* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2012).

35 For an overview of the research, Sabina Žnidaršič Žagar and Nina Vodopivec, "Searching for Women's and Gender History in Slovenia," *Aspasia* 6 (2012): 156–65; Biljana Kašić and Sandra Prlenda, "Women's History in Croatia: Displaced and Unhomed," *Aspasia* 7 (2013): 154–62.

their relationship with voluntary associations and their access to education and employment. These articles started to explore the debates around the veil developing during the interwar period, which involved both secular and religious notables.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, this interest turned out to be only temporary, and the articles produced were never followed by any kind of systematic research. The silence on this subject thus only served to implicitly confirm the idea that Muslim women had remained in the shadow of a timeless patriarchal oppression, obscurantism and passivity up to the establishment of the Socialist State.

The developments that at least to some extent affected the way in which Muslim women's experiences were approached did not only occur within the confines of Yugoslav Women's History. Islamic studies, which during the 1980s had benefitted from significant improvements both in Yugoslavia and abroad, played a crucial role in all of this. In 1986, the Paris-based orientalist Alexandre Popovic published *L'Islam balkanique* (Balkan Islam), a book that for decades would be an important milestone in studies on post-Ottoman Balkan Muslims.<sup>37</sup> The result of at least a decade of research, this work was the first to comprehensively deal with the patchwork of Muslim populations of Southeastern Europe, at that time all but forgotten by Western scholarship, as was the case for Muslims living in Socialist countries.<sup>38</sup> Popovic's book, and his work more in general, gave for the first time a critical overview of the historical trajectories of the Muslim populations in this part of Europe, of the evolution of their principal community institutions—schools, sharia courts, pious endowments, hierarchies of religious officials, etc.—and of their integration into the Balkan states. His research provided the groundwork for several generations of scholars, profoundly expanding

36 Senija Penava, "Izvori i literatura o problemima emancipacije muslimanske žene u Bosni i Hercegovini," *Prilozi Instituta za Istoriju* 18 (1981): 273–84; Senija Milišić, "O pitanju emancipacije muslimanske žene u Bosni i Hercegovini," *Prilozi Instituta za istoriju* 28 (1999): 225–241; Ljiljana Beljakašić-Hadžidedić, "Učešće muslimanskih žena u tradicionalnim privrednim djelatnostima u Sarajevu krajem XIX i početkom XX vijeka," in *Prilozi historiji Sarajeva. Radovi sa znanstvenog simpozija pola milenija Sarajeva*, ed. Dževad Juzbašić (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju and Orijentalni institut, 1997), 301–14. For an overview of the body of research on women's and gender history in Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Gorana Mlinarević and Lamija Kosović, "Women's Movements and Gender Studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Aspasia* 5 (2011): 129–38.

37 Alexandre Popovic, *L'Islam balkanique: Les Musulmans du sud-est européen dans la période post-ottomane* (Berlin and Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986).

38 On the notion of "forgotten Muslims," see Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejey, *Les Musulmans oubliés: L'Islam en Union soviétique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1981), 5.

our knowledge of Balkan Muslims, and in some cases dealt with women and gender issues, notably the question of the veil.

While the Yugoslav state was entering its final stages and beginning to disintegrate, in Bosnia there was a growing interest for the intellectual history of Bosnian Muslims, and for Islamic studies in general. Starting in the early 1990s, scholars such as Fikret Karčić and Enes Karić explored the debates developing within the Muslim community in post-Ottoman times, including as part of their analysis the development of the so-called “Muslim woman question.” However, this line of enquiry primarily explored the intellectual history of prominent male Muslim figures since the late Ottoman period, and mobilized Muslim women only insofar as they were symbolic figures in the discursive battlefield among these men, be they religious or secular. Scarce interest, or none at all, has been lent to “real” Muslim women and their role in the debate. Nevertheless, decades later this body of research remains of vital importance for those working on the cultural evolution of Bosnian Muslims, and has huge merits. First of all it has reappraised, at least implicitly, the importance of gender relations in post-Ottoman Muslim history, and the extent to which the debate about gender was indeed a political issue. Secondly, in stressing the importance of the relationship between the Muslim intellectuals of Bosnia and Yugoslavia, and their fellow-Muslims in the Middle East, this research has also begun to show that debating gender issues was an eminently transnational venture.<sup>39</sup> Thirdly, it has shed light on the veil debate, a topic that, as stated by Ina Merdjanova, “can become a battleground on which power struggles are waged, and power relations at different levels are articulated and reshaped: between Muslims and the state, on the one hand, and among Muslims themselves, on the other.”<sup>40</sup>

The “discovery” of Balkan Muslims, fostered by Islamic Studies both from within and from outside of the Yugoslav region, was rapidly cast into the limelight in the blaze of Yugoslavia’s collapse, a process that in Bosnia and Herzegovina took the form of a bloody war (1992–95). During the conflict and in the aftermath, several books were published in English on the

39 Fikret Karčić, *Društveno-pravni aspekt islamskog reformizma: pokret za reformu šerijatskog prava i njegov odjek u Jugoslaviji u prvoj polovini XX vijeka* (Sarajevo: Islamski teološki fakultet, 1990), Fikret Karčić, *The Bosniaks and the Challenges of Modernity* (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 1999), Enes Karić, *Prilozi za povijest islamskog mišljenja u Bosni i Hercegovini XX stoljeća* (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 2004), Šaćir Filandra, *Bošnjaci i moderna: humanistička misao Bošnjaka od polovine XIX do polovine XX stoljeća* (Sarajevo: Bosanski Kulturni Centar, 1996).

40 Merdjanova, *Rediscovering the Umma*, 94.

history of Bosnian Muslims. The primary aim of these publications was to understand and explain the conflict for an international readership that was entirely unfamiliar with this region.<sup>41</sup> In consequence of the atrocious images coming out of Sarajevo, Srebrenica and many other places completely unknown to the wider public until that moment, people suddenly became aware of Bosnian Muslims—or to be more precise, of Bosniaks (*Bošnjaci*), the national name officially adopted by them in 1993, at the height of the war. Many people, including myself, at that time a teenager, discovered through TV images of half-destroyed minarets that Muslims were not a presence living somewhere beyond the European continent, or recent arrivals who had emigrated for economic reasons. As a matter of fact, there were Muslim populations that had been living on European soil for centuries. Awareness about Bosnian Muslim women increased; one need only search for “Bosnian Muslim Women” in the catalogues of leading libraries across the world, or even on the Internet, to see the impressive number of texts that have been produced on gender violence and rape as a weapon of war.<sup>42</sup> This outpouring of research, also reinforced by NGOs and reports from international organizations (the UN and the European Union in particular), dealt with Muslim women mostly as victims of physical, psychological and symbolic violence. As this scholarship has widely shown, women became the embodiment of different ethnic communities; “our women” versus “their women,” as put by an article from 1995.<sup>43</sup> The activism of Muslim women during and after the war remained unexplored. Recent scholarship is trying to reappraise this period and the role of Muslim women in it, to challenge the narrative of victimhood, often gendered, mobilized by all of the political actors of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to give back to Muslim women their agency.<sup>44</sup>

Invisibilized, marginalized, victimized; according to this line of reasoning, it seems that the story of Bosnian Muslim women is a perfect case of

41 Among the many texts that were published during and in the aftermath of the war in Bosnia, see especially Mark Pinson, ed., *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina: Their Historic Development from the Middle Ages to the Dissolution of Yugoslavia*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Francine Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims: Denial of a Nation* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

42 Stefano Petrunaro, *Balcani: Una storia di violenza?* (Roma: Carocci, 2012), 121–34.

43 Julie Mostov, “‘Our Women’/‘Their Women’: Symbolic Boundaries, Territorial Markers, and Violence in the Balkans,” *Peace and Change* 20, no. 4 (October 1995): 515–29.

44 On this topic, see in particular Elissa Helms, *Innocence and Victimhood: Gender, Nation, and Women’s Activism in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013) and Zilka Spahić Šiljak, *Shining Humanity: Life Stories of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

“female invisibility in history.”<sup>45</sup> Bosnia’s transition into post-socialism not only brought about the return of a patriarchal society—a circumstance that surely does not favor gender-sensitive approaches—but also instilled an *obsession* for ethnicity and nationality in scholarly research, which for years has obscured other avenues for exploration. At first sight, it would seem that what Lydia Sklevicky said in 1989 about women in Yugoslav historical research is still true, that there were “more horses than women,”<sup>46</sup> at least for Muslims. Luckily, on closer inspection it becomes evident that this is no longer the case. In the last few years, a growing number of scholars have focused on the pre-1941 experiences of Bosnian Muslim women. What is so interesting is that they are only rarely professional historians; they mostly come from gender studies backgrounds, or are sociology, literature, and art history graduates. In many cases, they write from the margins of their academic field, and they dedicate an MA thesis to this topic before moving on to different professional experiences. The researchers are—it probably goes without saying—mostly women: students, archivists, and NGO activists that, thanks to funding from abroad, have in many cases been able to do original archival research. The topics addressed by them are numerous: representations in visual art and literature,<sup>47</sup> Muslim women and philanthropy,<sup>48</sup> or education and teaching,<sup>49</sup> to cite a few. Some of these texts work at a local level, exploring the history of women in a specific town or locality.<sup>50</sup> Oth-

45 On the issue of (in)visibility, see in particular Joan W. Scott, “The Problem of Visibility,” in *Retrieving Women’s History: Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society*, ed. Jay Kleinberg (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1988), 5–29.

46 Lydia Sklevicky, “More Horses than Women. On the Difficulties of Founding Women’s History in Yugoslavia,” *Gender and History* 1, no. 1 (1989): 68–73.

47 Jelena Petrović, “Representations: Fiction, Modern: Southeast Europe,” in *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*, Brill, 2009, DOI: 10.1163/1872-5309\_ewic\_EWICCOM\_0624d and Sarita Vujković, *U građanskom ogledalu: Identiteti žena bosanskohercegovačke građanske kulture (1878. – 1941.)* (Banja Luka and Belgrade: Muzej savremene umjetnosti Republike Srpske i Kulturni centar Beograd, 2009).

48 On Muslim female philanthropy, Kerima Filan, “Women Founders of Pious Endowments in Ottoman Bosnia,” in *Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture and History*, eds. Amila Buturović and Irvin Cemil Schick (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 99–126.

49 Mina Kujović, “Jedna zaboravljena učiteljica: Hasnija Berberović,” *Grada Arhiva Bosne i Hercegovine* 1 (2009): 179–86; and Mina Kujović, “Ko su bile prve nastavnice u Muslimanskoj osnovnoj i višoj djevojačkoj narodnoj školi u Sarajevu (1894.–1918.)” *Novi Muallim* 6, no. 21 (1426/2005): 48–55. See also Remzija Hurić-Bećirović, *Školovanje muslimanki u Bosni i Hercegovini pod austrougarskom vlašću* (M.A. diss., Faculty of Islamic Science, Sarajevo, 2010).

50 Three volumes—two of them written with the support of NGOs—have started to explore the history of women and gender in the regions of Semberija, Bratunac (Eastern Bosnia) and Banja Luka (Northern Bosnia): Tanja Lazić, Ljubinka Vukašinić and Radmila Žigić, eds., *Žene u istoriji Semberije* (Bijeljina: Organizacija žena Lara, 2012); Mensura Mustafić, *Žene u vremenu, Donne nel tempo* (Sarajevo: Forum

ers deal with the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina, situated in the broader Yugoslav region.<sup>51</sup> A few months before the publication of this book, a new book by Adnan Jahić on the Muslim woman question in post-Ottoman Bosnia offered a rich overview of the gender politics of Bosnian Islamic religious institutions, and deeply enriched our knowledge on this topic.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, new scholarship has allowed us to establish what happened to Muslim women in the Yugoslav region in the broader context of the Balkans, and the post-Ottoman and post-Habsburg regions.<sup>53</sup>

### THE BOOK'S STRUCTURE

This book is structured in seven parts, organized according to chronological and thematic criteria. The first two chapters examine the first forty years of post-Ottoman Bosnia, when the region became a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After focusing on the Habsburg public sphere's representations of Bosnia, the first chapter will take stock of Vienna's educational policies implemented in the region, as well as the parallel development of a local associational culture. Special attention will be given to the role and position of Muslim women, and how some of them succeeded in navigating between the expectations of Bosnian Muslim society, those of the Habsburg authorities, and their own, to build a new kind of cultural capital altogether. In continuation with this line of reasoning, Chapter Two will address the debate on the Muslim woman question that was taking shape in Bosnia, and more

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žena Bratunac, 2010); Draga Gajić, *Život i stvaralaštvo žena Banjaluke* (Banja Luka: Grafopapir, 2013). Recently, a book has summarized this body of research: Jasmina Čaušević, ed., *Women Documented: Women and Public Life in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 20th Century* (Sarajevo: Sarajevo Open Centre, 2014). For an extended version of the latter work in Bosnian, see Jasmina Čaušević, ed., *Zabilježene: Žene i javni život Bosne i Hercegovine u 20. vijeku: Drugo, dopunjeno i izmijenjeno izdanje* (Sarajevo: Sarajevski Otvoreni Centar, 2014).

- 51 See in particular Nusret Kujraković, *Žensko pitanje i socijalni položaj bošnjakinje u Bosni i Hercegovini između dva svjetska rata* (M.A. diss., University of Sarajevo, 2008). This thesis is very well documented, and a precious resource for exploring the evolution of Muslim gender relations in interwar Bosnia. For women's movements, see also the work of the sociologist Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović, *Ženski pokret u Bosni i Hercegovini: artikulacija jedne kontrakulture* (Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar and Fondacija Cure, 2013), in particular pages 57–93.
- 52 Adnan Jahić, *Muslimansko žensko pitanje u Bosni i Hercegovini 1908–1950* (Zagreb: Bošnjačka nacionalna zajednica za Grad Zagreb i Zagrebačku županiju, Naučnoistraživački institut Ibn Sina Sarajevo, Gradski ured za obrazovanje, kulturu i sport Grada Zagreba, 2017).
- 53 Karl Kaser, *Patriarchy after patriarchy: gender relations in Turkey and in the Balkans, 1500–2000* (Berlin and Wien: LIT, 2008), Agatha Schwartz, ed., *Gender and Modernity in Central Europe: The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its Legacy* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010).



broadly in the Yugoslav region on the eve of the twentieth century. Special attention is dedicated to the transnational circulation of people and ideas that shaped this debate, involving both Europe and the Middle East, and on the specific role of the thin cohort of women who managed to play a part in it. These first two chapters highlight one of the major arguments of this book: that debating appropriate Muslim gender relations was a way to discuss the fate of the Muslim community as a whole, in the post-Ottoman, European context.

In the political and social turmoil that accompanied the end of the Great War and the creation of the first Yugoslavia, there was a transformation in Muslim women's engagement in the public space. They did not simply limit themselves to written contributions in the press, or to support for associations in the form of donations, as they had done up until that point; they also engaged in volunteering, becoming physically visible in the Bosnian and gradually Yugoslav public space, in cities and in villages. For some of them, this open challenge to the rules of sexual and confessional segregation that were still being enforced at that time was also accompanied by a renegotiation, and sometimes the complete abandonment, of the veiling practice. Chapter Three addresses this crucial shift, focusing in particular on the presence of Muslim women in cultural, philanthropic and feminist associations, in Bosnia but also in the two main university cities of the country, Zagreb and Belgrade. This new situation required both men and women to find new words and ideas to describe and address it; Chapter Four thus looks at the radical reconfiguration of the Muslim woman question in the associational press during the 1920s and 1930s. If, until the Great War, discussions on this topic essentially revolved around the contents of, spaces for and limits of female education, after 1918 many new issues were added to the debate, such as the place of Muslim women in the national community. Even if different references were mobilized by the activists of these associations, the written words they produced had one strong common theme: that of fostering a growing inclusion of Muslim women in the forming Yugoslav social fabric. Here again, the idea that the Muslim population was living as a backward minority in Europe, and for that reason in need of change and progress, structured the whole debate. However, in their mission to promote their competing ideas of appropriate post-Ottoman gender rules, associations did not uniquely limit themselves to putting pen to paper, they

actively strove to put these ideas into practice. Chapter Five thus focusses on the gender politics implemented by the associations, including the establishment of vocational schools and student dorms, workshops, literacy courses, scholarship etc., and how these measures were modulated according to class variables. Among these initiatives, special attention will be given to the festive culture that the associations cultivated in the interwar years. As a matter of fact, Muslim women invested a great deal of time and energy in this apparently un-political domain of activity, using it to increase their individual and collective responsibility and visibility. For this reason, Chapter Six is dedicated to an analysis of associational festivities as a tool for the empowerment of Muslim women.

The last chapter of this book will focus on the second half of the 1930s, a short time lapse in which several major changes occurred. Shaped by radical shifts happening both in Europe and the Middle East, two new political forces gained visibility in Muslim and Yugoslav society: the communists and the Islamic revivalists. Despite taking up starkly opposing positions on virtually every issue on their agenda, these political forces had at least two points in common: they considered Muslim women to play a crucial role in their projects of social transformation; and they assigned to the voluntary association, until then considered to be a bourgeois, progressive and intrinsically liberal institution, the crucial role of spreading their ideas to the Muslim population. For this reason, Chapter Seven compares the approaches and discourses of these two political forces, and more precisely looks at how, on the eve of the Second World War, they proposed new alternatives to the political and social crisis shaking Yugoslavia and Europe.



# CHAPTER 1

## AT THE MARGINS OF THE HABSBURG CIVILIZING MISSION



In the early 1980s, when Senija Milišić outlined a research agenda for, as she put it, “the emancipation of Muslim women in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” she recommended that future generations of historians begin their inquiries in 1878.<sup>1</sup> Even if recent scholarship has shown that the Ottoman period was also a time of deep change in the lives of Bosnian women,<sup>2</sup> her suggestion has not lost its relevance. As a matter of fact, the shift from Ottoman to Habsburg rule had major consequences for Bosnia, affecting every domain of political, economic and cultural life. Several generations of historians have drawn up detailed anatomies of the four decades of Habsburg rule in Bosnia. Nevertheless, there are few pages dedicated to the consequences of this transition for Muslim women, and on how they were able to navigate such a transition. The first of two dedicated to the Habsburg period, this chapter will focus on three points. First of all, it addresses Bosnia’s place in the Habsburg Empire, both within its administrative machinery and its imaginary. Secondly, the chapter will address the impact of Vienna’s educational policies on the Muslim female population and how, despite enormous difficulties, by the eve of the Great War they had managed to produce a thin cohort of Muslim women educated according to Habsburg standards. Finally, after the state school, the chapter will focus on another institution deeply associated with the Habsburg period, and which lies at

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1 Senija Penava [Milišić], “Izvori i literatura,” 273–84.

2 See for instance Hana Younis, *Daša Jelić: Pogled u život jedne žene u posljednjim decenijama osmanske uprave u Sarajevu* (Belgrade: Everest Media, 2016) and other articles by the same author.

the heart of this book: the voluntary association. Special attention will be devoted to the (albeit limited) role of Muslim women within it.

### A QUASI-COLONIAL ADVENTURE

1878 is the year usually associated with the end of the Ottoman era in Bosnia, a region that since the end of the seventeenth century had marked the northern border of the Sultan's domains in Europe. That year, the Great Powers found themselves up against one of the most complex chapters of the Eastern Crisis. Three years earlier, a revolt started by Christian peasants in Herzegovina had progressively extended to other areas of Rumelia, and been harshly repressed by Ottoman troops.<sup>3</sup> Invoking its role as protector of the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire, in 1877 the Tsarist Empire declared war on Istanbul, and rapidly won. The Russo-Ottoman war led to the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano (March 3, 1878), in which Istanbul was forced to recognize the constitution of an autonomous Principality of Bulgaria extending from the Danube to the Aegean Sea. Two other political entities already substantially under the control of, and close to the Tsarist Empire, Serbia and Montenegro, were recognized as independent states. Alarmed by the rapid advances of Russian influence in the Balkan peninsula, Vienna and London called for an international congress in Berlin (June 13–July 13 1878), which would radically redefine the relationship between the rival empires. The congress completely redrew the political map of Southeastern Europe; not only was the “Great Bulgaria” that had been established by the Treaty of San Stefano reduced by half, but the Habsburg Empire also received the right to occupy and administer the Ottoman province of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This occupation was not supposed to undermine Ottoman sovereignty, and was explicitly intended to be provisional, with the limited aim of restoring peace and order. For Vienna, the occupation of Bosnia was primarily a measure that aimed to curb the dynamism of the young Serbian state; defining itself as the “Piedmont of the Balkans,” Serbia was at that time actively nurturing plans to unify the South Slavs under a common state. Last but not least, the occupation of Bosnia was

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3 For more information on the causes of the 1875 uprising, see Milorad Ekmečić, *Ustanak u Bosni 1875-1878* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1973).

seen in Vienna as a positive move, in the perspective of further penetration into Southeastern Europe—an option that was not to be excluded, given the state of crisis of the Ottoman Empire, presumed irreversible. With these aims in mind, in the summer of 1878 Habsburg troops entered the province, and within three months, after overcoming a few pockets of resistance, had occupied the territory.<sup>4</sup>

Though of strategic advantage, Bosnia—a somewhat triangular-shaped region covering 50,000 square kilometers—had rather poor spoils to offer. With the exception of the fertile northern plains along the Sava River and the far more arid expanses of Herzegovina, the province was essentially a mountainous forested region. Agriculture, in which the vast majority of the population worked, went little beyond subsistence farming. Except for timber and some mineral resources (the eastern region, particularly around Tuzla and Srebrenica, was rich in silver and salt deposits) Bosnia did not have much economic appeal.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, from an ethno-demographic standpoint the province was a veritable headache. Having wavered for centuries between the spiritual authority of Rome and Constantinople, and ultimately conquered by the Ottomans in 1463, the people of Bosnia were distributed across four main religious groups. According to the region's first population census, conducted by the freshly instated authorities after occupation, the vast majority of the population (approximately 43%, or 571,250 people) were Orthodox Christians, followed by Muslims (38%, or 448,613 people), then Catholics (19%, or 209,391 people) and finally other smaller groups, in particular Jews.<sup>6</sup> Thus, no religious group made up an absolute majority within the province's population. Additionally, on top of this religious patchwork each group was often further divided into socio-economic groups; as had already become evident during the 1875 uprising, the majority of landowning families were Muslim, while the peasants that worked their land were mostly Christians, particularly Orthodox. Any attempt to transform agrarian society therefore ran the risk of shifting the careful balance between the different ethnic groups.

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4 Arthur J. May, *The Hapsburg Monarchy: 1867–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 130–3.

5 Peter F. Sugar, *Industrialization of Bosnia-Herzegovina: 1878–1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963).

6 Mustafa Imamović, *Pravni položaj i unutrašnje-politički razvitak Bosne i Hercegovine od 1878. do 1914* (Sarajevo: Magistrat, 2007), 123.

The history of the four decades of Habsburg rule over Bosnia (1878–1918) have been approached in very different ways throughout the twentieth century. Some Yugoslav historians considered the region to have been conquered essentially for imperial designs, an attempt to curb the “national awakening” of the Balkan peoples. Conversely, other historians saw the Habsburg period as a true golden age of unprecedented economic, social and cultural development.<sup>7</sup> More recently, a growing number of scholars have asked whether Habsburg rule over Bosnia could be considered to have been a colonial endeavor. Over the past few decades more and more scholars have referred to the Empire’s administration over the region as “colonialism,” “Habsburg colonialism,” or “quasi-colonialism,” and compared it to more classic forms of colonialism, such as the territories under French control and the English in the Maghreb, the Middle East and India.<sup>8</sup>

As a matter of fact, several factors make it possible to describe Habsburg rule over Bosnia as some form of colonial venture. The first is surely its problematic status within the Empire’s constitutional architecture. The 1878 occupation threatened to disrupt the fragile balance that had been achieved between the Habsburg crown and the Hungarian aristocracy in 1867, and which had restructured the Empire around two centers. By virtue of this compromise, the Empire had become “Austro-Hungarian,” composed of Cisleithania and the Kingdom of Hungary, both entities endowed with autonomous parliaments and governments but united under the Emperor and a Common Ministerial Council made up of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, War, and Finances. Each part of the Empire fearing that the other half might stand to gain from the annexation of Bosnia, the two parliaments agreed to assign an entirely new status to the province; Bosnia would be neither an

7 For a survey of the different perceptions of the Austro-Hungarian period among Yugoslav historians, see Stijn Vervaeke, “Some Historians from Former Yugoslavia on the Austro-Hungarian Period in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1878–1918): A Reality of Imperialism versus the Golden Years of the Double Eagle?,” *Kakanien Revisited* (2004): 1–5, <http://www.kakanien-revisited.at/beitr/fallstudie/SVervae1.pdf>

8 Among the researchers that have examined the issue, Robert Donia in particular has explored the hypothesis that Bosnia was “Austria-Hungary’s first and only colony,” see Robert J. Donia, “Proximate Colony: Bosnia-Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian Rule,” *Kakanien Revisited* (2007): 1–7, <http://www.kakanien-revisited.at/beitr/fallstudie/RDonia1/>. Historians are far from unanimous in agreeing on using the term “colonialism” to define the forty years of Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia. Particularly noteworthy critics of this interpretation include Robert A. Kann, “Trends Towards Colonialism in the Habsburg Empire, 1878–1918: The Case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1878–1914,” *Russian and Slavic History*, eds. Roger E. Kanet, Don Karl Rowney, and George Edward Orchard (Cambridge, Mass: Slavica, 1977), 164–80; and more recently, Raymond Detrez, “Colonialism in the Balkans: Historic Realities and Contemporary Perceptions,” *Kakanien Revisited* (2002): 1–4, <http://www.kakanien-revisited.at/beitr/theorie/RDetrez1/>.

Austrian nor a Hungarian territory, but instead would become an “imperial land” (*Reichsland*). As a result of taking on this unprecedented status, Bosnia became the only territory of the Habsburg Empire that did not have its own representatives in either of the Empire’s two parliaments, and was therefore the only one to be excluded from the Dual Monarchy’s decision-making—a specificity that, as a matter of fact, recall other more traditional colonial situations. This exceptional constitutional status was maintained throughout the period in which the province was “temporarily occupied,” between 1878 and 1908, as well as after 1908, when Vienna took advantage of the Young Turk revolution to definitively annex Bosnia.<sup>9</sup>

Another factor that has led some historians to speak of a colonized Bosnia has to do with the Habsburgs’ exceptional approach to governing this region. To avoid conflict between the two halves of the Empire, the region’s administration fell directly upon the Common Ministerial Council, though in practice only the Ministry of Finance was involved. The Provincial Government (*Landesregierung* in German, or *Zemaljska vlada* in Serbo-Croatian) was established in 1878, with its headquarters in Sarajevo, directly under the authority of the Ministry of Finance. Between 1882 and 1912 a high-ranking military officer (*Landesschef*) was placed at the head of the Provincial Government, alongside a civil servant (*Adlatus*). Just as in traditional colonial situations, Bosnia was thus governed by a hierarchy of officials, where the military maintained a predominant role.<sup>10</sup>

Administering Bosnia turned out to be a delicate task. In 1881, applying military conscription to all Bosnians—a measure that violated the terms agreed upon in Berlin—was enough to trigger an armed uprising in Herzegovina involving both Orthodox and Muslim peasants. The revolt, which took Habsburg troops a month to put down, made it clear to Benjamin Kállay (1839–1903), the new Habsburg Minister of Finance and *de facto* governor of Bosnia and Herzegovina, that the newly-annexed region would need to be handled with care. As a great deal of historical research has already amply made clear, the prevailing idea that lay behind Kállay’s twenty-year rule (1882–1903) was that Bosnia had an eminent vocation for governance

9 Dževad Juzbašić, “O nastanku paralelnog austrijskog i ugarskog zakona o upravljanju Bosnom i Hercegovinom iz 1880. godine,” *Radovi: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine* 32, no. 11 (1967): 163–96.

10 Imamović, *Pravni položaj*, 41–58.



along religious lines. According to this view, and in substantial continuity with the Ottoman era, Bosnian society ought to be composed of four main religious communities: Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim and Jewish. The different communities thus delimited were not in any way considered to be nations or proto-nations, but rather flocks to be administered through two complementary institutions: the aforementioned Provincial Government, and religious institutions. Having strengthened the structure of the former, throughout his term Kállay strove to create Orthodox, Muslim, Catholic and Jewish religious hierarchies loyal to, and closely controlled by, the Empire.<sup>11</sup>

In the Habsburg strategy of Bosnian rule, the different religious segments of the population played very specific roles. The only group to be generally satisfied with the outcome of the 1878 occupation, the Catholics, were considered to be the group most loyal to the Habsburgs, but too socially marginal and too few in number to provide a solid basis for the imperial strategy. Additionally, a number of the Catholic educated elite were becoming more and more attracted to the sirens of Croatian nationalism, whose proponents at that time harbored the dream of reorganizing the Empire on a tripartite basis, i.e. to add a Slavic entity to the existing German and Hungarian halves. On the other hand, the Orthodox relative majority, the most dynamic group from an economic and cultural standpoint, had taken up arms against the 1878 occupation, and continued to look upon the Habsburg presence with a growing hostility. Members of the Bosnian Orthodox elite, religious and secular alike, openly considered their fate to be tied to the neighboring Serbian nation-state, rather than to the multinational Habsburg Empire. In this context of burgeoning nationalisms, the Habsburg authorities turned their interest to the Muslim population in particular. The Muslims, who represented more than a third of the entire population, included a very powerful socio-economic elite composed of small and large landowning families. Earning the support of the large landowning Muslim class (*begovat*) meant tapping into patronage networks that extended across the entire province. The fact that Muslims were particularly strong in urban centers—Mostar, Travnik, and espe-

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11 Tomislav Kraljačić, *Kalajev režim u Bosni i Hercegovini: 1882–1903* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1987), 45–87.

cially in Sarajevo, the new “administrative capital” of Bosnia—facilitated formal and informal contacts between the Muslim elite and the administrators.<sup>12</sup> Finally, in a context in which Orthodox and Catholic populations were increasingly identifying themselves in terms of their national identity, as *Srbi* (Serbs) and *Hrvati* (Croats) respectively, the Muslims seemed to be indifferent to this form of self-identification, for the most part preferring to identify themselves as *muslimani*, “Muslims.” For these reasons, the Habsburg authorities had no reservations about picking out the Muslims as the best group through which they might foster an a-national, pro-imperial patriotism, that could spread from there to the entire Bosnian population.<sup>13</sup>

However, earning the Muslim elite’s trust was not an easy task. Long-standing hostility toward the Habsburg Empire, nourished by at least four centuries of regular military confrontations, had been rekindled by the events of 1878, when Muslim insurgents had been opposed to, and found themselves suddenly repressed by, Habsburg troops. Under the impression that they were a *de facto* minority under the rule of a Christian emperor, part of the Bosnian Muslim population decided to flee Bosnia and to settle in regions still under the Sultan’s effective control, e.g. Rumelia or Anatolia. The stream of *muhadžirs*—“religious refugees,” the term usually given to the Muslims who left regions no longer under Muslim sovereignty—was also soon endorsed by the *Šejh-ul-Islam*, the highest ranking member in the Ottoman Muslim religious hierarchy. According to several estimates, between 1878 and 1918 some 60,000 people left the province.<sup>14</sup> This exodus was particularly alarming for the Habsburg authorities; should the Muslim population be whittled away, the Orthodox population could be lent an absolute majority, thus reinforcing Belgrade’s claims over Bosnia. In order to reassure the Muslim population, Vienna hurried to provide full citizenship rights and religious freedom for the entire Bosnian population. At the Congress of Berlin, Vienna not only guaranteed to fully safeguard Muslim lives

12 Robert J. Donia, *Islam under the Double Eagle: The Muslims of Bosnia and Hercegovina, 1878–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 37–127.

13 Kraljačić, *Kalajev režim*, 45–87.

14 The figure is difficult to determine with certainty, given the mobility of some populations between Bosnia and the rest of the Ottoman Empire, which continued even after 1878. For an overview of the phenomenon of Muslim emigration from Bosnia between 1878 and 1918, see Imamović, *Pravni položaj*, 139; On the emigration of Muslims from the Balkans in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in general, see Alexandre Toumarkine, *Les migrations des populations musulmanes balkaniques en Anatolie (1878–1913)* (Istanbul: Isis, 1995).

and properties, but also promised to protect the fundamental institutions regulating Muslims' everyday lives, e.g. primary and secondary community schools (*mekteb* and *medresa*), pious foundations (*vakuf*) and the courts of Islamic law which had jurisdiction over personal status, family and inheritance rights (*šerijatski sudovi*).<sup>15</sup>

In order to overcome the reticence of the Muslim notables, the Habsburg authorities resorted to a variety of different strategies. A preliminary measure involved postponing *sine die* a radical land reform demanded by the Christian peasants, which would have rapidly brought about the ruin of Muslim landowners.<sup>16</sup> A second tactic was to co-opt the local ruling class, and in particular the members of the landowning families, into state employment. As early as 1880, the Minister of Finance started to appoint "personalities able to exert influence over their flock because of their integrity, education, impeccable conduct, and social status"<sup>17</sup> as civil and religious officials, in exchange for public demonstrations of loyalty. In reaction to the nomination of a *kadija* (judge of Islamic law) for Bosnia and Herzegovina by the *Šejh-ul-islam*, the Habsburg authorities also established a hierarchy of Muslim religious officials which were *de facto* autonomous in respect to Istanbul. Drawing inspiration from Christian institutions, such as the Catholic chapter or the Orthodox consistory, in 1882 Vienna appointed a *Reis-ul-ulema*, a "Chief of the scholars," as part of a four-member *Ulema-medžlis*, or "Assembly of the Scholars," in charge of religious affairs for Bosnian Muslims. After 1883, the administration of the pious foundations was entrusted to a special Commission, composed of Habsburg non-Muslim officials. Though it had appointed Bosnian Muslim notables to these posts the Empire ultimately did not aim to involve the local population in decision-making.<sup>18</sup>

Habsburg efforts to garner support from the local elite encountered some success. Several members of the large landowning families rapidly accepted the lure of administrative positions. Among them, Mustaj beg Fadilpašić

15 Mustafa Imamović, *Bosnia-Herzegovina: Evolution of Its Political and Legal Institutions* (Sarajevo: Magistrat, 2006), 287–9.

16 Husnija Kamberović, *Begovski zemljišni posjedi u Bosni i Hercegovini od 1878. do 1918. godine* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2003), 109–38.

17 Cited in Donia, "Proximate Colony," 3.

18 Fikret Karčić, "The Office of Ra'is al-'Ulamā Among the Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims)," *Intellectual Discourse* 5, no. 2 (1997): 109–20.

(1830–1892) and Esad Kulović (1859–1917), publicly lent their support to the Habsburg Empire and were successively rewarded with the post of mayor of Sarajevo over the next few years. Muslim notables were co-opted into administrative posts on a tremendous scale; in 1895, out of a total of 91 municipalities there were 77 mayors, 11 deputy mayors, and over 300 city councilmen of Muslim faith, all appointed by the government in exchange for their public loyalty.<sup>19</sup> This co-opting tactic even gained ground among the *ulema*, the Islamic learned men. Sarajevo's *muftija* (jurist qualified to give authoritative legal opinions) Mustafa Hilmi Hadžiomerović (1816–1895), after having issued a *fetva* (legal opinion) to legitimize military service in the Habsburg army for Muslim men, was appointed *Reis-ul-ulema* in 1882; Tuzla's *muftija* Mehmed Teufik Azabagić (1838–1893) would later be awarded the same post for having condemned the emigration of *muhadžirs* from an Islamic perspective, and so on.<sup>20</sup> Mehmed *beg* Kapetanović Ljubušak (1839–1902), a member of one of the most important landowning families of Herzegovina, became the most prolific journalist and writer of his generation, contributing to the establishment of a post-Ottoman Muslim public sphere in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1887 and 1896 respectively, Kapetanović published two collections of folk proverbs, “The People’s Wealth” (*Narodno blago*) and “Eastern Wealth” (*Istočno blago*), which were highly popular for decades after their publication. The books, the first to be published by a Bosnian Muslim in the Serbo-Croatian language using Latin script, aimed to popularize the alphabet of the Empire among Muslims.<sup>21</sup> In 1891, Kapetanović founded the influential political journal *Bošnjak* (Bosniak), which brought together several of his contemporaries, Muslim pro-Habsburg intellectuals. According to the Habsburg agenda, the journal’s main objective was the spread of a Bosnian, pro-imperial and areligious patriotism, in opposition to the growing Croatian and Serbian nationalisms.<sup>22</sup>

However, the co-opting policy did not prevent the growth of a faction of the Muslim educated elite openly critical of the Empire. As early as 1885, Muslim landowners from Travnik and Posavina (Northern Bosnia)

19 Imamović, *Pravni položaj*, 143.

20 Imamović, *Pravni položaj*, 144.

21 For a biography of Mehmed *beg* Kapetanović Ljubušak see, among others, Esad Zgodić, *Bosanska politička misao: austrougarsko doba*. (Sarajevo: DES, 2003), 39–68, 305–6.

22 On *Bošnjak* see, among many other works, Emina Memija, “Neostvarene narodnosne ideje “Bošnjak”, prvi politički list Bošnjaka na narodnom jeziku,” *Godišnjak BZK Preporod* 1 (2009): 217–22.

brought forward their first complaints to the Habsburg government, asking for the enforcement of their property rights over their land, and for the autonomous administration of Muslim communal schools and pious foundations. In 1899, Muslim criticism of the Habsburg administration took a new turn. That year, a certain Fata Omanović, a sixteen-year-old girl from Mostar, was either abducted or went secretly on her own initiative to Dalmatia, allegedly to escape an arranged marriage. Once outside Bosnia, the young girl was taken to a monastery and baptized. The incident provoked a wave of intense outrage among the Bosnian Muslim elite. They saw in this act an attack against the entire Muslim population, and proof that Muslim survival in a Christian-led empire was always at risk, despite reassurances from the Habsburg administration. In the wake of this event, the majority of the province's Muslim elite organized into a veritable opposition movement against the Habsburg administration. In 1901, this movement made a strategic alliance with another movement, that of the Serbian-Orthodox elite, in order to make their opposition to the Habsburg authorities more effective. In the face of the constitution of such a hostile Muslim-Serbian coalition, Vienna lost no time; it rapidly adopted strict repressive measures against the movement in Mostar, and meted out a few punishments as an example to the others, culminating with the forced exile of *muftija* Ali Fehmi Džabić (1853–1918), the leader of the movement.<sup>23</sup> Muslim movements for autonomy had clearly pointed out the extent to which Kállay's vision of a docile, apolitical Bosnian society was far from a reality.

### A HABSBERG CIVILIZING MISSION

Around the same years in which the Fata Omanović affair drew visibility to the Muslim traditional elite's sensitivity about the fate, and choices, of Muslim women, the European public began to show a growing interest for Bosnia. Since the mid-1870s, when the Eastern Crisis had hit the front pages of newspapers, the Balkans had been becoming increasingly familiar to larger proportions of the European public. In a few years, thanks to an impressive number of travelogues, articles and novels, what had until then been an ob-

<sup>23</sup> Nusret Šehić, *Borba za vjersku i vakufsko-mearifsku autonomiju i počeci stvaranja prvih političkih organizacija Muslimana u vrijeme austrougarske uprave u Bosni i Hercegovini: naučnoistraživački projekat* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 1978).

scure corner of “Turkey in Europe” became relatively familiar to the attentive European reader.<sup>24</sup> Not surprisingly, most of the ink that was spilt dealt with the subjects living in the core provinces of the Dual Monarchy, who since 1878 had been witnessing the efforts of ‘their’ Empire to rule the province. Of course, the multitude of texts on Bosnia produced and circulated in the Habsburg Empire cannot be reduced to a single narrative; nevertheless, as has been shown by Clemens Ruthner and Stijn Vervaet, apart from differences in political orientations, these texts shared some general ideas. First of all, given the importance of Islam in the country’s urban and social landscape, Habsburg subjects tended to consider this space as more “Eastern” than other parts of Eastern Europe. The visibility of minarets, mosques and people in radically different clothing pushed Habsburg authors to consider Bosnia to be as “Oriental” as other parts of the Muslim world in Asia and Africa. Secondly, that Vienna, as the other European colonial powers were doing overseas, had been vested with the historical mission of bringing “culture” to the Bosnian people. Lastly, that under the tutelage of the Habsburg Empire, Bosnia could leave behind, once and for all, four centuries under the Ottoman yoke, and return again to the path to progress alongside the rest of Europe.<sup>25</sup> Habsburg subjects, who frequently (and proudly!) referred to the newly-conquered province as their own colony, seemed to consider the region’s shift from Ottoman to Habsburg sovereignty, not only as a political, but also as a civilizational change. For instance, while commenting on the 1908 annexation, Croatian political leader Stjepan Radić stated that “Europe had the right and duty to put Bosnia and Herzegovina in order, so as to secure the life and properties of all citizens.”<sup>26</sup>

In the Dual Monarchy, the well-established trope of the civilizing mission was invariably mobilized when commenting on Bosnian rule, an argument that was widely used at that time as a source of legitimation for European imperialism all over the world. References to the “Habsburg man’s

24 For the British case, see Neval Berber, *Unveiling Bosnia-Herzegovina in British Travel Literature (1844–1912)* (Pisa: PLUS-Pisa University Press, 2010), 1–26.

25 Clemens Ruthner, “Besetzungen: A Post/Colonial Reading of Austrian and German Cultural Narratives on Bosnia-Hercegovina, 1878–1918,” in *Wechselwirkungen: Austria-Hungary, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Balkan Region, 1878–1918*, ed. Clemens Ruthner et al. (New York: P. Lang, 2015), 221–42; Stijn Vervaet, *Centar i periferija u Austro-Ugarskoj: dinamika izgradnje nacionalnih identiteta u Bosni i Hercegovini od 1878. do 1918. godine na primjeru književnih tekstova* (Sarajevo: Synopsis, 2013), 96–125.

26 Citation from Radić’s *Živo hrvatsko pravo na Bosnu i Hercegovinu* (1908), quoted in Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest Hrvatske seljačke stranke* (Zagreb: Naklada P.I.P. Pavičić, 1999), 115, emphasis mine.

burden” in regard to Bosnia can be found primarily in the memorandums and public declarations of the highest-ranking Imperial officials, such as Minister Kállay. In a well-known interview with the British *Daily Chronicle* in 1895, Kállay described the adventure of occupying Bosnia, which he had embarked upon seventeen years ago:

Austria is a great Occidental Empire... charged with the mission of carrying civilization to Oriental peoples. Administration is our only politics:... to make the people contented, to ensure justice, to develop agriculture, to render communication easy and cheap, to spread education... that is my administrative ideal—that is my politics.<sup>27</sup>

In an era when the idea of the nation seemed to be triumphing over the imperial idea—Piedmont had unified the majority of the Italian peninsula by 1861, and Prussia did the same ten years later with the German states—the occupation of Bosnia became a precious opportunity for the Dual Monarchy. A rapid and successful modernization of this “neighboring Orient” would prove that Vienna still had its word to say in history, and that the creation of nation-states was not the only way to deal with the Ottoman retreat from Southeastern Europe. In other words, the Bosnian example had to show that an empire, composed of a family of peoples united under the scepter of a benevolent sovereign, could still foster progress and culture.<sup>28</sup>

At the turn of the century, the Empire attempted to turn Bosnia into an example through which it could showcase its credibility and effectiveness, before both a domestic and international audience. Events like the Budapest Millennium Exhibition in 1896, and especially the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1900, were an opportunity to broadcast globally the success of the Habsburg civilizing mission in Bosnia. For the latter exhibition, the Empire arranged for the construction of a separate pavilion for Bosnia and Herzegovina along the banks of the Seine, between the Austrian and Hungarian pavilions. Visitors entering the site—a bazar-like structure integrating several elements of Ottoman architecture—could contemplate a massive frieze painted by the world-famous Art Nouveau painter Alphonse Mucha, with at

27 The article, which dates back to October 3, 1895, is quoted by Donia, *Islam under the Double Eagle*, 14.

28 Robin Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism: The Habsburg “Civilizing Mission” in Bosnia 1878–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15–25.



Figure 4: Alphonse Mucha, *The Allegory of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 1900, tempera on canvas, Museum of Decorative Arts, Prague.

its center an allegory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As eloquently highlighted by Edin Hajdarpasić, “Mucha’s centerpiece was a grand Art Nouveau rendering of the Habsburg imperial fairy tale, depicting a Bosnian Sleeping Beauty roused from centuries of sleep by wise imperial governance”<sup>29</sup> (see figure 4).

Imperial administrators were of course not alone in advancing this kind of civilizational rhetoric. Journalists, travelers, ethnographers and politicians who visited the newly-annexed province (sometimes bringing a camera with them) also enthusiastically joined in, in praise of the occupation of Bosnia. As highlighted by Clemens Ruthner, Bosnia was clearly perceived as “a periphery in need of a new center, as the old center [Istanbul] had proven incapable of living up to its ‘obligations.’”<sup>30</sup> The pamphlet “Bosnia, Its Present and Near Future,” published in Leipzig in 1886—and which, as we shall see, greatly angered Bosnian Muslim notables—is a good example of this narrative. The author, who remained anonymous, appeared to characterize the occupation of Bosnia as a radically new phenomenon, entirely different from the numerous territorial conquests made throughout the long history of the Habsburg Empire. The Bosnian occupation was of interest for very specific reasons:

29 Edin Hajdarpasic, *Whose Bosnia? Nationalism and Political Imagination in the Balkans, 1840–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 194; Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 329–31.

30 Clemens Ruthner, “‘Naš’ mali ‘orijent’. Jedno postkolonijalno čitanje austrijskih i njemačkih kulturalnih narativa o Bosni i Hercegovini 1878–1918.” *Prilozi Instituta za Istoriju* 37 (2008): 156.



For the first time, we can examine an example of a “European power” taking on the reorganization [*Reorganisierung*] of an “Asian” country, of how it worked over 1.3 million coarse minds that had “never been graced with culture,” [*Kultur*] all to create a European political entity, to form a civilized people [*Kulturvolk*].<sup>31</sup>

The role of reorganizing, improving and civilizing the life of the province was clearly assigned to the imperial authorities; only the enlightened Habsburg administration was considered to be capable of guaranteeing the province “a lasting future firmly rooted in the European spirit [*Im europaischem Geiste*], without return or regression.”<sup>32</sup>

The Habsburg civilizing discourse rapidly found new and different forms in which it could be framed and circulated. In 1893, the Opera of Vienna presented a ballet entitled “A Wedding in Bosnia.” The ballet was about a group of Viennese tourists traveling in Bosnia, and their fortuitous arrival in a village where peasants were celebrating a wedding. A key moment in the show—which, according to the press of that time, the Court and the Emperor himself found highly amusing—was a scene in which a Viennese woman successfully taught Bosnian peasants how to dance the waltz.<sup>33</sup> In 1896, the German writer Heinrich Renner, drawing on rhetoric consolidated within the societies of the European colonial powers, did not hesitate to describe Bosnia and Herzegovina as a slumbering Oriental princess, waiting to be roused by a kiss from her prince—the Habsburg Empire.<sup>34</sup>

We have established that, according to recent scholarship, Bosnia was generally considered by Habsburg subjects to belong to the Orient. But at the end of the day, what kind of Orient did they expect to find in this land? Some authors, at times, tended to lump Bosnia with regions like Anatolia and the Middle East. This attitude was not of course totally incomprehensible: once the Habsburg visitor crossed the border and entered in Bosnia, he or she was immediately confronted with an abundance of architectural markers usually associated with the Oriental city, such as minarets, bazars and hammams. In other words, Habsburg travelers were immersed in a

31 Anonymous, *Bosniens Gegenwart und nächste Zukunft* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1886), iv.

32 Anonymous, *Bosniens Gegenwart*, 4.

33 Diana Reynolds, “Kavaljeri, kostimi, umjetnost: kako je Beč doživljavao Bosnu 1878-1900,” *Prilozi Instituta za istoriju* 32 (2003): 135–48.

34 Ruthner, “Besetzungen,” 221–42.

landscape radically different from the one they had left in the core provinces of the Empire. Passing through the countryside and towns, this same visitor also had the opportunity to witness a kaleidoscope of people dressed in different and (at least to their eyes) exotic ways. Given these circumstances, it is not astonishing that writers and artists, in describing their Bosnian experience, mobilized the same tropes that Westerners developed to narrate the (mostly colonized at that time) Muslim world—i.e., an Orientalist discourse, to put it in Edward Said's terms.

However, Bosnia was not an Orient like the others. Its location on the European continent, the fact that it lay just beyond the Habsburg border, and not in some removed territory overseas, meant that the Habsburgs' perception of this region was slightly different. The fact that the overwhelming majority of the local population was light-skinned and spoke a Slavic language, more precisely the same Slavic language to that spoken by Habsburg citizens on the other side of the border, made it difficult for Habsburg subjects to attribute the same degree of "otherness" to Bosnia as, for example, France could for the Maghreb, or England could for India. Thanks to its liminality, Bosnia occupies thus in the Habsburg (and more general, Western) imagination an inherently "ambiguous location,"<sup>35</sup> to use an expression that Larry Wolff used to describe the Western perception of Eastern Europe. Not an entirely foreign element, and yet radically different from any other region of the Habsburg Empire, Bosnia shifts in and out of Europe, and in and out of the Orient, becoming an Other within Europe, as Maria Todorova wrote of the Balkans.<sup>36</sup>

### FORGING HABSBERG MUSLIM GIRLS

During the same years in which Habsburg subjects were fostering fantasies of their own proximate Orient and their alleged right to civilize it, a segment of the Bosnian population was gradually beginning to witness the effects

35 Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 9.

36 For more on the specific nature of the Western discourse on the Balkans, beyond the previously quoted work by Larry Wolff, see Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997); Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995): 917–31. For a review of the meaning and uses of concepts such as Orientalism and Balkanism, see Katherine E. Fleming, "Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 4 (2000): 1218–33.

of the Habsburg policies, especially in the domain of education.<sup>37</sup> Immediately after its establishment, the Provincial Government began to set up new Habsburg schools with the goal of preparing a reserve of local educated candidates that could then be employed as civil and religious officials and teachers. As noted by Robin Okey, the Habsburg administration vested the schools with an almost “talismanic power”; in just a few generations, it was believed, the new schools would be capable of fostering economic growth, defusing tensions between the various classes and religious groups, while appeasing growing nationalist sentiment with imperial patriotism.<sup>38</sup> The administrators, particularly Kállay, believed that the state school institution would quickly replace the various Christian Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish community schools in existence in Bosnia since Ottoman times. To discourage the development of distinct religious and national identities among the pupils, Orthodox, Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish students, as well as the children of imperial officials serving in the province, were meant to attend classes together.<sup>39</sup>

The school system that the Habsburg authorities set about creating provided for the education of both boys and girls, consistent with the schooling in other Habsburg provinces in the second half of the nineteenth century. Education for the two sexes consisted of two separate, asymmetrical courses of study. After five years in a state elementary school—and when their families’ economic situation allowed it—boys could choose from a wide range of technical and commercial schools. These schools aimed to prepare students for careers as lower-level administrators or artisans, or for continuing on to secondary school, in particular to the gymnasiums (*gimnazija*). Founded in the province’s main cities—Sarajevo in 1879, Mostar in 1893, Banja Luka in 1899, and so forth, for a total of eleven establishments before the First World War<sup>40</sup>—these schools opened the door to the Habsburg and European universities for Bosnian students. The course of study open to girls, however,

37 This paragraph is mostly based on my reflections developed in a previous article of mine, Fabio Giomi, “Forging Habsburg Muslim girls: gender, education and empire in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878–1918),” *History of Education* 44, no. 3 (2015): 274–92.

38 Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism*, 60–1.

39 Mitar Papić, *Školstvo u Bosni i Hercegovini za vrijeme Austrougarske okupacije 1878–1918* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1972), 27.

40 Papić, *Školstvo u Bosni*, 116.



Figure 5: Muslim woman wearing a *feredža* in Mostar, 1904.

Source: ZM, Franjo Topić's photography collection, 499.

was radically different; after five years of elementary school, female students could continue their education by attending a five-year secondary school for girls (*viša djevojačka škola*).<sup>41</sup> In 1911, the educational possibilities for schoolgirls were further expanded by the establishment of five-year female teacher-training schools (*ženska preparandija*).<sup>42</sup> The project of civilizing Bosnia through schooling was thus eminently gendered. The photo series taken by Croatian photographer Franjo Topić, taken at the turn of the century, portraying a series of Bosnian women, shows better than many words the ambition of this pedagogical project: to transform Bosnian Ottoman women into Habsburg middle-class girls (See figures 5, 6, 7 and 8).

41 Girls were only permitted to enroll in secondary education like gymnasiums in special cases, and only for independent study (*vanredne učenice*); they were admitted to the final exams but could not physically attend lessons. However, this concerned no more than a dozen female students throughout the forty years of Austro-Hungarian rule. Đorđe Pejanović, *Srednje i stručne škole u Bosni i Hercegovini od početka do 1941 godine* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1953), 221.

42 Alongside these schools, a few private institutions had already previously been founded in the province, established by Catholics and Protestants. On this subject see Papić, *Školstvo u Bosni (1878-1918)*, 117. On Habsburg education in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Gary B. Cohen, *Education and Middle-Class Society in Imperial Austria, 1848-1918* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1996).



Figure 6: Bosnian Muslim women, undated.

Source: ZM, Franjo Topić's photography collection, 1034.

Nevertheless, in its civilizing mission, the Habsburg Empire was forced to confront a very different reality. Firstly, tax revenues from the province were far lower than expected, meaning that the Provincial Government was only able to introduce the new school system very gradually. Thus, the new system would only go so far as to coexist alongside the existing community schools, without ever managing to fully replace them. Secondly, the Bosnian people proved to be far more reticent than anticipated, with regard to the new state school system, and therefore to the administration's plans. The Muslims were the most hostile, remaining mistrustful of the Habsburg schools even after decades of occupation. According to the many reports sent by teachers to the Provincial Government, the reason for such hostility lay in the interfaith character of the state schools. Still traumatized by the loss of their status as first-class citizens in 1878, Muslims generally saw these state-led interreligious schools as places whose hidden agenda was to convert Muslim children to Christianity.

The opposition that Muslim families put up against sending their children to state schools was markedly gendered. Though the idea of submitting boys to a state education was met with distrust by Muslim families, by



Figure 7: Interior of the girls' school in Sarajevo, with students dressed in traditional clothes, 1906.

Source: ZM, Franjo Topić's photography collection, 202.



Figure 8: Sarajevo Girls' School, turn of the century.

Source: ZM, Franjo Topić's photography collection, 2603.

the end of the century several thousands were already sitting at state school desks. The same, however, cannot be said for Muslim girls. Despite resorting to schemes, persuasion and pressure to convince prominent Muslims to send their children to school, the Habsburg administration did not succeed in attracting Muslim girls to state schools. In 1900 the results were disappointing.

RELIGION	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
Muslim	4,874	12	4,886
Orthodox	7,488	942	8,430
Catholic	6,551	1,759	8,310
Jewish	466	377	843
Other	124	92	216
Total	19,503	3,182	22,685

Table 1: Number of male and female pupils in state schools (school year 1899/1900).

Source: Vojislav Bogićević, *Pismenost u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša 1975), 284.

The Provincial Government set about fostering the education of Muslim girls in two ways. First of all, using its control over the *Vakuf* Commission, the institution in charge of the administration of pious endowments, it strove to reform the Muslim community schools as much as possible. In 1892, male and female reformed primary schools (*mekteb-i-ibtidai*), were established. Though the administration's attempts to introduce non-religious subjects met with resistance from the *ulema*, they did manage to introduce Bosnian lessons (in the documents of the time, referred to as the *zemaljski jezik*, "regional language"), both in the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, and Arabic lessons according to the "new methodology," (*usuli-džedid*) which departed from the purely mnemonic method previously used. Unlike the traditional *mekteb*, which however remained the most common Muslim community schools in the region, the reformed ones required teachers to have completed their training in the Muslim Teachers' School of Sarajevo (*dar-al-muallimin*). In the forty years of Habsburg rule over the province, several thousand Muslim girls were able to attend these female reformed

schools and gain familiarity with the Serbo-Croatian writing system, among other subjects.<sup>43</sup>

However, the Provincial Government did not stop there. In the early 1890s, two distinct *mektebs* for girls were founded in Muslim residential districts in Sarajevo: one in Džinić Alley in 1891, and another on Bakarević Street in 1894. A noteworthy contribution to the establishment of these schools came from *hadži* Hasan *efendi* Spaho (1841–1915), a teacher and judge who had been trained in Istanbul in the 1860s, a period in which Ottoman reformism (*Tanzimat*) was at its apex. After completing his studies, Spaho held several posts in the Ottoman administration, including as a judge in Sofia, Damascus and Cairo, and as teacher in *ruždijas* (reformed Ottoman elementary school) in Jajce and in the Belgrade region. After 1878, Spaho managed to reinvest his Ottoman cultural capital in the new political setting: recruited into public education by the Provincial Government, he initially worked as a middle-school teacher of Arabic in Sarajevo, subsequently becoming director of the School for Sharia Judges (*Šerijatska sudačka škola*) from 1905 to 1912. According to Spaho, who led the joint administration of the institutes between 1892 and 1894, the reformed *mektebs* for girls had “two hearts: Islamic sciences and handiwork”<sup>44</sup> (see table 2). It is difficult to say whether Spaho had a specific model in mind for the organization of these two schools. Given his training in, and knowledge of, the Ottoman educational system, it seems reasonable to assume that he was inspired by the steps that the Ottoman government had been taking since the 1860s, when it founded the first weaving school open to girls in Usçuk in 1865.<sup>45</sup>

43 Vojislav Bogićević, *Istorija razvitka osnovnih škola u Bosni i Hercegovini u doba turske i austrougarske uprave: 1463–1918* (Sarajevo: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika BiH, 1965), 227–229. In 1876, in the vilayet of Bosnia, there were nearly a thousand *mektebs*, where 28,445 boys and 12,334 girls attended school. In 1879, in the entire province there were approximately 500 *mekteb*, providing schooling for 16,000 boys and just under 8,000 girls in separate buildings. If the number of these establishments grew, exceeding a total of 1,000 structures by 1911, they maintained a fairly rudimentary organizational structure, nearly always with a single teacher per school, with an average of forty to fifty children of assorted ages assigned to each teacher. On this topic, see: Hajrudin Čurić, *Muslimansko školstvo u Bosni i Hercegovini do 1918. godine* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1983), 205–6.

44 Ibrahim Kemura, “Počeci modernog školovanja muslimanki (prve ženske muslimanske škole u Sarajevu,” *Glasnik Vrhovnog islamskog starješinstva u Federativnoj Narodnoj Republici Jugoslaviji*, no. 1–2 (1974): 22–34.

45 Husnija Kamberović, *Mehmed Spaho: 1883–1939: politička biografija* (Sarajevo: Vijeće Kongresa bošnjačkih intelektualaca, 2009), 13. On female education in the late Ottoman Empire, see Yücel Gelişli, “Education of Women from the Ottoman Empire to Modern Turkey,” *SEER - South-East Europe Review for La-*



SUBJECT	HOURS PER WEEK			
	Year I	Year II	Year III	Year IV
Local language	10	6	6	3
<i>Muzaćera</i> (Co-Repetition)	7	3	-	-
<i>Akajd</i> (Doctrine)	3	4	4	4
<i>Ahlak</i> (Morals)	-	3	3	3
<i>Tedžvid</i> (Recitation of the Qur'an)	-	2	2	2
<i>Tedbiri menzil</i> (Home Economics)	-	-	2	2
Weaving	3	2	-	-
Sewing	-	2	1	-
Ancient Embroidery	-	-	5	6
Modern Embroidery	-	2	3	2
Basic Embroidery	4	4	-	-
Patternmaking	-	-	-	2
Drawing	-	-	2	3

Table 2: The Džinić Alley *mekteb* curriculum  
Source: Kemura, "Počeci modernog školovanja," 29.

Interest for the two schools rapidly grew; by 1900, each *mekteb* had enrolled just under three hundred female students.<sup>46</sup> Encouraged by this success, several years later the Provincial Government decided to go a step further and found an elementary school *exclusively* for Muslim girls in Sarajevo, thus making an exception to the principle that the schools should be open to all religions. It was Olga Hörmann, the wife of the director of the Provincial Museum of Sarajevo Kosta Hörmann (1850–1921), who was assigned the task of exploring this avenue, at her own discretion. As a respected woman,

*bour and Social Affairs* 7, no. 4 (2004): 121–35. For information on the transformation of the Ottoman Empire's educational system during the second half of the nineteenth century, see Selçuk Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy, and Discipline* (Leiden, Boston and Köln: Brill, 2001) and Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> A total of 149 female pupils attended the *mekteb* in Džinić Alley (66 in first grade, 36 in second grade, 27 in third grade and 20 in fourth grade), while at the Bakarević street school there were 143 girls (64 in first grade, 24 in second grade, 29 in third grade, 26 in fourth grade). "Ženske ruždije," *Bošnjak*, July 19 (1900): 3.

Hörmann was indeed in a position to reach out to Muslim families, in particular to its female members, and to make a case to them in favor of female education.<sup>47</sup> In 1894, the Provincial Government was able to set up the first course devoted to Muslim girls that subsequently became a four-year elementary school for Muslim girls in Sarajevo in 1897. In 1901, when the first generation of female students was completing elementary school, the authorities created a three-year (and four-year after 1913) advanced course for girls who wanted to continue their education at a secondary level. Because no Muslim girls had enrolled in the interreligious teacher-training schools, the school opened a separate three-year course to train Muslim female teachers in 1913. Following its inception, approximately 30 to 40 girls every year entered the Sarajevo's Muslim Girls' School. Despite the significant dropout rate, before the end of the First World War almost one hundred Muslim girls had completed their primary education, and a few dozen Muslim girls had completed their secondary education. In order to maximize the effects of the Habsburg pedagogy on the education of Muslim women, the Provincial Government succeeded in employing as teachers the girls who completed the advanced course, in *mekteb-i-ibtidais* throughout the province. During the Great War, the first female students to graduate from the teacher training course obtained certification as primary school teachers; as the Bosnian newspapers enthusiastically remarked, they were "the first female Muslim teachers" (*prve muslimanke-učiteljice*)<sup>48</sup> a status that gave them access to professional life as state employees. The following year, ten more female students obtained certification.<sup>49</sup>

Thanks to the school registers, which scrupulously recorded the names and professions of the girls' parents, it is possible to have some idea of the socio-economic background of the girls enrolled. Unsurprisingly, some of these students were the daughters of a number of the province's Muslim landowning families, especially those that had chosen to cooperate with the Habsburg government after 1878. These wealthy families chose to abandon the traditional Ottoman practice of providing only a domestic

47 ABiH, ZV, 52/211/2, Olga Hörmann to ZV (1894).

48 'Prve muslimanke – učiteljice', *Sarajevski List*, April 14 (1915): 3.

49 Papić, *Školstvo u Bosni (1878–1918)*, 248; Čurić, *Muslimansko školstvo*, 112; Mina Kujović, "Muslimanska osnovna i viša djevojačka škola sa produženim tečajem (1894–1925)," *Novi Muallim* 11, no. 41 (2010): 72–9.

education for their daughters, dispensed by private teachers. Almost one third of female students also came from white-collar families, whose fathers were usually officers in the new administration (e.g. Provincial Government, or mail and railroad officials) or in a religious institution (officials of the *Ulema-medžlis* and of the *Vakuf* Commission, teachers of Islamic schools or sharia judges). Even the daughter of the *Reis-ul-ulema* Azabagić was enrolled at the school for one year.<sup>50</sup> For these families, sending their daughters to the school was partly done in compliance with the administration's desires, which wanted to use their social prestige in order to encourage Muslim families to send their daughters to school. Insofar as it was a clear performance of modernity, female schooling was also seen to be a way for Muslims to become more integrated, at least to a certain degree, within a post-Ottoman, Habsburg society.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, more than half the female students came from small craft and trade families; in particular butchers, tailors and coffee shop and restaurant owners. Though there is little information about this group, it seems probable that the families that had formal or informal contacts with Habsburg officials were more likely to send their daughters to these schools. The well-known Hadžikarić family of tailors, for example, among the first in Sarajevo to tailor clothes in a European style and work for the Habsburg authorities to produce uniforms for the School for Sharia Judges, sent all of their daughters to Sarajevo's Muslim Girls' School.<sup>52</sup>

After 1878, being favorably disposed toward female schooling was also of economic relevance; having been rapidly integrated into the Austro-Hungarian Customs Union, Bosnia's local market was flooded with merchandise from other regions of the Empire, thus making affairs difficult for Bosnian craftsmen and shop-owners. As a result, an education for girls that included modern needlework and embroidery techniques helped to improve the family income and enhance a girl's prospects for marriage. In a 1903 report to the Provincial Government, the director of the school lamented that, when meeting with the teaching staff, the girls' relatives only ever expressed

50 Zurmuta was enrolled at the Muslim Girls' School in 1903/1904. See HAS, 34, MŽOŠ, School register 1903–1904.

51 HAS, 34, MŽOŠ, School registers.

52 Fata Košarić, "Moje školovanje," *Preporod*, September 15, (1976): 16–7. Courtesy of Ajša Zahirović.

concern over their daughters' aptitude for handiwork: "they do not ask about any of the other subjects."<sup>53</sup>

One aspect that emerges from the school registers is that for a significant number of female students (varying each year from one third to one half of students) a woman claimed to be their legal guardian, usually their mother or grandmother. Sometimes the names of these women are accompanied in the registers by their profession and/or their social status (e.g., landowner and seamstress), and they are frequently listed as widows. The high number of households headed by a woman in the registers indicates that openness to female education may have been gendered—women were more inclined to send their daughters and nieces to school than fathers or other male relatives. The tendency for widows to send their daughters to school already struck some observers at the time. In 1919, the Muslim social reformer Hasan Rebac wrote: "It is interesting to note that the girls [attending school] are largely without fathers or male relatives, and that schooling has been undertaken thanks to the determination of the mothers, who had to struggle against all kinds of prejudice."<sup>54</sup>

Whether enrolled at a primary or advanced level, the schoolgirls sitting at the desks of Sarajevo's Muslim Girls' School were exposed to an education that was fundamentally new for a typical Bosnian Muslim girl. If we compare the school curricula with what was on offer in the traditional *mektebs* for girls, the difference is striking. Islamic studies was not the sole subject taught at the state school, although it remained one of the school's most important subjects at every level (six weekly hours in the advanced course, three in the teacher's course).<sup>55</sup> The emphasis on Islamic education indicates that the aim of the school was neither to eradicate Islam nor to convert Muslim girls to Christianity. This respect for the religious pluralism of Bosnia was doubtless partly in line with a tradition of religious tolerance in the Habsburg Empire dating back to the late eighteenth century. However, this approach also responded to the specific needs of the Empire's strategy for control in Bosnia. In order to prevent any change in the ethnic balance of the local population, and in particular any integration into the ranks of

53 ABiH, ZV, 57/49/4, Štefanija Franković to ZV (1903).

54 Hasan Rebac, "Naša muslimanka," *Ženski Pokret*, no. 8 (1920): 15.

55 Ćurić, *Muslimansko školstvo*, 34–80.

the potentially hostile Orthodox-Serbian community, Vienna did its best to preserve the Muslim population as the second largest religious group in the region, forbidding *de facto* conversion and discouraging emigration to the Ottoman Empire. The schools' central task was therefore to civilize without converting. The importance assigned to religion in the curriculum was also evident in the spatial administration of the school building. Despite the fact that Sarajevo's Muslim Girls' School always suffered from a shortage of space, a classroom was regularly reserved solely for religious classes and daily prayer.<sup>56</sup>

Given the linguistic and geographical continuity between Bosnia and Croatia-Slavonia, the Provincial Government in Sarajevo used the latter province's school programs as the main model for Bosnia's educational system. According to Habsburg educators, who since 1894 had been disseminating their ideas throughout Bosnia in the *Školski Vjesnik* (School journal, a pedagogical journal for teachers directly financed by the Provincial Government), the main goal of female schooling was to forge "proper mothers"; childbirth and childrearing were assumed to be a woman's primary and most important contributions to society. In the eyes of the authorities, mothers played a crucial role in the Habsburg civilizing mission in Bosnia: the schooling of future generations of Bosnian children could only be successful if preceded and accompanied by the tireless work of adequately trained mothers. The education of young girls who would one day be mothers was thus an important tool in the effort to transform Bosnia's semi-Oriental society from within the private space.

As religion was no longer considered to be sufficient for a rounded education for young girls, new subjects entered the school curriculum. The subject that became of major importance in the female curriculum, especially in secondary schools, was female handiwork (*ženski ručni rad*). This novelty had been imported from the Croatia-Slavonian schools, where since 1883 it had been the most important subject in female education. As Davorin Trstenjak put it in his book *Dobra kućanica* (The Good Housewife), a best-seller which went through five editions between 1880 and 1906, and was even adopted by the Provincial Government in Sarajevo as the official

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<sup>56</sup> ABiH, ZV, 57/49/4, Štefanija Franković to ZV (1903).

textbook for schoolgirls, teaching female handiwork had two goals: to provide lower middle-class girls with a means to contribute to the family's income, and to discipline girls and help them develop (supposedly) female virtues such as diligence, orderliness, devotion and kindness. As has been shown for the Croatian context, enforcing the link between appropriate femininity and handiwork had a direct impact in limiting female agency in terms of space and time; practices such as sewing, embroidery and weaving were supposed to be done in the home for several hours a day, thus binding women to the domestic space. In this way, both the bourgeois European and Muslim ideologies of separate spheres were enforced at the same time.<sup>57</sup>

Interesting differences can be also noted when we compare the program of Sarajevo's Muslim Girls' School with those of the ordinary interreligious female schools in Bosnia. Despite the Provincial Government's express desire to provide Muslim girls with the same education as that which non-Muslim girls received in the province's interreligious schools, differences remained. While in the female interreligious schools the teaching of foreign languages—German or French—and civic education were compulsory, these subjects were optional at the Sarajevo Muslim Girls' School.<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately the archives do not mention an explicit motive for this choice, either on the part of the Provincial Government, or on the part of the school's director. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that subjects that for the schoolgirls could have enabled autonomous interactions with foreign people or ideas, and with the public authorities, were not considered worth teaching. According to the school's curriculum, any interactions for women that transcended domestic, family and community boundaries were expected to be mediated by men (see table 3).

Despite having sidestepped the threat of subjecting their daughters to ordinary interfaith schooling, these schools remained a source of anxiety for the Muslim population. According to the teachers' reports to the Provincial Government, one cause for concern was that the school did not exclusively teach religious subjects. The *ulema*, especially the teachers at the Islamic schools, seemed to have been the most hostile toward

57 Dinko Župan, "Dobre kućanice. Obrazovanje djevojaka u Slavoniji tijekom druge polovice 19. stoljeća," *Scrinia Slavonica* 9, no. 1 (2009): 232–56; Dinko Župan, "'Uzor djevojke': obrazovanje žena u Banskoj Hrvatskoj tijekom druge polovine 19. st.," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 33, no. 2 (2001): 435–52.

58 Ćurić, *Muslimansko školstvo*, 249.

SUBJECT	HOURS PER WEEK			
	Year I	Year II	Year III	Year IV (since 1913)
Religious Science	6	6	6	6
Local Language	4	3	3	3
Geography	2	2	1	1
History	1	2	2	2
Natural Science	2	2	-	-
Life Science	-	1	2	2
Counting	2	2	2	2
Geometry	1	1	1	1
Drawing	2	2	2	2
Calligraphy	1	1	-	-
Domestic Sciences	-	-	1	1
Handiwork and Patternmaking	9	8	9	5
Hygiene	-	-	1	1
Pedagogy	-	-	-	4

Table 3: Curriculum of the Sarajevo Muslim Girls' School, 1913

Source: Ćurić, *Muslimansko školstvo*, 249.

female education. As observed by the teacher Marija Kulijer in 1903, families often refused to send their daughters to school “because [they] fear the *muallim*,”<sup>59</sup> the Muslim religious teacher. In one of the very rare autobiographical accounts of this schooling, written several decades after she had graduated, one of the first students of Sarajevo’s Muslim Girls’ School, Fata Košarić (née Hadžikarić) recalls the difficulties connected to her schooling. According to Košarić, who following this education became a teacher herself:

parents who sent their children to German schools [*švapske škole*], as the Habsburg state schools were generally called, were hated by the ignorant and angry people... When Avdaga [Hadžikarić, her father] enrolled his first

59 ABiH, ZV, 57/281/2, Marija Kulijer to ZV (1903).

daughter Sejda in Mrs Hörmann's school, people in the market [*čaršija*] started to attack him openly, and for two weeks he couldn't leave the house; anyway, he never withdrew his daughters from school.<sup>60</sup>

Opposition to female schooling was not only to be found in the city market. Hostility was also prevalent in the residential districts (*mahala*), situated around the market and extending into the hills of Sarajevo. As Košarić recalls from her childhood:

I studied mostly at night, in the light of the oil lamp, in order not to feed the mischievousness and hatred of the neighborhood [*komšiluk*], as they often insulted us from their windows as we walked to school. Of course, some women in the neighborhood were glad to visit us with their daughters, and they were very pleased that we read to them some folk poem or stories from *Behar* [the largest Muslim literary journal, see next paragraphs]. However, there were many ignorant rascals who shouted at us in the street.<sup>61</sup>

This attitude was not only one met on the street. In 1911, an attempt by the Provincial Government to give the advanced course its own autonomous Muslim female secondary school was formally opposed by the *Ulema-medžlis*; the collective body that dealt with Islamic affairs in Bosnia argued that:

the schoolgirls, during their enrolment in this school, will grow up there until the age when sharia requires them to veil—and then to avoid mixing [*miješati*] or have contact [*dolaziti u dodir*] with persons who do not belong to their immediate family... Additionally, looking at the curriculum of this school, the *Ulema-medžlis* is aware that these schoolgirls, once they will have completed their training, will gain access to the state schools as teachers, and this is strictly in contradiction with sharia law. Finally, besides the abovementioned concerns, the establishment of such a school would provoke a great deal of disquiet among Muslims, a point which [the Provincial Government]

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60 Fata Košarić, "Moje školovanje," *Preporod*, September 15 (1976): 16. Courtesy of Ajša Zahirović.

61 Košarić, "Moje školovanje," 16.



must promptly take into consideration, as already today this disquiet has reached a serious level.<sup>62</sup>

The *Ulema-medžlis'* intervention achieved its goal, and the authorities gave up the idea of establishing a separate secondary school for Muslim girls. The teacher training course met a similar fate; in order to reduce the “disquiet among Muslims,” it remained simply a course, rather than become an autonomous institution.

Aside from the state school curriculum, the most contentious aspect of female education in these institutions was that the teaching staff consisted entirely of non-Muslims. Because the Bosnian population rejected out of hand the possibility of using male teachers in girls' schools, for fear of impropriety, the Provincial Government in Sarajevo needed to find female teachers. But in the late nineteenth century, no Muslim women possessed the teaching qualifications required by the state. As a result, the teaching staff in Muslim schools consisted of non-Muslims who had been educated in the teacher-training schools of Bosnia or other Serbo-Croatian-speaking regions of the Habsburg Empire. Until the end of the First World War, the schools' teachers came mainly from Croatia-Slavonia. While most were Catholic Croats, there was a small minority of Orthodox Serbs.<sup>63</sup> Despite the presence of two teachers of religion—old and thus supposedly sexually inactive, in order to forestall rumors—the Muslim Girls' School of Sarajevo was still considered to be a cover for converting young Muslim girls. As the director Štefanija Franković put it to the Provincial Government in 1903:

people spread rumors about the school, continuously splitting hairs about its activities... Many girls are absent because people frighten them by telling them “the German women [*švabice*, the schoolteachers] will make you become Christians [*povlašiti*]!”<sup>64</sup>

Although the Provincial Government had promulgated a law in Bosnia expressly forbidding conversion in order to reassure the Muslim popula-

62 Ćurić, *Muslimansko školstvo*, 202–3.

63 Kujović, “Ko su bile,” 48–55.

64 ABiH, ZV, 57/49/7, Štefanija Franković to ZV (1903).

tion, these rumors persisted until the end of the Habsburg period. However, these difficulties aside, thanks to the organization of these experimental schools at the crossroads between state and Muslim religious institutions, a first small cadre of Muslim girls had begun studying and learning to write in the Serbo-Croatian language.

### DOMESTICATING VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

Like the state schools, another institution associated with Habsburg rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the voluntary association. This kind of organization began making an appearance in Bosnia mostly after 1878; references to an associative milieu before that date are in fact very rare and incomplete. As a great deal of previous research has already suggested, voluntary associations were introduced by the thousands of Habsburg officials that moved to Bosnia from different regions of the Habsburg Empire. In 1883, the *Časničko-činovnička kasina* (Casino for Civil and Military Officials) was established in Sarajevo, followed in 1885 by the *Gospojinsko Društvo* (Ladies' Association).<sup>65</sup> Even though the information available on these first societies is very limited, it can be confirmed that they greatly contributed, in Bosnian cities, and especially in Sarajevo, to the introduction and visibility of a new set of social practices. A flyer for an event organized by the Ladies' Association in 1893 in Ilidža, the thermal and leisure resort a few kilometers from Sarajevo, gives an idea of the activities organized "under the high patronage of Vilma Kállay," the wife of Minister Kállay. The event included an opera concert, men and women exchanging flower bouquets, and public balls—a set of practices implying gender relations hardly imaginable in the Ottoman town.<sup>66</sup> From the outset, the Bosnian elite of all religions freely participated in these associative events—concerts, theater performances, balls—organized by military and civil officials. Rapidly, however, volunteer activities went beyond the initiative of the Habsburg non-Bosnian administrators, and began to be organized by the local population as well.

65 Avram Pinto mentions the existence of Jewish voluntary associations before 1878 but he does not mention his sources. See Avram Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva i Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1987), 147. For the first examples of voluntary associations after 1878, see Todor Kruševac, *Sarajevo pod Austro-ugarskom upravom 1878–1918* (Sarajevo: Muzej grada Sarajeva, 1960), 410–1.

66 HAS, Poster Collection, 103, Ladies' Association event in Ilidža, held on July 9, 1893.

The Habsburg authorities' attitude toward the dissemination of an associational culture among Bosnians was rather ambiguous. Of course, associations represented an opportunity for the local urban population to learn to foster values such as solidarity, individual commitment, a love for culture, and zeal for their fellow citizens—in a word, all of the middle-class virtues that the Habsburg civilizing mission wanted to introduce into Bosnia. In order to encourage the development of associational life, the authorities built in 1897 the sumptuous *Društveni dom* (*Vereinshaus* in German), literally the “house of the associations.” Based on plans designed by the Czech architect Karel Pařík, this imposing building in the neoclassical style (today's National Theater) was built a stone's-throw away from the Miljacka River, as a solution for the endemic absence of adequate spaces for associational activities. Organized around a sumptuous auditorium, which led into a series of spaces—lounges, corridors, cloakrooms, outdoor terraces, internal balconies—the *Društveni dom* replaced the Officer's Club as the center of associational life and of middle-class urban sociability.<sup>67</sup> However, at the same time voluntary associations began to worry the Habsburg administration; as in other parts of the Empire, the association could rapidly become a tool for elaborating and disseminating anti-imperial ideas, and in particular for fostering nationalist sentiments. Thus in order to control the spread of these collective institutions, associations were only able to be established at the discretionary authorization of the Provincial Government.<sup>68</sup>

The Bosnian urban population began experimenting with volunteer initiatives only gradually and, as in most parts of the Habsburg Empire, for the greater part along religious and national lines. In 1888 the Orthodox artisans, teachers and religious figures of Sarajevo established *Sloga* (Concord), in 1894 their Catholic counterparts founded *Trebević* (after the mountain overlooking Sarajevo), and in 1900 the Jews followed suit, establishing *La Lira* (Lyre). While these choir associations can be ascribed to the growing urban middle class, a group of teachers and workers who were sympathetic toward socialist ideas established in Sarajevo in 1905 the choir association

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67 Risto Besarović, *Iz kulturnog života u Sarajevu pod austrougarskom upravom* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1974), 45–67.

68 Kruševac, *Sarajevo*, 413.

*Proleter* (Proletarian), which mainly aimed to speak to the growing working class of Sarajevo. The establishment of choir associations also rapidly flourished in other Bosnian towns, again in these cases along religious-national lines. In Banja Luka for example, two choir associations—the Orthodox-Serbian *Jedinstvo* (Unity) and the Catholic-Croatian *Nada* (Hope)—were established respectively in 1893 and in 1898.<sup>69</sup> These associations not only limited themselves to their primary goal—that is, familiarizing the Bosnian population with Croatian, Serbian and more broadly European music—but increasingly claimed to have a clear national stance. After several years of negotiation with the Provincial Government, in 1898 *Trebević* succeeded in being officially recognized as a “Croat association,” and in 1906 *Sloga* managed to earn the title of “Serbian singing society.” As stated by Todor Kruševac, these associations “through music propagated and reinforced national awareness, and acted as a breeding ground from which other voluntary associations could grow forth.”<sup>70</sup> In contrast with their fellow citizens, few Muslims chose music societies as a form of expression. Instead of choirs, the urban Muslim population privileged the *kiraethana*, the Ottoman word for “reading room.” This institution was not a novelty; in the mid-nineteenth century the Ottoman authorities had already introduced reading societies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The fact that this activity was not a complete novelty surely helped this form to spread among the Muslim population, at that time fairly indifferent to the new institutions and practices brought by the Habsburgs. The largest Bosnian reading room was probably the one in Sarajevo, established in 1888 in the Bendbaša quarter, rapidly followed by others in the main towns of the province—in 1890 in Banja Luka, in 1898 in Tuzla, in 1899 in Brčko, and so forth. Reading rooms, of which a total of 116 were also established by non-Muslims in 1911, became the first places in Bosnia where it was possible to read books and newspapers, local or from other regions of the Habsburg Empire. The reading rooms rapidly also became a space where Islamic learned men or teachers organized the first public lessons on different topics, gave literacy courses, and sometimes held parties.<sup>71</sup>

69 Đorđe Mikić, *Banja Luka: kultura građanskog društva* (Banja Luka: Institut za Istoriju, 2004), 175–87 and 197–200.

70 Kruševac, *Sarajevo*, 414.

71 Mikić, *Banja Luka*, 209–12; Kruševac, *Sarajevo*, 412; Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 18.

Choir and reading societies were not the only associations that began to appear. At the turn of the century, wealthy merchants, landowners and artisans set up organizations whose mission was to care for the urban poor. Philanthropic associations were mostly established along religious lines; the Jews of Sarajevo established *La Benevolencija* (The Benevolence), the Muslims of Banja Luka established the *Muslimansko dobrotvorno društvo* (Muslim Philanthropist Society), and so on. This kind of voluntary association rapidly became at the initiative of a vast array of activities, such as setting up soup kitchens, organizing clothes collections for the poor, taking on the care of orphans, running embroidery courses for urban women, and much more. At the same time, the integration of Bosnia into the Habsburg imperial system also meant tapping into the association networks already flourishing in Central Europe, such as the pan-Slavist gymnastic association *Sokol* (Falcon), which extended its networks into Bosnia. The spread of an associational culture in Bosnia was remarkable; in 1913 there were 123 associations in Sarajevo, with 44,377 members. In Tuzla too, the main city in Eastern Bosnia, between 1883 and 1913 more than 40 different associations had grown up, established along national, religious, and professional lines, with narrow or wide-ranging aims.<sup>72</sup>

The spread of voluntary associations was constantly being affected by the evolution of political life in Bosnia. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the policy implemented by Benjamin Kállay of not granting recognition to nationalist associations was clearly a failure, and the Habsburg administration was forced to begin recognizing the existence, not only of religious, but also of national groups in Bosnia. István Burián (1852–1922), who became Minister of Finance after Kállay's death in 1903, abandoned the idea of a Bosnian areligious patriotism that had met with so little success under his predecessor, and openly recognized that local notables needed to be associated, at least to some extent, with the decision-making process.<sup>73</sup> In 1902, a group of Orthodox men with a secondary or higher education, in particular

72 Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva*, 141; Mikić, *Banja Luka*, 168–9; Kruševac, *Sarajevo*, 417. For an early account of the flourishing of voluntary associations in Habsburg Bosnia, see Đorđe Pejanović, *Kulturno-prosvetna humana i socijalna društva u Bosni i Hercegovini za vreme austrijske vladavine* (Sarajevo: Bosanska pošta, 1930). On associative life in Tuzla, see Dragiša Trifković, *Tuzlanski vremeplov*, vol. 5 (Tuzla: Grafocoop, 1997), 41–42.

73 Imamović, *Pravni položaj*, 162–63.

students and teachers, established the Serbian cultural association *Prosvjeta* (Education), while in 1907 their Catholic counterparts established the Croatian cultural association *Napredak* (Progress). Both associations had as their main goal the promotion of schooling for Bosnian children, and thus concentrated their efforts principally on collecting money to distribute as scholarships. Awakening the national spirit of the Bosnian population, respectively as Serbs or as Croats, was considered to be a part of their cultural mission. This new emphasis on education, which had become the focal point of both associations, had not gone unnoticed by the Jewish elite. In the same years, the Jewish association *La Benevolencija* also changed its statutes, adopting the cause of schooling as its main goal.<sup>74</sup>

In the new political atmosphere of the early twentieth century, Muslims created their own associations as well. In 1903, a few months after the establishment of the Serbian cultural association, the Muslim cultural association *Gajret* (Effort, in Ottoman) was set up in Sarajevo. The men at the foundations of these cultural associations, and in particular *Gajret*, deserve special attention. These individuals represented a striking novelty in Bosnian Muslim society. Born in the 1860s and 1870s, they had mostly received their education in the Habsburg school system and in central European universities, in particular in Vienna, Budapest, Graz, and Zagreb. Safvet *beg* Bašagić (1870–1934) had a leading role in the association; the member of a landowning family from Nevesinje, he had obtained a doctorate in Oriental languages. On his return to Bosnia, Bašagić had become a teacher of Arabic at the secondary school in Sarajevo, and one of the city's most active cultural entrepreneurs, publishing books, translating, and even participating in political activities. Edhem Mulabdić (1862–1934), after having attended the teacher's school in Sarajevo, also worked as school inspector and as a professor at the Muslim Teachers' School of Sarajevo. One of the most important writers of his generation, in 1917 he became direc-

74 On *Prosvjeta*, see Božidar Madžar, *Prosvjeta: Srpsko prosvjetno i kulturno društvo 1902–1949* (Banja Luka and Srpsko Sarajevo: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Republike Srpske, 2001). On *Napredak*, see Tomislav Išek, *Mjesto i uloga HKD Napredak u kulturnom životu Hrvata Bosne i Hercegovine: 1902.-1918.* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju and HKD Napredak, 2002). On *La Benevolencija* and its new early twentieth century agenda, see Stanislav Vinaver, *Spomenica o proslavi tridesetogodišnjice jevrejskog kulturno-potpornog društva La Benevolencija u Sarajevu maja 1924* (Belgrade: Štamparija i Cinkografija "Vreme" A.D., 1924), 5.

tor of the Sarajevo's Muslim Girls' School.<sup>75</sup> Mostly employed by the administration after their state schooling, these men were always proponents of the Habsburg Empire's role in Bosnia, describing it as a great occasion for a Muslim "cultural rebirth." This pro-Habsburg stance set them in stark contrast against the vast majority of Muslim notables grouped around the Movement for Autonomy.<sup>76</sup>

Like its Jewish and Orthodox counterparts, the Muslim cultural association *Gajret* rapidly spread across Bosnia. On the eve of the First World War, *Gajret* already had a dozen local branches to its name in the principal towns of the province.<sup>77</sup> As for the activists of *Napredak* and *Prosvjeta*, the purpose of these associations was to improve the extremely low literacy rates in the province by favoring education through a variety of means—granting scholarships, organizing public lessons and literacy courses, setting up reading rooms and founding newspapers. In order to foster education in the Muslim population, *Gajret* not only dedicated itself to distributing scholarships to students, but also rapidly established a set of cultural institutions. In 1905 the association founded the Islamic Printing House, linked to the *kiraethana* of Sarajevo.<sup>78</sup> The printing house was rapidly followed by a gentleman's club (*Muslimanski klub*), a male sporting association (*El-Kamer*), and a journal of the same name. Schooling, sociability and sports were all part of the same pedagogical design.<sup>79</sup> Cultural associations even rapidly assumed the same structure; a central branch (*glavni odbor*) with its headquarters in Sarajevo, and with local branches (*mjesni odbor*) throughout the province. *Gajret* differed from the other cultural associations operating in Bosnia on one particular point, its ill-defined national leanings. *Gajret's* founders Bašagić and Mulabdić were themselves disposed toward Croatian nationalism, that is they defined themselves as "Croats of Muslim faith." However, the influence of Croatian nationalism on *Gajret's* early discourse and activities seems to have been very weak. In 1909, the aforementioned Movement for Autonomy, by that time already transformed into

75 ABiH, ZV, 84/150/39, Edhem Mulabdić to ZV (1917).

76 Philippe Gelez, *Safvet-beg Bašagić (1870–1934): Aux Racines intellectuelles de la pensée nationale chez les musulmans de Bosnie-Herzégovine* (Athens: École française d'Athènes, 2010); Safet Sarić, *Mulabdić: monografija* (Mostar: Pedagoška akademija, 2002).

77 Sarić, *Mulabdić*, 85–90.

78 Amra Rašidbegović, "Osnivanje i rad Islamske dioničke štamparije u Sarajevu do 1918. godine," *Bosnica* 2, (1997): 59–62.

79 Imamović, *Pravni položaj*, 218.

a political party took control of *Gajret*, marginalizing the pro-Habsburg educated elite within the association. Osman Đikić (1879–1912) was appointed as its new secretary, a poet and journalist from Mostar educated in Istanbul and Vienna.<sup>80</sup> Influenced by the growing anti-Habsburg sentiment in Bosnia at the beginning of the twentieth century, Đikić defined himself as a “Serb of Muslim faith.” From this moment on *Gajret* adopted a growing pro-Serbian discourse.

### EARLY STRATEGIES OF FEMALE ENGAGEMENT

The volunteering experience followed, in Bosnia as elsewhere, different patterns according to gender. Often neglected by the historiography, women played an important role in the burgeoning local associational culture at the turn of the century. Their engagement took different institutional and practical forms, according to their profession, confessional affiliation and national belonging. One way in which Bosnian women engaged in associational life was by establishing their own associations. This strategy was followed in particular by Orthodox women who could count on several examples from their counterparts in neighboring regions. As a matter of fact, since the 1860s and 1870s Serbian women from Habsburg Vojvodina and Serbia had been establishing their own philanthropic and cultural associations.<sup>81</sup> In 1901 a group of wealthy and educated Serbian women from Banja Luka established the *Dobrotvorna Zadruga Srpkinja* (Serbian women's charitable society), probably the first female association ever established in the province. The main task of this association was of course caring for the poor, but also reinforcing education and national solidarity between Serbian women. In 1909 there were already nine existing Serbian female philanthropic associations in Bosnia, and an official monthly journal, *Srpska Žena* (Serbian Woman, 1911–1912) served to foster links between the different local chapters. Even if the journal was only published for less than two consecutive years, this case is an eloquent demonstration of how the

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80 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 71.

81 On the origins of female associations in the Yugoslav region, see the groundbreaking works of Sklevicky, “Karakteristike organiziranog djelovanja,” 308 (1984): 415–7 and 30, no. 309 (1984): 454–6 and Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 6–7.



act of establishing an association and of founding a journal were often linked to one another.<sup>82</sup>

In any case, separate female associations in Habsburg Bosnia remained confined to the Orthodox population and, at the end of the day, very limited in number. Catholic and Jewish women preferred to volunteer in the community-based associations that were at that time flourishing in Bosnian towns. Female participation followed different patterns. Jewish women in Sarajevo regularly participated in the different activities of the aforementioned associations (for example, *La Benevolencija* and *La Lira*), without establishing specific female chapters.<sup>83</sup> Conversely, Catholic women engaged in the activities of *Napredak* and, after 1909, they institutionalized their presence through separate local female chapters. Nevertheless, the main Croatian cultural association of Bosnia and Herzegovina was slow to feminize itself. In 1912, out of a total of 34 local chapters, there were only 4 female chapters.<sup>84</sup>

These networks of voluntary associations, with their rich array of gatherings, balls, picnics, amateur choral and musical performances, became the environment in which a small but vital cohort of Bosnian women gained visibility in the Bosnian towns. As in other regions of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empire, many of the women who invested their spare time in volunteering were primary-school teachers. The two groundbreaking figures who belonged to this teacher-activist corps were Adeline Paulina Irby (1831–1911) and Georgina Muir Mackenzie (1833–1874), two British travelers, suffragists and writers who established a school for girls in Sarajevo in 1869, mostly open to Orthodox girls. Following their example, other teachers became active in the public space. As becomes clear from the numerous journal articles and pamphlets they wrote, their engagement in philanthropic and cultural associations was perceived as an extension of their pedagogical mission at school. Stoja Kašiković (1865–?), for example, a Serbian-Orthodox teacher who volunteered in several philan-

82 In 1909, branches of the Serbian Woman's Charitable Society could be found in Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka, Donja Tuzla, Bjeljina, Bosanska Gradiška, Bosanska Dubica, Petrovac and Prijedor. On this topic, see *Kalendar "Prosvjeta"* (1909): 242. On the activities of this association in the Banja Luka region, see Mikić, *Banja Luka*, 257–66.

83 HAS, poster collection, 142, *La Lira Sarajevo*, *Nochada de Teatro* (November 30, 1912 – Kislev 20, 5673). On Jewish associations and the place of Jewish women in them, see Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva*, 82.

84 *Napredak's* local female branches were established in Vareš, Travnik, Fojnica and Sarajevo. See *Kalendar "Napredak"* (1912): 36. The source does not give any information on the socio-economic status of the women involved. On the same topic, see Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 10.

thropic associations with her husband, was also among the founders of the prestigious literary journal *Bosanska vila* (Bosnian fairy) and, for a certain period, even its editor (interestingly, under the male pseudonym Stevo Kaluđerović). One could also cite the journalist and writer Jelica Belović-Bernadzikowska (1870–1946), who became one of the most active cultural entrepreneurs of her time, using her free hours outside of teaching to tirelessly contribute through volunteering and writing, introducing Western feminist ideas into Bosnia. In the early twentieth century, Bosnian towns were thus witness to an increased visibility of women in the public space, circulating between schools, churches, associations and printing-houses.<sup>85</sup>

What was the place of Muslim women in such a blossoming associational culture? Scholarship dealing with Muslim associations has repeatedly shown that Muslim women remained entirely untouched by the turn-of-the-century gathering fever. As a matter of fact, Muslim women either did not want to enroll in Muslim voluntary associations, or were prevented from doing so, let alone attempting to establish their own ones. It seems that the wives of Habsburg officials cautiously tried to involve some Muslim upper-class women in the activities of the aforementioned Ladies' Club, but that this initiative did not meet with any durable success.<sup>86</sup> Several hypotheses might be put forward to explain the absence of Muslim women in voluntary associations. Firstly, Muslim women were entirely absent from the teaching corps, where associations usually recruited their most dedicated volunteers. Secondly, the rules of sexual and confessional segregation still enforced in urban spaces prevented proximity and contact between Muslim women and men, with the exception of a few family members. Thirdly, it seems that voluntary associations, at least in the beginning, were negatively perceived among the Muslim population. As stated by a Muslim activist involved in the foundation of *Gajret*, when the association was established, rumors abounded: "the men throughout the market [*čaršija*] and coffee shops, and the women in the quarters [*mahale*] started to spread the rumor that *Gajret's* activists [were] gather[ing] money to organize orgies in the base-

85 For a recent overview of the historiography on women and gender in Habsburg Bosnia, see Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović, Fabio Giomi, and Zlatan Delić, "Period austrougarske uprave," in *Zabilježene: Žene i javni život Bosne i Hercegovine u 20. vijeku*, ed. Jasmina Čaušević (Sarajevo: Sarajevo Open Centre and Foundation CURE, 2014), 16–38.

86 Mustafa A. Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu: savremeni kulturni i socijalni problemi muslimana jugoslovena* (Belgrade: Skerlić, 1936), 260.

ment of the *Društveni Dom*, and that they consume[ed] prohibited [*haram*] drinks, and that there they [ate] food that [was] even more prohibited.”<sup>87</sup> State schools and voluntary associations were thus considered to be alien institutions capable of endangering the morality and integrity of the Muslim population. For all these reasons, Muslim women supposedly chose to resort to more discrete methods of supporting Muslim voluntary associations, which did not imply their visibility in the public space, through various forms of financial support for the associations’ activities. The Ottoman Empire, and Muslim societies more in general, abound with examples of this kind: insofar as Islamic law granted them control over part of their holdings, for centuries wealthy Muslim women had been using their wealth to support different kinds of cultural and philanthropic initiatives.

This support initially took the form of the *zekijat*, the ritual alms mandatory according to Islam. In 1910, Paša *hanuma* Čugurević, the wife of an important Tuzla landowner, joined the prestigious ranks of *Gajret*’s benefactors by donating 200 crowns. This gesture, probably the first of its kind to be made by a woman, was enthusiastically welcomed by the association’s journal, which publicly hailed *hanuma* Paša as a champion “of the cultural rebirth of our *millet* [religious community].”<sup>88</sup> That same year, other women began to dedicate parts of their *zekijat* to *Gajret*, even stirring up the enthusiasm of male activists: “our women [*naše ženskinje*], who until now have done nothing for our association, nor contributed to its economic consolidation, can do a lot for it and we hope that this news, *inšallah*, will soon spread among our women.”<sup>89</sup>

In addition to the ritual alms, women also participated in associative life through the *vakuf* institution.<sup>90</sup> According to Islamic law, the *vakuf* is an in-

87 Izet Perbev, “Nekoliko epizoda u prilog istoriji Gajreta,” *Gajret*, no. 16 (1928): 253.

88 “Novi članovi utemeljitelji,” *Gajret*, no. 1 (1910): 13.

89 “Zekijat Gajretu,” *Gajret*, no. 10 (1910): 165.

90 Concerning *vakuf* funded by women in the Yugoslav region, and in Bosnia in particular, see Kerima Filan, “Women founders of pious endowments in Ottoman Bosnia,” in *Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture, History*, eds. Amila Buturović and Irvin Cemil Schik (London and New York: I.B. Tauris 2007), 99–127 and Dragana Amedoski, “Women *Vaqfs* in the Sixteenth-Century Sanjak of Kruševac (Alaca Hisâr),” *Balkanica* XL (2009): 43–55. For an overview of *vakuf* in the Yugoslav region during the post-Ottoman period, see Alexandre Popovic, “Le Waqf dans les pays du sud-est européen à l’époque post-ottomane” in *Les Waqf dans le monde musulman contemporain (XIXe-XXe siècle)*, ed. Faruk Bilici (Istanbul: IFEA, 1994), 199–213 and Mehmed Begović *Vakufi u Jugoslaviji* (Belgrade: SANU, 1963). On *vakuf* established by women, see Lucienne Thys-Šenocak, *Ottoman Women Builders: The Architectural Patronage of Hadice Turhan Sultan* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

alienable religious endowment, typically a donated building or plot of land, or even cash, which are to be used for religious or charitable purposes.<sup>91</sup> In 1911, for example, two wealthy sisters from Sarajevo, Zulejha *hanuma* and Hašema *hanuma* Imširović, converted all of their property into a pious foundation and declared that one fifth of its revenue was to be donated in perpetuity to *Gajret*. Another part of the revenue was to be used to support religious girls' schools in various parts of Bosnia.<sup>92</sup>

Other wealthy Muslim women chose to support the association financially in more creative ways. An interesting case is that of Hankija *hanuma* Mujbašić-Gazdić. A resourceful widow from Sarajevo, after 1878 she had entrusted her fortune to the Provincial Bank, and accumulated significant interest over the years. Given that Islamic law prohibited the enjoyment of interests, *hanuma* Mujbašić-Gazdić had at her disposal an important amount of technically illicit money cumulated thanks to a non-Islamic institution. In order to resolve this situation, in 1912 she chose to donate the entire sum (over 1,300 crowns) to *Gajret*, relinquishing the fruits of this illicitly accumulated wealth to promote the Muslim "cultural reawakening."<sup>93</sup> Thus, though they remained invisible, Muslim women were able to participate through the medium of money in the establishment of Muslim cultural associations.

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Bosnia's shift from Ottoman to Habsburg sovereignty, initiated in 1878 and completed in 1908, was accompanied by a powerful civilizational rhetoric, broadcast by both official and unofficial voices from Austria-Hungary. Passing from the Ottoman to the Habsburg Empire did not simply mean a rule change like any other: it meant moving from the backwards East to the enlightened West, (re)joining the European people on the path to progress and liberty, after four centuries under the Ottoman yoke. This narrative, which assigned the Habsburg authorities with the burden of bringing culture to this

91 Selma Avdić Hajrović, *Zaboravljene dobročiniteljke: sarajevske vakife* (M.A. diss., University of Sarajevo).

92 "Narodna dobrotvorka," *Gajret*, no. 3 (1911): 31. In a publication celebrating *Gajret*'s twenty-fifth anniversary, Hašema Imširić is mentioned as a one of the association's *veliki dobrotvori* (great benefactors), alongside companies and banks. Cf. Hamza Humo, *Spomenica dvadesetipetogodišnjice Gajreta: 1903.-1928*. (Sarajevo: Glavni odbor Gajreta, 1928). For further information on the Imširić sisters' assets, see the article "Podizanje Doma," *Gajret*, no. 7-9 (1935): 115-7.

93 "Lijepi primjer," *Gajret*, no. 1 (1912): 13.

proximate little Orient, turned out to be very close to the same one used, in those same decades, by the Western European powers to legitimize their rule over the colonized world overseas. The educational policy, built around a new set of state schools, and the reform of existing ones, was seen as a tool for ensuring lasting Habsburg rule over the province. A cohort of local Muslims decided to collaborate in this field with the Viennese authorities, and engaged in promoting the education of Muslim pupils in the new schools—both for boys and girls. Their success was greater with the former than with the latter, however: education for girls was perceived as unnecessary, dangerous, or even un-Islamic by a significant portion of the Muslim population. Despite these difficulties, in the early twentieth century a first generation of Muslim girls, mainly from Sarajevo, started out on an educational path of a new kind, centered around handiwork, domestic economy, and taught in Serbo-Croatian. Given the extreme resistance of Muslim society to the education of girls, this path was exclusively pursued in specific structures, segregated according to sex and confession, established through negotiation between the Provincial Government and the religious institutions.

In roughly the same years, Bosnian Muslims, like their other fellow citizens, became ever more familiar with the voluntary association, in particular cultural and philanthropic ones. Like in the other regions of both the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires in those years, associational culture was developing essentially along confessional and national lines, and men and women appropriated this institution closely associated with Habsburg modernity in different ways. While educated and wealthy Muslim men established their own cultural and philanthropic associations, and invested their time and energies in intense volunteering activities, wealthy Muslim women preferred to participate indirectly; that is, in ways that did not imply transcending the boundaries of their domesticity, such as donating money and goods to associations. As they had done for centuries under the Ottoman Empire and in the Muslim world more in general, wealthy Muslim women resorted to Islamic institutions like the *zekijat* or *vakuf* as a way to support newly-established voluntary associations, demonstrating both the porousness and continuity between allegedly “traditional” and “modern” forms of philanthropy.

## CHAPTER 2

# DOMESTICATING THE MUSLIM WOMAN QUESTION



If real Muslim women were only marginally involved—in the flesh, as it were—in “modern” institutions like state schools and voluntary associations, the Muslim woman as a discursive construct was becoming a steady presence in the Bosnian public sphere. From the turn of the century, the debate on women’s social and political place in society—and through this, the debate on gender relations more broadly—was labeled as the “woman question.” A *global* phenomenon par excellence, crossing both the industrializing West and its colonial space, this debate assumed different facets according to *local* circumstances. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the debate was—at least in the case of Muslims—highly communitarized. In other words, it gave birth to a separate debate on Muslim gender relations, i.e., the Muslim woman question. Both in the West and in the Muslim world, this debate and its different variations—education, reproductive rights, suffrage, bodily autonomy, legal position in marriage, medical rights—became a way to discuss the place of men and women in modernity. This chapter examines the evolution of the Muslim woman question in Habsburg Bosnia, by focusing on three main questions. First, I will look at how the arguments that nourished this debate were developed by Bosnians, not in some kind of splendid isolation, but were shaped by the constant circulation of people, and the translation of texts, across empire borders. Second, this chapter will try to prove that the debate on women was not uniquely the business of men, and that, on the contrary, some women succeeded in making their voices heard. Third, that Muslim women too, on the eve of the Great War, had their word to say. Special attention will thus

be devoted to the Muslim woman question as seen from the perspective of these aforementioned real, in-the-flesh Muslim women, and to the potential specificities of their discourse.

### IMAGINING BOSNIAN MUSLIMS

In her most widely-read book, Maria Todorova convincingly shows that, in the second half of the nineteenth century, a growing corpus of scholarship contributed to the “discovery” of the Balkans by Western travelers, journalists and politicians. Of course, if information about the geography and populations of this part of Europe had been circulating among educated people well before that period, it is in this period that, given the region’s growing importance for European foreign policy, this knowledge grew. Of course, as Todorova points out, there was no such thing as a single Western vision of the Balkans: national spaces, class and political orientations played a major role in creating different perceptions of the Balkans. Nevertheless, it seems apparent that, especially after the Eastern crisis, European commentators made pains to stress their sympathy for “the plight of the subject Slavs.” As recently shown by Edin Hajdarpašić, the trope of suffering was particularly true for the case of Bosnia. This association between the Turks and oppression, and the exclusion of any possible happy subjection of Christians under Ottoman rule, was already clear in the mid-nineteenth century. Bosnia’s condition as the true land of suffering and sadness, mostly (but not exclusively) inhabited by Christians and slaves, was sometimes compared to other forms of slavery under discussion in Western countries at that time, such as chattel slavery in America. It was a parallel that captured the imagination of an increasingly liberal nineteenth-century public.<sup>1</sup>

In this context of open European sympathy toward the Christian population of Southeastern Europe, Muslims became an object of constant scrutiny. Followers of a non-Christian and non-European religion, and perceived as nostalgic for Ottoman rule, Bosnian Muslims were without a doubt the most discredited group in the eyes of the occupiers. The latter frequently

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1 Edin Hajdarpašić, *Whose Bosnia?: Nationalism and Political Imagination in the Balkans, 1840–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 52–89.

mobilized an anti-Muslim repertoire that, despite nuances in content and in tone, was already well established in Europe and that found roots in the confrontation between European Christian scholars and Islam, dating back to the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> The aforementioned 1886 pamphlet “Bosnia, its Present and Near Future”, after describing the different confessional groups of the province, offers a vivid example of this disregard for Muslims:

The lowest condition [*am tiefsten*] is certainly reserved for the Muslim, who believes his God is best served by barking [*Herplärren*] a couple verses of the Quran in Arabic, a language incomprehensible to Him. The Greek-Orthodox Serb prays slightly better [*wenig besser*], expressing their religious sentiments with a series of endless signs of the cross and by repeating the exclamation “Lord, have mercy!” a hundred times. But even in the case of the Bosnian Catholic, who is of course relatively more educated than the others, the exercise consists mostly in outward signs and prayer formulas, which require little if any thought from the person praying, leaving the heart unaffected and the mind devoid of all thought... In any case, there is no doubt that the Catholics are certainly more advanced than the other two faiths from this standpoint.<sup>3</sup>

Using religious practice as a device to categorize the Bosnian population, the author offers here a classification of its different confessional groups, in order of the most advanced to the most backward. Muslims, needless to say, were placed on the lowest rung of the Bosnian social ladder.

The position and fate of the Muslims of Bosnia, and those of the Balkans in general, triggered at that time a vivid debate among Western scholars. As shown by Nathalie Clayer and Xavier Bougarel, as soon as it was apparent that the demise of Ottoman rule in Southeastern Europe would only be a matter of time, historians, orientalist and politicians of different countries and political orientations began to debate one question: once the rule of the sultan had been “pushed back to Asia,” should the Balkan Muslim emigrate or stay? In other words: should the de-Ottomanisation of Europe be

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2 John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

3 Anonymous, *Bosniens Gegenwart und Nächste Zukunft* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1886), 33.



accompanied by its de-Islamisation, the disappearance of the Muslim population? Or perhaps it was legitimate to imagine a future for these Muslim populations in Europe in the coming post-Ottoman order?

The answers to these questions varied significantly. A large number of nineteenth and twentieth century historians and ethnographers tended to make a clear distinction between the Muslim Turkish-speaking peoples (such as the inhabitants of modern-day Macedonia, Dobruja, or Thrace), and the Muslim Slavic-speaking and Albanian-speaking peoples (such as the Muslims of Bosnia and Albania, or the Pomaks of Bulgaria). While the former were considered to be hopelessly removed from European civilization in terms of religion, race, and language, and therefore doomed to follow the Ottoman retreat and “go back to Asia,” a glimmer of hope remained for the latter. As Slavs, and therefore as natives both “by language and by blood,” emigration was not destined to be their only fate. The two principal Serbian intellectuals of the nineteenth century, for example, Dositej Obradović and Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, insisted on separating Slavic-speaking Muslims from non-Slavic ones, and on reserving the former as authentic members of the Serbian Nation.<sup>4</sup> This position received in 1829 the prestigious endorsement of the German historian Leopold von Ranke, who stated that it would be madness see the Muslims of Bosnia and Bulgaria as intruders on European soil, and a historic mistake to have them “return to Asia.” Even the Habsburg administration remained largely optimistic about its newly-acquired Muslim subjects. Presumed to have been converted to Islam by force or for mere tactical reasons, their Islamization was considered to be superficial. Unanimously considered to be legitimate members of the Slavic family, Vienna remained hopeful for the possibility of their adapting to the new circumstances, and of imagining a future for themselves within European civilization.<sup>5</sup>

This idea of a “Slavic-Muslim adaptability” coexisted with other, far more pessimistic discourses. The aforementioned 1886 pamphlet, for example, stated that although the Bosnians were a population speaking a single language, “the three faiths that divide this people have led to the progressive development of rifts that clearly separate the children of this country [from

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4 Hajdarpasic, *Whose Bosnia?*, 21, 33.

5 Nathalie Clayer and Xavier Bougarel, *Europe's Balkan Muslims: A New History* (London: Hurst, 2017), 36–40.

one another] in every aspect of intellectual, social, and economic life.”<sup>6</sup> This century-long division had made Muslims incapable of fully integrating into Bosnian post-Ottoman society. According to the author, Muslims longed for the “old times” (*die alte Zeit*),<sup>7</sup> an Ottoman nostalgia that “through the centuries, does not fade with the passage of years and days.”<sup>8</sup> In light of these circumstances, there could be no place for Muslims in Bosnia’s future:

Whether aristocratic or humble, for all these reasons, the Turk [a term used to indicate Muslims in general] has too high an opinion of himself to accept becoming a servant when not so long ago he was a lord. In fact, the Turk cannot bear the superiority of Christians, whom he despises from the very depths of his soul... He finds their casual vivacity effeminate, and the equality they afford to women, a sign of the perversion of their race. Bowing to the orders of a European, who thinks and feels in this way, would be a disgrace for the Turk. And as he is unable to escape this in Bosnia, and given that he could not bring himself to grow alongside the “European,” finding himself eclipsed at every turn, he chose the only escape possible: fleeing to Asia [*die Flucht nach Asien*]<sup>9</sup>

Following this reasoning, the pamphlet ends with a particularly sinister conclusion, predicting the extinction of Muslims:

The Turkish element cannot compete economically with the country’s other “nationalities,” nor is it equipped to play an intellectual or cultural role within Europe, and consequently is becoming physically and morally extinct [*er steht physisch und moralisch auf dem Aussterbeetat*].<sup>10</sup>

In this intellectual and political confrontation on the right for Balkan Muslims to have their own place in post-Ottoman Europe, gender representations began to play an increasingly crucial role. Drawing from a well-established set of tropes circulating at that time, non-Muslim authors

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6 *Bosniens Gegenwart*, 1.

7 *Bosniens Gegenwart*, 10.

8 *Bosniens Gegenwart*, 7.

9 *Bosniens Gegenwart*, 12.

10 *Bosniens Gegenwart*, 14.

mobilized alleged Muslim gender practices to demonstrate similarities or differences between “the European” and “the Turk,” and built on this argument to underline the impossibility of their finding their own place in the post-Ottoman era. As in Western orientalist discourse, the position of women in particular was often put forward as the best proof of the Muslim population’s position on the global civilizational ladder. As early as 1865, the renowned Romanian writer Dora d’Istria (pen-name of the duchess Elena Ghica, 1828–1888) argued that Albanian Muslims, in stark contrast with the vast majority of Muslims, did not degrade their women, and that this fact should be taken as the best proof of their intrinsic European-ness.<sup>11</sup> The gender argument was of course put the other way around, that is, in order to support the thesis of a Muslim inadaptability to post-Ottoman circumstances. This was the case, for instance, for Milan Nedeljković, the Serbian scholar who in 1892–93 published his thesis on the imminent disappearance of Balkan Muslims in the journal of the oldest and most prestigious Serbian cultural-national society, *Matica Srpska* (Serbian matrix) from Novi Sad, in Habsburg Vojvodina. The goal of the text, with the pompous title “Islam and its Influence on the Spiritual Life and Cultural Progress of its Peoples” was ambitious: drawing from French and German orientalist scholarship, it aimed to “analyze every aspect of the Muslim religion, investigate its philosophy, its knowledge, its foundations,”<sup>12</sup> in order to evaluate Islam’s contributions to mankind. As becomes clear from reading the first few pages, the author’s true goal was of a far more restricted nature. With its four sections, the text aimed to demonstrate the irreducible difference between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the intrinsic inferiority of the former, with special reference to Serbia and the Balkans. According to the author, the European Christian peoples, despite their differences, shared a “general and common aspiration for cultural progress [*zajednička i opća težnja za kulturnim napretkom*],”<sup>13</sup> while Muslims did not. Nedeljković, who like his contemporaries drew abundantly from social Darwinism arguments, considered Muslims—Slavs and Turks alike—to be intrinsically ill-equipped for “survival” (*opstanak*) in a post-

11 Clayer and Bougarel, *Europe’s Balkan Muslims*, 37.

12 Milan Nedeljković, “Islam i njegov uticaj na duševni život i kulturni napredak naroda mu. Kulturno-istorijska studija,” *Letopis Matice Srpske*, no. 172 (1892): 58.

13 Nedeljković, “Islam i njegov uticaj,” 58.

Ottoman Europe, the reason for this residing within Islam itself. The religion of Muhammad was intrinsically afflicted with “religious fanaticism” (*verski fanatizam*) and “religious intolerance” (*verska intolerancija*), and these features prevented Islam from fostering “progress” (*napredak*) for its followers. Given such a premise, the Balkan Muslims were bound for “complete and utter political and spiritual insignificance” (*potpuna politična i duševna beznačajnost*).<sup>14</sup> According to Nedeljković, the Muslims were fated to gradually disappear from this region: “it would be senseless to attempt to eradicate the Muslim religion by force,” insofar as “the Muslim peoples will abandon Islam of their own volition once they have reached the mental development and maturity needed to rise above the Quran.”<sup>15</sup> Even though in this case conversion replaced emigration as an outcome, in Nedeljković’s view the result would be no different; the European future of the Balkans was free of Islam.

Here again, in support of his thesis, Nedeljković referred to Muslim gender relations, and more precisely to the condition of women in Muslim societies. In his text, Muslim males are described as violent, oppressive religious fanatics, and Muslim women are described as enslaved and submissive. Here again, referring to widely-circulating tropes produced and circulated in the same period in Western Europe, the Muslim woman’s condition is described essentially as hidden by the veil and locked in the harem. The similitudes between this line of reasoning and the discourse of European colonizers, which reached its peak more or less in the same period, appears here crystal clear: as highlighted by Leila Ahmed and Meyda Yeğenoğlu regarding the Maghreb and the Middle East, veiling and sexual segregation were elected as the symbolic cornerstone upon which to build an asymmetrical relationship between hegemonic (in this case, Slavic Christian) and non-hegemonic (Slavic Muslim) groups.<sup>16</sup> In the words of Nedeljković, the Muslim woman was thus a “creature without rights... like things, tools and objects for the sensual enjoyment and entertainment of men, devoid of any

14 Milan Nedeljković, “Islam i njegov uticaj na duševni život i kulturni napredak naroda mu. Kulturno-istorijska studija,” *Letopis Matice Srpske*, 175 (1893): 98.

15 Nedeljković, “Islam i njegov uticaj na duševni život i kulturni napredak naroda mu. Kulturno-istorijska studija,” *Letopis Matice Srpske*, 176 (1893): 113.

16 Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies* and Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

sublime meaning in and of itself.”<sup>17</sup> What is worth noting in Nedeljković’s discourse is the absence of emphasis on lascivious sensuality, a trait that many scholars have recognized as a constant in Western representations of Muslim women.<sup>18</sup> Reading this text, it seems that Bosnia and the Balkans are not a place for dancing odalisques or the princesses of *One Thousand and One Nights*: Muslim women are imagined as victims of inherent violence and enslavement.<sup>19</sup>

As an educated man, Nedeljković also insisted on another point that distinguished, in his view, Christian women from Muslim women in the Balkans: their access to education. According to this line of reasoning, it was not only veiling and segregation that isolated women from broader society, but something even worse—the walls of ignorance. The conclusion of this argument is adamant:

how different the educated women of the West are from the ignorant Muslim women! [*kakva li je razlika između obrazovane zapadnjakinje i neobrazovane muhamedanke!*]... the gradual progress of the Christian European youth, and the backwardness and decadence of Muslim generations are rooted in this difference.<sup>20</sup>

At the turn of the century, while the very existence of Muslims in post-Ottoman Europe was being directly contested by non-Muslim scholars, representations of gender relations, and more precisely of Muslim women, were gaining importance in the public debate. Her position in society became a powerful device for establishing a hierarchical distinction between Balkan Christians and Balkan Muslims and their belonging to an imagined civilizational space like the West and the Orient. Practices such as veiling and segregation became closely associated with the survival, progress or growth of the entire Muslim community, affecting the very likelihood of these communities to find their place in the post-Ottoman order.

17 Nedeljković, “Islam i njegov uticaj,” 176 (1893): 107.

18 Mohja Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

19 Interestingly, Neval Berber in her research on British travel literature reached the same conclusions, see Neval Berber, *Unveiling Bosnia-Herzegovina in British Travel Literature (1844–1912)* (Pisa: PLUS-Pisa University Press, 2010), 76.

20 Nedeljković, “Islam i njegov uticaj,” 1893, 109.

## THE MUSLIM WOMAN QUESTION

As has been shown by previous scholarship, it took Bosnian Muslims some years to familiarize themselves with the post-Ottoman public setting. In his groundbreaking book on the Balkan Muslims, Alexandre Popovic talks of “shock” to describe the state of mind of the Muslim elite in the years that followed the congress of Berlin, in which they refused to engage in any public debate.<sup>21</sup> More recently, Enes Karić claims that the first years of Habsburg rule over Bosnia were a “time of hush and great silence” for Muslims, due to the dramatic shift in “civilizations and masters” they had to cope with. Indeed, between 1878 and 1882, “[T]here is no record of a single epistle (*risala*) or book written by Bosnian Muslims... One could say that this was the ‘discourse of silence’ or ‘discourse by silence,’ however self-contradictory the term may seem.”<sup>22</sup> This silence is, as a matter of fact, eloquent: it testifies to the deep change in the region’s cultural paradigm, evident both in the languages and the alphabets used in the province. This cultural shift was, first of all, a linguistic shift. Under Ottoman rule, besides the growing importance of the French language since the *Tanzimat* period, the most widespread learned languages were still Arabic and Ottoman, both written in the Arabic script. In the southern provinces of Austria-Hungary the learned languages were Serbo-Croatian, in both the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, and of course German. It took some time for Muslims to adapt to this new dominant cultural framework. Once they had appropriated written expression in Serbo-Croatian, Muslim intellectuals were able to contribute to building a Serbian-Croatian-speaking public sphere with Bosnia as its focal point, but which also included Croatia-Slavonia, Dalmatia, Vojvodina and Serbia. This shared space in which books, people and ideas could circulate made it possible for Muslims to participate in debates along with non-Muslims, and especially with people living in the other provinces of the Habsburg Empire. Muslims contributed regularly to the different literary journals produced in Bosnia, in particular pro-Croatian *Zora* (Dawn),

21 Popovic, *L'Islam Balkanique*, 284–87.

22 Enes Karić, “Aspects of Islamic Discourse in Bosnia-Herzegovina from the Mid 19th till the End of the 20th Century: A Historical Review,” in *Şehrayin. Die Welt der Osmanen, die Osmanen in der Welt; Wahrnehmungen, Begegnungen und Abgrenzungen. Illuminating the Ottoman World. Perceptions, Encounters and Boundaries*, ed. Yavuz Köse (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 286.

pro-Serbian *Bosanska Vila* (Bosnian Fairy) and pro-government *Nada* (Hope). At the same time, Muslims also cultivated a platform for debate specific to Bosnian Muslims centered around the communal institutions whose protection had been ensured at the Congress of Berlin. This Muslim public debate remained open to what was going on in the Muslim world, and especially in the Ottoman public debate. At the crossroads between these two discursive spaces, from the end of the nineteenth century Muslim intellectuals began to elaborate a discourse on Muslim women, and on gender relations more in general.

Among the first Muslim intellectuals to begin writing in public, in 1886 the aforementioned Mehmed *beg* Kapetanović Ljubušak decided to reply to the anonymous pamphlet produced that year in Leipzig, thus writing the first challenge to the “Muslim Extinction Thesis” to be put forward by a Bosnian Muslim. In the pages of his 1886 text, “What the Muhammedans in Bosnia think, Kapetanović overturned his opponent’s main arguments, maintaining that Bosnian Muslims (which he interestingly called Muhammedans, thus adopting the German term used by his opponent) could be loyal subjects of the Habsburg Empire. As a rebuttal of the thesis that emigration to Asia was the only possible future for Muslims, the author stressed that Bosnia was their true native land (*vatan*), and that for this reason they ought to stay. Life under the rule of a Christian emperor was possible for Muslims, as long as Austria-Hungary could guarantee protection for Muslims, their property and institutions. Kapetanović’s argument puts forward a line of thinking that would become an attitude shared by his generation of the Muslim educated elite: trust in the compatibility between Islam and progress. The brochure argued that Islam in itself could be a means of progress, and that, in the post-Ottoman setting, through adaptation Muslims were capable of surviving in “the new era” (*novo vrijeme*)—as Muslim intellectuals had started to call the post-1878 period.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, the first representatives of the new generation of educated Muslims, one that had come into being mainly after 1878, joined the cause. Osman Nuri Hadžić (1869–1937) was one of these young men; originally from Mostar, he had completed his education both in state and com-

23 Mehmed *beg* Kapetanović Ljubušak, *Što misle muhamedanci u Bosni: odgovor brošuri u Lipskoj tiskanoj pod naslovom ‘Sadašnjost i najbliža budućnost Bosne’* (Sarajevo: Tisak i naklada Spindlera i Löschnera, 1886).

munity schools. After having been enrolled in the *mekteb* and *medresa* of his native city, he had attended the Sarajevo School for Sharia Judges, before moving to Zagreb and obtaining a degree in law. After returning to Bosnia, Hadžić worked as an official at the district court of Sarajevo and for the Provincial Government, and then as Director of the School for Sharia Judges. Thanks to a very prolific writing career, Hadžić became one of the most established intellectuals in the Bosnian Muslim community, alongside Bašagić and Mulabdić. Osman Nuri Hadžić took it upon himself to respond to Nedeljković's pamphlet with his own, entitled "Islam and Culture," published in Zagreb in 1894. In this text, the author strove to demonstrate that Islam had also produced its own majestic testaments to civilization throughout history, and show that Islam and progress were not only compatible, but also that it had contributed to the general good of human civilization. By the mid-1890s, Muslim intellectuals had already begun to forge a discourse of their own, structured around a series of recurring key issues. For this group, the Muslims of Bosnia, and Muslims in general, lived in a state of backwardness (*nazadak*) compared to non-Muslims, and to ensure the community's survival (*opstanak*), it was therefore necessary to adapt (*prilagođivanje*) their way of life, aligning it wherever possible with European modernity. In this way it would again be possible to continue on the path to progress (*napredak*), which Muslims had abandoned centuries earlier.<sup>24</sup>

In the discourse produced by Muslim intellectuals, gender roles started to gain a certain significance. Mirroring Nedeljković's text, a section of Hadžić's pamphlet is dedicated to the condition of women. Hadžić used a series of *surahs* (chapters of the Quran) and *hadiths* (sayings of the Prophet) to prove that conditions for Muslim women were far removed from those given by Western representations. The Bosnian author stressed that, first of all, Muslim women were a far cry from the representations produced in the West, neither lascivious odalisques nor enslaved individuals. On the contrary, Hadžić pointed out that Islamic law, which gave women the right to dispose of their inheritance, put them in a better position than their counterparts in contemporary Europe, where they depended almost entirely on their fathers and husbands. In answer to Nedeljković's representation of

24 Osman Nuri Hadžić, *Islam i kultura* (Zagreb: Tisak dioničke tiskare, 1894).



the Muslim domestic sphere (the harem), Hadžić focused on the relationships between husband and wife, and parents and children, stating that it was based on collaboration and mutual respect “in a way that is difficult to find in the West [*Zapad*].”<sup>25</sup> In response to Nedeljković’s argument, which saw the veil and the segregation of the sexes to be emblematic of the Muslim female condition, Hadžić also defended the practice of segregation and, implicitly, the veil, claiming that they were in accordance with the domestic situation of women, and in no way hindered the development of their individual expression or happiness:

Though it is a woman’s duty to run the household, and though her true world [*pravi svijet*] is in the home, this in no way prevents a woman from amusing herself from time to time. Gatherings are held at home, where she may converse with family members and friends, and she may go to visit her family. In other words, the diversions of Muslim women respect popular customs and the laws of Islam.<sup>26</sup>

However, Hadžić was most adamant about education. According to the author, Islam was not a religion of ignorance and obscurantism for women, but rather a faith that stressed the importance of education for both sexes. As proof for this argument, Hadžić pointed out that:

this *hadith* should suffice: *Talabul ilmi farizatam ala kjuli muslimin ve muslimetin!* (It is a religious duty for every Muslim man *and woman* to pursue knowledge). This should suffice to immediately invalidate the claims of the Serb [that is, Nedeljković]. Is he aware that many female secondary schools and institutes for the training of female teachers now exist in Istanbul? Is he aware that each year these schools turn out more and more teachers, who work throughout the entire Turkish Empire? Is he aware, in conclusion, that there is a [Muslim] Girls’ School in Sarajevo? This highly educated professor should first learn of these things and then—after some reflection—put ink to paper.<sup>27</sup>

25 Hadžić, *Islam i kultura*, 88.

26 Hadžić, *Islam i kultura*, 88.

27 Hadžić, *Islam i kultura*, 90–91.

In this pamphlet, Hadžić interestingly moves from referring to an abstract and ahistorical Muslim woman as defined by the *hadiths*, to talking about a historical contemporary Muslim woman in the Ottoman Empire. According to the Bosnian scholar, new attitudes towards female education did not only come from the European West, but also from the Middle East. The reference to the “Girls’ School in Sarajevo” is likely a reference to the Muslim Girls’ School established that year.

Like their non-Muslim counterparts, the Muslim educated elite did not simply limit themselves to pamphlets in order to assert their voices in the Bosnian public sphere. In the climate of relative political freedom that followed Kállay’s death, the first generation of Muslim students founded several literary journals, including *Ogledalo* (Mirror), *Biser* (Pearl) and especially *Behar* (Blossom).<sup>28</sup> This last journal, founded by Bašagić, Mulabdić, and Hadžić on the same model as literary journals already being published in Bosnia, became the most important vehicle for literary texts, essays, poems, plays, and novel excerpts written predominantly by Muslims and for a Muslim audience. Journals such as *Behar* and *Biser* paid particular attention to women entering the public sphere through literary writing. In addition to Muslim women from Egypt and the Caucasus, who were also widely cited, Ottoman women got the lion’s share of these journals, with biographies, translations, and literary analyses dedicated to them. Though the journals were not lacking in references to the female writers of the Ottoman golden age, it was the generations of women who lived in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire that captured the imagination of Bosnian Muslim intellectuals. Among the “pearls of the Ottoman Parnassus,”<sup>29</sup> Fatma Aliye (1862–1936), Makbule Leman (1865–1898) and Nigar Bint Osman (1856–1918) received particular attention. As can be read in the pages of *Behar* in 1907, “[in the Ottoman Empire today] countless primary and secondary female schools are popping up everywhere, where young Ottoman women are trained and educated to become good housewives and mothers, able to nurture and raise respectable members of Muslim society and

28 Emina Memija and Lamija Hadžiosmanović, *Biser: Književno-historijska monografija i bibliografija* (Sarajevo: Nacionalna i univerzitetska biblioteka Bosne i Hercegovine, 1998) and Todor Kruševac, *Bosansko-hercegovački listovi u XIX veku* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1978). On *Behar*, see Muhzin Rizvić, *Behar: Književnoistorijska monografija* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1971).

29 Mirza Safvet [pseud. of Safvet beg Bašagić], “Stambolska pjeskinja,” *Behar*, no. 5 (1904–1905): 5.

Turkish citizens.”<sup>30</sup> According to this text, “Istanbul even boasts a *Dar-al-muallimat*, a female teachers’ school with three departments... This institute has graced the Ottoman people with powerful female poets and excellent female writers, who have enriched Ottoman literature with their creativity of spirit.”<sup>31</sup>

Bosnian intellectuals were especially struck by the biographies of these women, known as “the most prolific and greatest poetesses of the new Orient”.<sup>32</sup> A solid background both in religious subjects and the liberal arts developed within and beyond the domestic sphere; the ability to master not only the genres, languages, and cultural products of the Ottoman tradition but also those of Europe, and particularly France; international fame; and finally the ability to reconcile their public vocation as writers with family life, marriage, and motherhood. Bosnian Muslim intellectuals also widely quoted Muslim women from minority contexts (i.e., the Russian Empire and especially the Caucasus), where women “have already begun consciously fulfilling their duty and are beginning to discuss the woman question [*žensko pitanje*] more than the men themselves—in many cases defending religion, and challenging the erroneous judgments of European scholars regarding our holy Islam.”<sup>33</sup>

Reading this corpus of texts on gender relations produced by Bosnian Muslims in the early twentieth century, one is impressed by the variety of intellectual references cited in them. On the same page can be found references of very different natures, and from very different intellectual traditions. Of course, religious sources such as the Quran and the *hadiths* are evoked as the lodestone for progressive discourse on Muslim women. References to the Islamic society contemporary to Muhammed, “when the prophet’s companions who made Islam great were the sons of cultured mothers,”<sup>34</sup> constitute of course an important reference. At the same time, Bosnian Muslim intellectuals also seem to have had a sound knowledge of more recent evolutions in the Muslim intellectual debate, in particular of the burgeoning nineteenth-century trends of Islamic modernism in the Muslim world. Of note

30 [Musa,] Ćazim [Ćatić], “Turska Pjesnikinja Nidar,” *Behar*, no. 8 (1907–1908): 104.

31 Ćazim, “Turska Pjesnikinja Nidar,” 104.

32 Mirza Safvet, “Stambolska pjeskinja,” 4.

33 Mehmed Karamehmedović, “Naobrazba našeg ženskinja,” *Musavat*, no. 9 (1911): 3.

34 S. Džemal, “Što nam je dužnost,” *Zeman*, no. 4 (1911): 2.

among the progressive Muslim authors quoted in the article are Muhamed Abduh (1849–1905), or the Egyptian Qasim Amin (1865–1908), “who with his book [probably in reference to his 1899 work *Tahrir-al-mar’a*, “The Liberation of Women”] endeavored to destroy the harmful customs of the patriarchy.”<sup>35</sup> The ideas of Muslim thinkers would increasingly circulate in the following years, when the book of another Egyptian modernist intellectual, Muhammed Ferid Vedždi (1875–1956), was entirely translated into Serbo-Croatian and published, first in the journal *Biser* and then, in 1915, as a separate book, translated by the Muslim poet Musa Ćazim Ćatić (1878–1915) under the title “The Muslim Woman.”<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the discourse of Muslim intellectuals was not uniquely nourished by this scholarship. Thanks to their training in Habsburg, and more generally in Western universities, they also drew abundant inspiration from the fathers of European theories on education, such as “the great Rousseau,” as well as from European thinkers in general, notably the “great Voltaire,”<sup>37</sup> Darwin and especially Kant. For the writers of these journals, bringing together thinkers from such different intellectual traditions was not problematic; after all, as S. Džemal claimed, “the Quran contains the basis of every philosophy.”<sup>38</sup>

In these years of fervent intellectual exchange, *Gajret* activists became particularly active in demanding a new form of education for Muslim women. The quantity of articles they dedicated to the Muslim woman question through the association’s official journal intensified. In an article from 1910, the gender agenda of the association is clearly defined. Referring to the same *hadith* already quoted by Hadžić, the author stressed that education was obligatory (*farz*) for both Muslim men and women:

Many people think they have accomplished their religious duties [*farz*] only by learning certain obligations, i.e. how to pray, fasting, washing before praying and so on. In doing so, they forget that besides religious duties, there is the obligation to learn the basic knowledge of your trade, your *ilmi-hal*. Besides religious sciences, the blacksmith is obliged by his religion to learn

35 Džemal, “Što nam je dužnost,” 2.

36 Muhamed Ferid Vedždi, *Muslimanska žena* (Mostar: Tisak i naklada prve muslimanske nakladne knjižare i štamparije, 1915).

37 Džemal, “Što nam je dužnost,” 4.

38 Džemal, “Što nam je dužnost,” 4.

the knowledge of his trade; the same goes, according to Islam, for the shopkeeper, who has to know how to be a shopkeeper... The importance of female education in the life of the people is comparable to the importance the locomotive has for the train. If the locomotive is weak and unable to move, the whole train remains motionless. So are mothers, who are the first to transmit to the human spirit faith, morality, self-awareness as a human being, and other similar feelings. If they are unable to fulfil this duty, then any other progress languishes.<sup>39</sup>

As was the case in the rest of the Muslim world at the turn of the century, as well as in Europe, the Muslim woman question was becoming an inevitable subject of debate.

#### “SAVING MUSLIM WOMEN FROM EDUCATION”

Institutional changes occurring both in the provincial and communal political arenas during the 1900s made a closer exploration of the contents and limits of this “*ilmi-hal* for Muslim women” ever more relevant. In 1908, taking advantage of the Ottoman government’s preoccupation with the Young Turk Revolution, Vienna unilaterally transformed its “temporary occupation” of the region into an annexation. The Habsburg authorities’ fears of an Ottoman Reconquista of Bosnia, or of the province swinging into the Serbian sphere of influence, seemed to have been waylaid once and for all. In order to demonstrate its good intentions toward its Bosnian subjects, in 1910 Vienna allowed the constitution of a Bosnian Diet, a provincial assembly elected on restricted suffrage. However, the extent of minister Burián’s approval for the local elite’s association with the decision-making process turned out to be extremely limited. As a matter of fact, the Bosnian Diet was vested only with advisory powers and had the right to propose laws only on a limited range of subjects. Despite its limited powers, the establishment of a provincial assembly was for Bosnian society a major change; it encouraged Bosnian political groups to organize as real parties, and offered Bosnian notables a new arena for public discussion. Given the dramatically low literacy rate in Bosnia—in 1910, 88.05% of the entire population was illiter-

39 Hazim Muftić, “Ženska naobrazba ili izostavljeni farz,” *Gajret*, no. 5 (1910): 73–4.

ate—one of the first tasks of the Bosnian Diet was to propose a law on compulsory education. Considering that Muslim women were almost entirely illiterate—99.68%, compared to 83.86% of Catholic and 95% of Orthodox women—the Muslim notables elected in the assembly found themselves bound to address the issue of education for Muslim women.<sup>40</sup>

The 1908 annexation also brought about a significant transformation within the Muslim community space. Considering that the Habsburg position in Bosnia had been strengthened, Burián decided to give both Muslim and Orthodox-Serbian notables recognition for something they had been demanding for almost ten years: administrative autonomy for their community institutions. Following negotiations with the Muslim political elite, in 1909 the Provincial Government approved a Statute for Autonomy guaranteeing the Muslim population the right to elect the head of the local religious hierarchy, to be ratified both by the Emperor in Vienna and the *Šejh-ul-islam* in Istanbul. The administration of the community schools and pious foundations was also transferred into Muslim hands, through the creation of a set of elected administrative bodies. The new *Reis-ul-ulema* (and the first to be elected under the new Statute), Sulejman Šarac (1850–1927), established an Inquiry Committee in 1910, with the task of evaluating the state of Muslim schools and potentially proposing reforms.<sup>41</sup> For this second forum, Muslim notables were again asked to make decisions about female education.

The importance that education assumed in both provincial and communal public spheres aroused a great deal of enthusiasm among the new generation of Muslim educated elite, who in their journals stressed the need for better schooling for Muslim boys and girls. Despite their enthusiasm, the 1911 debates turned out to be for them a harsh defeat both in the provincial and communal forums. All 24 seats reserved for Muslim representatives in the Bosnian Diet were won by the Muslim Popular Organization (*Muslimanska Narodna Organizacija*, MNO). Established in 1906, this party had been created as an extension of the Muslim Movement for Autonomy, bringing together the anti-Habsburg Muslim political leaders. This meant that the Muslim educated elite, which was mostly pro-

40 Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 92.

41 Ćurić, *Muslimansko školstvo*, 193.

Habsburg and thus almost absent in the ranks of the movement, became extremely marginal within the Diet. Muslim notables such as Hadžić, Bašagić and Mulabdić even attempted to set up a pro-Habsburg party for the 1910 elections, the short-lived Muslim Progressive Party (*Muslimanska Napredna Stranka*, MNS). In the end, however, the “progressives”—as this group started to define itself—were eliminated by the electoral competition.<sup>42</sup>

The proceedings of the debate on a law for compulsory education show that only two Muslim deputies clearly stood up for improving education for Muslim pupils of both sexes: the physician from Sarajevo Hamdija Karamehmedović (1883–1968), and *hafiz* Mehmed *efendi* Mehmedbašić, probably a religious official.<sup>43</sup> The majority of MNO deputies, however, had a very different view on this issue. During the Diet’s debates the leaders of the Muslim party openly asked for, and obtained, a specific clause excluding Muslim girls from compulsory education. Promulgated on June 5, 1911, the new law on education was doubly disappointing for Muslim educated notables; the text not only failed to compel the state to create a school infrastructure, thus making compulsory education dead letter, but also, under MNO deputy pressure, the law explicitly excluded Muslim schoolgirls from compulsory education. Despite the anger and embarrassment expressed in the Muslim press by progressive intellectuals, in 1911 Muslims remained the only Bosnian religious group for whom the principle of compulsory schooling only applied selectively, according to sex.

Deprived of political representation at the Diet, the progressive elite attempted to achieve better results in the Muslim communal arena, the Inquiry Committee on education. The composition of this assembly was rather varied; it included landowners and *ulema*, as well as Muslim teachers from the state schools. The aforementioned Karamehmedović was also part of the Inquiry Committee. During the several months of its activity, the members of the Inquiry Committee discussed many of the most critical aspects of Muslim communal schools: calendars, opportunities to use schoolbooks in the “local language,” reform for pedagogical programs, and much more. The committee also discussed the modification of paragraph 162 of the Statute for Autonomy, which required Muslim children to attend the *me-*

42 Šaćir Filandra, *Bošnjačka politika u XX. stoljeću* (Sarajevo: Sejtarija, 1998), 21–42.

43 Hamdija Karamehmedović, ed., *Zapisnici sjednica islamske prosvjetne ankete: držanih koncem decembra 1910. i u januaru 1911.* (Sarajevo: Vakufsko-mearifski saborski odbor, 1911).

*kteb* for a minimum of three years of before enrolling in a state school. Progressive Muslim notables considered this clause to be an obstacle that delayed the schooling of Muslim children compared to their peers. In one of its last sessions, the Inquiry Committee also dealt with the issue of education for Muslim girls. For the second time that year, Karamehmedović reiterated his fervent support for schooling Muslim pupils of both sexes, mobilizing the same arguments that were circulating at that time in Muslim progressive journals.<sup>44</sup> The proceedings of the Inquiry Committee provide us with one of the rare examples of a clear discourse against female schooling pronounced by a Muslim religious official before the First World War. Replying to Karamehmedović, a certain Omar *efendi* Zukanović responded that:

The *mektebs* for females are not so important, at least not as important as they are for males. Insofar as girls remain at home, educating them is not as much a priority as is educating boys, who are daily in contact with people of different faiths. At the end of the day, it is a man's duty to educate his wife. If he receives an education in accordance with the Islamic spirit, he alone will educate his wife.<sup>45</sup>

These lines provide a rare insight into the opinion of those among the socially conservative Muslim educated elite who were opposed to female education. What can we subsume from them? For this member of the Islamic hierarchy, communal schooling seems to have been above all for defensive purposes; it was necessary to protect Muslims from "contact with people of different faiths." The domesticity of Muslim women made their education a secondary issue. As a matter of fact, the males of a household, and in particular the husband, were the interface between the private, female sphere and the rest of the world—a world where Muslims were no longer safe.

The Inquiry Committee was not able to debate all of the topics that were on its agenda. The reopening of the Diet in late January 1911, which five members of the committee were a part of, brought about the interruption of its inquiry activities, and prevented the members of the committee from elaborating a final document. During its last session, the members decided to meet

44 Karamehmedović, *Zapisnici*, 146.

45 "IX. sjednica islamske prosvjetne ankete, držana 5. januara 1911," *Musavat*, no. 17 (1911): 2.



again at the end of the year and to discuss the situation of secondary community schools.<sup>46</sup> In the following months, the discussion about female education continued in Muslim journals and newspapers. The newspaper *Musavat* (Equality), the MNO house organ, published on Karamehmedović's initiative the proceedings of the discussion of the Inquiry Committee, thus making public the fracture among the Muslim elite.

In this context of keen interest for the Muslim woman question, *Muallim*, the association of teachers of Muslim schools, decided to print a brochure with a fascinating title: "Letter in Defense of Muslim Women", signed by a woman with a Muslim name—Safije *hanuma*. It is easy to imagine the surprise that the Bosnian public might have felt reading this thirty-page text, the first of its kind signed by a *hanum* i.e., a "Muslim lady." According to the journal's editorial board, which wrote a short introduction, the text was "written by one of our well-respected female writers."<sup>47</sup> In a public debate dominated by those in favor of schooling, this fact lent some credibility to a text that was meant to give a voice to a silent majority taking a different stance. This silent majority purportedly consisted of those who believed that "Muslim women should receive an education, provided that it not become something else: denationalizing [*odnaroditi*] and Europeanizing them [*europaizirati*], rather than allowing them to remain honest Bosnian Muslim women."<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting how, in this line of reasoning, the adoption of the European model of education and a loss of authenticity go hand in hand. In fact, the text unequivocally attacked the state school system and explicitly recommended that Muslim families not send their daughters to school. Safije *hanum* directly attacked Karamehmedović's arguments, and qualified Muslim women as "the greatest martyrs of the corruption of modern times and of its satanic liberty!"<sup>49</sup>

The publication drew the ire of many figures engaged in the cause for female education, especially Karamehmedović. In addition to the contents of the brochure, the critics turned their attention to the mysterious identity of its author, claiming that "not even the most corrupt of Muslim women [could] have written it."<sup>50</sup> The mystery was rapidly solved; a few

46 Ćurić, *Muslimansko školstvo*, 192.

47 Safije hanum [Sofija Pletikosić], *Pisma u obranu muslimanskog ženskinja* (Sarajevo: Izdanje uredništva Muallima, 1911).

48 Safije hanum, *Pisma u obranu*, 1.

49 Safije hanum, *Pisma u obranu*, 1.

50 "Safije hanum—Sofija Pletikosić," *Musavat*, no. 55 (1911): 2–3.

weeks after its publication, the journal *Musavat* discovered that behind the Muslim female pseudonym was a woman called Sofija Pupić-Pletikosić, “a Serbian woman, and wife of the now-retired director of the school of commerce.”<sup>51</sup> Having resided in Bosnia for some time, Pupić-Pletikosić was at that time living in Opatija, on the Adriatic coast. Pletikosić was no stranger to incendiary press contributions; ten years earlier she had published a series of articles in *Bosanska Vila*, this time against the effects of education on Serbian women. In 1911 she was already known to the Serbian public in Bosnia as an eccentric partisan of the anti-modernist cause. Nearly ten years earlier, Sofija Pupić-Pletikosić had written a series of articles entitled “Fashion and the Serbian Woman” (*Moda i srpska žena*), in which she harshly criticized the infiltration of European fashion and coquetties into Serbian society.<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, progressive notables reserved even harsher criticism for the Muslim teachers of the journal *Muallim*, accused of having endorsed, through the publication of this text, the cause of the reactionaries. *Zeman* (Time), for example, attacked the teachers for distributing and condoning a text that was considered to be “obscurantist,” “medieval,” “fanatical,” and “hypocritical,”<sup>53</sup> and stated that they therefore deserved to be exposed as the “ones truly responsible for today’s backwardness and *džehalet* [Arabic term for ignorance].”<sup>54</sup> *Musavat* was even harsher; there was no real danger when “extravagant persons”—in reference of course to Pupić-Pletikosić—wrote of such things. But when these ideas were adopted by people who had considerable influence over the population, such as the teachers of communal schools, it was necessary to fight back. “A killer kills only one person. They [the members of *Muallim*’s editorial board] kill the people as a whole.”<sup>55</sup>

At first, *Muallim*’s editorial board chose to meet this reaction with silence, and then tried to downplay the incident. In their journal, they acknowledged that the brochure they had published “had provoked strong anger in some people, especially in those who had been directly put into question,”<sup>56</sup>

51 “Safijje hanum—Sofija Pletikosić,” 2.

52 Fatima Žutić, “Sofija Pletikosić, Safijja-hanum, i rasprava o emancipaciji i školovanju žene muslimanke,” *Glasnik Rijaseta Islamske zajednice Bosne i Hercegovine* 72, no. 7–8 (2009): 664–75.

53 Džemal, “Što nam je dužnost,” 2.

54 Džemal, “Što nam je dužnost,” 1–2.

55 “Jedna nekulturna pojava,” *Musavat*, no. 56 (1911): 1–2.

56 “Dva brošura,” *Muallim*, no. 1 (1911): 8–15 (printed in *arebica*).

and they declared themselves to be “supporters of education,” as they had shown in their journal numerous times before. Their opinion of the text by Safije *hanum*/ Pupić-Pletikosić—called at this point “an unknown female writer”<sup>57</sup>—seems to have radically changed. Not only was “the Safije brochure... not so great a threat for the dissemination of culture,” but also the “anti-schooling statements of the brochure, if there are any, are something with which the *Muallim* editorial board disagrees.”<sup>58</sup> In conclusion to their paltry justification, the editors of *Muallim* could find little better for minimizing the incident than pointing out the sex of the author and mobilizing a well-established misogynist repertoire. Insofar as a woman had written the text, the progressive notables ought to have been less scathing in their criticism of her position in the press. In particular, they declared that Karamehmedović’s attack should have been less virulent against a woman, considering “the psychological state of members of the [fairer] sex, known for its sentimental nature.”<sup>59</sup>

In the following weeks, Pupić-Pletikosić continued to strongly defend her ideas in public, in particular publishing a second text, a one-hundred-page tirade against Karamehmedović’s statements and the cowardice of *Muallim*. It is interesting to note that Pupić-Pletikosić was only able to publish her second text with extreme difficulty and at her own expense, in Opatija. As she explains in the preface of the text, “all the newspapers suitable for this kind of discussion are in the hands of young and educated men and women, inexperienced and fashion fanatics, who thus shut the door in my face and in the face of my work.”<sup>60</sup> This second brochure did not in any case produce any noticeable echo in the Muslim public sphere; after *Muallim*’s partial retraction the debate was considered to be closed.

What was the 1911 controversy, the first of its kind on the Muslim woman question in Bosnia, really about? The confrontation was not simply a case of supporters against opponents of female education, but also a controversy between advocates of different kinds of female education, with at its heart the issue of the state school. The supporters of female education in

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57 “Dva brošura,” 9.

58 “Dva brošura,” 9.

59 “Dva brošura,” 13.

60 Sofija Pupić-Pletikosić, *Polemika o emancipaciji žene u obranu muslimanskog ženskinja, ujedno: Odgovor doktoru Hamdiji Karamehmedoviću i drugima* (Opatija: V. Tomičić i dr., 1911), 4.

state schools were the products of two different experiments in educational reform, and shared a common language; those who had been shaped by the period of Ottoman reform, and those who had been raised in the cultural climate of the Habsburg Empire. In the discourse defended by these men, women played a key role; “[as] mothers, they hold in their hands the future of their entire family, and perhaps even an entire people... Mothers should be their children’s first teachers.”<sup>61</sup> Only educated mothers were able to provide Muslims with what they needed to adapt to the post-Ottoman context. However, as they were, the Muslim women of Bosnia were ill-equipped to carry out this mission: “it is lamentable, a hundred times over, that a group of women such as this exists in developed Europe [*prosvijetljena Evropa*], who are in no way in keeping with the spirit of contemporary times,”<sup>62</sup> who “do not reason,”<sup>63</sup> and therefore “do not know how to educate their own children in this day and age.”<sup>64</sup> These women, depicted as radically incapable of integrating into European society, were deemed to be the principal cause of the different maladies affecting the Muslim people in Bosnia and elsewhere: indolence, fatalism, and fanaticism. In a changing world, a religious and domestic education was no longer sufficient for Muslim women. They needed to go to school—i.e. to a state-run educational institution outside of the domestic sphere.

What form of female education were these men advocating? And above all, how was this education expected to affect gender relations within Bosnian Muslim society? The underlying idea was that it was possible and desirable to selectively adopt European cultural norms and institutions, provided they were compatible with Islam.<sup>65</sup> They did not therefore wish to adhere to European gender relations entirely, nor to transform Muslim women into Europeans—disdainfully referred to as *evropljanka* or *zapadnjakinja* (Westerner) or, depending on their nationality, French or *švabica* (German). Karamehmedović himself declared that “we will never be in favor of European-

61 Karamehmedović, “Naobrazba našeg ženskinja,” 3.

62 Muhamed Hilmi Hodžić, “Naobrazba muslimanskih žena. Savjeti muslimanskim ženama,” *Behar*, no. 1 (1912): 4.

63 Karamehmedović, “Naobrazba našeg ženskinja,” 3.

64 Karamehmedović, “Naobrazba našeg ženskinja,” 3.

65 Karić, “Aspects of Islamic Discourse,” 285–333 and Fikret Karčić, *The Bosniaks and the Challenges of Modernity* (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 1999), 152.

izing our women!”<sup>66</sup> As for Muslim women, they were supposed to become “good mothers, good wives, capable women of the house”<sup>67</sup> through education. Rather than preparing women to enter the public space, school consisted merely of a period of temporary training before a girl returned to the domestic realm. In the plans for education drawn up by these Muslim intellectuals, the ideology of the separate spheres—inherent to both traditional Muslim society and European bourgeois culture—were reinforced and re-legitimized. Even the institution of the veil, a source for indignation for Westerners, was not called into question by these authors.

If we turn to examine the anti-schooling advocates, their first point of criticism was the school curriculum. Modern schools, saturated with the ideas of “heretics such as Immanuel Kant and Charles Darwin,”<sup>68</sup> instilled doubt in girls about the very existence of God. Doubt bred both individual and collective instability, and instability bred the subversion of family and political hierarchies. The first victims of the schools were religious authorities, who were replaced by new figures with scientific legitimacy: “nowadays, the people’s destiny and future is in the hands of teachers, both male and female.”<sup>69</sup>

Consider what the schools and those who attend them have taught our children; they drink wine, eat pork, mock religion, ridicule their own customs, their own dress, their most sacred things. You see? This is the power and the force of modern education and school! They eradicate children’s hearts and souls, transforming them into something new, strange, diabolical.<sup>70</sup>

Female education was hardly less pernicious, as it produced girls who were anxious, hysterical, moody, and unsuited to family life:

Not even the devil himself would marry them! They have no shame, no intention of respecting men, they want to do everything a man does; where he goes, she must go as well. There is no order in the home, they do not even know where to begin. They do not know how to cook, nor how to knit, they

66 Hamdija Karamehmedović, *Odgovor na pisma ‘Safije’ Hanume* (Sarajevo: Bosanska pošta, 1911), 26–7.

67 Karamehmedović, *Odgovor na pisma*, 18.

68 Safije hanum, *Pisma u obranu*, 18.

69 Safije hanum, *Pisma u obranu*, 8.

70 Safije hanum, *Pisma u obranu*, 8.

must buy everything... What use is it to them to have attended school, with their foreign languages, their piano skills?<sup>71</sup>

Requesting political rights, as did “modern, educated women, who, like men, are consumed by politics and socio-political relations,”<sup>72</sup> was considered to be the ultimate act of subversion for women, as politics was a naturally male domain. Fortunately, “Muslim women have shielded their hearts from the ills of politics, which is the most insidious and terrible disease known to man.”<sup>73</sup> While Christian men—the French being a perfect example—were now entirely slaves to the whims of their women, forced to ruin their families in order to satisfy their wives’ demands for luxury (*luks*), Islamic law was deemed admirable in this respect, as it gave men the option to easily end a marriage.

Female schooling subverted not only family and social, but even natural laws. The woman who went to school was a woman who betrayed her own gender, one that denied the distinction between women and men, imposed by God and inscribed in nature. An educated woman was no longer a woman.

To provide schooling for women just like men, and to give women the same freedom and the same rights as men means ensuring the disappearance of womanhood itself! The perversion of education is a huge social evil, because this perversion and superficiality create conceit, pride, excessive self-confidence, reveries, selfishness, derision, and much more. These are the fruits of perversion and superficiality—and they are more and more prevalent. I mean that educating women as men are, and giving women the same freedom and the same rights as men in every field and scope of social life, ensures that they can no longer be called “women.”<sup>74</sup>

The pamphlet accused the intellectuals of wanting “Muslim girls to attend school and become mercenaries for the Germans [*Švabine ajlučarke*], writers, teachers, cashiers, telegraph operators, as the Christian women al-

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71 Safijje-hanum, *Pisma u obranu*, 24.

72 Safijje-hanum, *Pisma u obranu*, 22.

73 Safijje-hanum, *Pisma u obranu*, 22.

74 Pupić-Pletikosić, *Polemika o emancipaciji*, 39.

ready are,”<sup>75</sup> and decried the idea that they might “become part of society [*pustiti u svijet*], trying to make a living in the hotels, bathhouses, and streets of Ilidža... therefore, our distinguished author must know [in reference to Karamehmedović] that if a girl dons a skirt, she will quickly give herself to the first boy who comes along [*fistan na se, a momka uza se*].”<sup>76</sup> These lines bring us to the very core of the anti-schooling argument, which established a strict connection between women’s conquest of intellectual and sexual autonomy.

Hostility toward schooling was not entirely directed toward the curriculum, but also the spatial dimensions of the institution. The schools—or rather the journey from home to school—could lead to decadence, as it exposed students to the modern city, with its institutions of perdition. The traditional world had been undermined by the arrival of the era of Austro-Hungarian occupation—referred to in the brochure as “the modern Christian era” (*moderno krišćansko doba*). “Before,” in fact:

every little home had its own resources: a little garden for growing all the basic necessities... A cow, a sheep and their milk, fat, and wool for cooking and making clothes. The mothers tended to all this, and their daughters learned all this from their mothers, watching them as they worked.<sup>77</sup>

The traditional home was a place both for living and working. This world, where practical knowledge was acquired, from neighbors (*komšiluk*), and within the neighborhood religious community (*džemat*) and transmitted orally, was perfect as “it held neither evil nor bad examples.”<sup>78</sup> The rise of capitalist economic structures, which had divorced living and production spaces, and destroyed the cohesion and balance of the traditional world, was at the root of the current state of decadence; distancing oneself from the home meant departing from morality and moving toward immorality. In fact, on their way home from school, students would “begin by chasing a dog near the butcher’s shop, then they move on to the greengrocer’s, then they stop by the *kafana* (coffee house) and the *mejhana* (tavern), then the

75 Pupić-Pletikosić, *Polemika o emancipaciji*, 39.

76 Pupić-Pletikosić, *Polemika o emancipaciji*, 10.

77 Pupić-Pletikosić, *Polemika o emancipaciji*, 6.

78 Pupić-Pletikosić, *Polemika o emancipaciji*, 6.

hotel, the gypsies' *mahala*—and finally, there they are at the brothel.”<sup>79</sup> The same would inevitably happen to young girls: send your Muslim daughters to school, the brochure cautioned, “and you will find them in Ilidža,”<sup>80</sup> a town with thermal baths just outside of Sarajevo, known as a place of recreation, dalliance, and prostitution.

Putting up opposition to schooling did not mean excluding women from all forms of education. “She must know the tenets of the Quran, how to keep order in the home and in a man’s life, how to raise her progeny, cook, sew, and knit. This is a woman’s duty, what God, society, and her country expect of her.”<sup>81</sup> “God’s mission for women—husband, home, and children—is also considered to be their ‘natural predisposition’ and ‘eternal law.’” For this sort of education, there was no need to rely on specific institutions like schools: “The Muslim woman does not need many words to educate her children, she teaches through real-life examples, through the example of work—and for children and men alike, learning by example is and remains the best means of education.”<sup>82</sup> The husband, family, neighborhood, and local religious community were the appropriate places and channels for Muslim women to receive a proper education. The *mekteb* (yet another neighborhood institution) was more than sufficient for learning everything a woman needed to know about religious sciences. Therefore, the neighborhood religious school constituted the furthest circle of knowledge and mobility that a Muslim woman should need to attain. The only way to save Muslim women, who, unlike Christian women, were not yet irreversibly corrupt, was to “return to the past” (*vratiti se natrag*). Any change would be disastrous: “The moral decadence of the [educated] girl is a natural consequence; whenever one goes against nature, one reaps bitter fruits.”<sup>83</sup>

It is interesting to note the extent to which, in 1911, Muslim conservatives were not yet familiar with forms of public writing. Their participation in the public debate had only been made possible by borrowing a text written outside the Muslim community—and ironically enough, written by a woman. However, their reluctance to write in public should not be understood as a lack of reactivity. In late 1911, as had been expected, the *Reis-*

79 Pupić-Pletikosić, *Polemika o emancipaciji*, 18.

80 Pupić-Pletikosić, *Polemika o emancipaciji*, 4.

81 Pupić-Pletikosić, *Polemika o emancipaciji*, 9.

82 Pupić-Pletikosić, *Polemika o emancipaciji*, 15.

83 Safijje hanum, *Pisma u obranu*, 14.



*ul-ulema* called for a second Inquiry Committee on community education (December 11, 1911–January 7, 1912). The composition of the Committee was this time radically different. The few progressive intellectuals that had been present in the first Committee, such as Karamehmedović, were replaced with people from Islamic institutions. The only secular members were Edhem Mulabdić and Hasan Hodžić, but they were only admitted as external advisors. The news that the Inquiry Committee, in accordance with the decision by the *Ulema-medžlis* and the administration of pious foundations and communal schools, was against the establishment of a secondary school for Muslim girls in Sarajevo (see Chapter I), pushed the two to abandon the Committee. As stated by Mulabdić, the debate could not be continued as long as “on education in general, and on female education more precisely, we have different opinions.”<sup>84</sup> On the eve of the First World War, a lasting division at the roots of the post-Ottoman Bosnian Muslim elite was already visible; between on the one hand progressive Muslim notables, influential in the public debate but with next to no decision-making powers, and on the other the conservative Muslim elite, reluctant to write in public but dominant in political and religious institutions.

“TO BE ABLE TO WRITE ON PAPER, ALBEIT VERY MODESTLY,  
WHAT I DESIRE”

In Habsburg Bosnia, writing about Muslim post-Ottoman gender relations was not an exclusively male prerogative. Looking closely at the dozens of newspapers and journals run by Muslim cultural entrepreneurs between 1878 and 1918 affords a glimpse of a first generation of Muslim women writing in public. The common thread running through their different life trajectories was their education in state schools, and especially in Sarajevo’s Muslim Girls’ School, where almost all of them had spent several years as students and afterward as teachers. This marked them out from the rare Muslim women in Bosnia that produced literary works in the nineteenth century, like Umihana Čuvidina (c. 1794–c. 1870) and Habiba Rizvanbegović-Stočević (1846–1890). Originally from Sarajevo, the former is one of the

84 The minutes of the second Commission of Inquiry were published the next year: *Zapisnici Islamske prosvjetne ankete* (Sarajevo: Izdanje Ulema Medžlisa, 1912), cited in Čurić, *Muslimansko školstvo*, 203.

earliest Bosnian female authors whose work survives to this day. The only full poem that can be attributed with some certainty to Čuvidina is her seventy-nine line epic poem, called *Sarajlije idu na vojsku protiv Srbije* (The Men of Sarajevo March to War against Serbia). Habiba Rizvanbegović-Stočević was the daughter of an Ottoman pasha and the wife of an important Ottoman state official, originally from Mostar. She published a series of poems in the Ottoman language in Istanbul, especially in the avant-garde literary journal *Servet-i Fünun* (Wealth of Knowledge).<sup>85</sup> The generation that began writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, on the other hand, had two novel traits; they wrote in Serbo-Croatian, and they published their writing in Bosnian journals. In other words, these women contributed to the establishment of a modern public sphere in Bosnia.<sup>86</sup>

Compared to their Orthodox and Catholic counterparts, Muslim women mostly published anonymously, or under pseudonyms. Interestingly enough, they very often chose pseudonyms from the Ottoman, Arabic, or Persian literary traditions. Gradually, though, they started to use their real first names, and eventually also included their family names, and thus gradually became fully visible as individuals. They usually appended titles such as “schoolgirl” (interestingly using the term *ružđijanka*, “schoolgirl of *ružđija*,” the Ottoman reformed primary schools) or in some cases “teacher” (*učiteljica*) to their names. It seems clear from their titles that these women’s schooling and professions in education were factors that legitimized their participation in the public debate.<sup>87</sup> Writing seems to have remained for Muslim women a temporary experience, mostly limited to their time as students. In other words, before the Great War there does not appear to have been any Muslim women who became professional authors or journalists, such as Milena Mrazović, the pioneering journalist and editor of a Sarajevo journal in German, the *Bosnische Post* (Bosnian Post), or Stoja Kašiković, who became co-editor of the Serbian literary journal *Bosanska Vila*.<sup>88</sup>

85 Hawkesworth, *Voices in the Shadows*, 250–1.

86 A first version of these reflections has already been published in Fabio Giomi, “Daughters of two empires. Muslim women and public writing in Habsburg Bosnia-Herzegovina (1878–1918),” *Aspasia* 9, no.1 (2015): 1–18.

87 For some examples of these different ways of signing texts, see Munira, “Život muslimanke,” *Gajret*, no. 7–8 (1910): 106–107; Svršena ruždijanka, “Na početku školske godine,” *Tarik*, no. 7 (1910): 103; N. “Mačke i mazenje djeteta,” *Gajret*, no. 6 (1910): 92–93; Sukejna, “Blago im je, blago!,” *Biser*, no. 2 (1914): 25.

88 Sarita Vujković, *U građanskom ogledalu: Identiteti žena bosanskohercegovačke građanske kulture (1878–1941)*. (Banja Luka & Belgrade: Muzej savremene umjetnosti Republike Srpske i Kulturni centar Beograd, 2009), 96–106.

For Muslim women, marriage and especially motherhood often represented the end of their writing careers.

During the last decade of Habsburg rule, Muslim women experimented with a vast range of literary genres. Given the long tradition of poetesses in the Ottoman Empire, poetry remained the first and most widespread genre for Muslim women until the end of the Habsburg period. Among the first to publish poetry was Hasnija Berberović (1893–?), a student at Sarajevo Muslim Girls' School and, in 1915, the first Muslim woman to teach in state schools.<sup>89</sup> Originally from a family of Sarajevo sugar merchants that had sent all of their children, boys and girls alike, to state schools, Berberović published her first poem in *Behar* in 1907, under the pseudonym *Vahida*, an Arabic name meaning “Peerless.” At the age of fourteen, this young woman had already developed a close relationship with poet and *Behar* editor Musa Ćazim Ćatić—who dedicated two of his poems to her, one of which, significantly, portrays her intent on playing the piano.<sup>90</sup> Berberović's younger sister, Zulkida Berberović (1896–1957), also wrote several poems while she worked as a teacher of women's handiwork in the city of Tuzla, in Eastern Bosnia.<sup>91</sup> This poetry appears to have been inspired by traditional Bosnian folk music, mostly dealing with themes such as courting or unrequited love—themes that at that time were considered to be the most in line with the supposedly natural qualities of women. At the same time, however, some of these poems—especially Berberović's—contain elements typical of the post-Ottoman era; belief in the “cultural reawakening” of the Muslim population and the duties of the “children of the new century” (*djeca novog v'jeka*—that is, the new generation of educated Muslims of both sexes).<sup>92</sup>

On the eve of the First World War, some Muslim women had also ventured into prose. Nafija Sarajlić (née Hadžikarić, 1893–1970), a former student of the Sarajevo Muslim Girls' School who worked for a time as a teacher in a reformed *mekteb*, was the first and only Muslim woman of her generation to write novels. From a renowned family of tailors that had made uniforms for Habsburg officials, and one of the first in Sarajevo to produce European-

89 Kujović, “Jedna zaboravljena učiteljica,” 179–86 and Kujović, “Ko su bile,” 48–55.

90 Musa Ćazim Ćatić, “Iz ljubavnih melodija (Vahidi),” *Behar*, no. 13 (1908): 211–2.

91 For a biography and bibliography of Zulkida A. Tuzlanka Berberović, see Ajša Zahirović, *Od stiha do pjesme: Poezija žena Bosne i Hercegovine* (Tuzla: Univerzal, 1985), 110–1.

92 Hasnija Berberović, “Gusle,” *Behar*, no. 23 (1907–1908): 365.

style dress,<sup>93</sup> in 1913 Sarajlić followed the example of the Muslim educated elite and started to explore Western literary genres. She began publishing a series of short stories in the Muslim newspaper *Zeman*, and the following year in *Biser*, and before the end of the war she had published approximately twenty short stories.<sup>94</sup> In the same period, a more restrained group of Muslim women started to show increasing confidence in their public voices, and began to experiment with the social commentary essay, a genre that analyzed the mechanics of the social world, and that had remained until then exclusive male territory. Not surprisingly, Muslim women's explorations into the social commentary essay remained limited to so-called feminine subjects, such as education, childrearing, and morality. Among the first to venture into this domain was Šefika Bjelevac (née Alihodžić, 1894–1927), a former student of Sarajevo Muslim Girls' School, who came from a renowned family of textile artisans in the Sarajevo market, and the daughter of an embroidery teacher working at a reformed *mekteb* in Sarajevo. According to some sources, her mother had learned German on her own, reading fashion reviews imported by Habsburg officials and working for the emerging local middle class.<sup>95</sup> After focusing on poetry, under the pseudonym *Nesterin* (Wild White Rose), Šefika Bjelevac abandoned anonymity and published articles such as "Education and School," in which she stressed the importance of extra-domestic education for future Muslim mothers, thus making her voice heard in the debate on appropriate Muslim female education.<sup>96</sup>

What stance did Muslim women take with respect to the debate on the Muslim woman question? Muslim women who decided to write in public before the First World War seem to have adopted the discursive pattern that had already been elaborated by Muslim male progressive notables. The first attempts in Habsburg Bosnia to openly question the ideology of the

93 Fata Košarić, "Moje školovanje," *Preporod*, September 15, 1976: 16–7. Courtesy of Ajša Zahirović.

94 Šemsudin Sarajlić and Nafija Sarajlić, *Iz bosanske romantike. Teme* (Sarajevo: Preporod, 1997).

95 I owe part of the biographical information concerning this generation of women to the private notes of Ajša Zahirović. In the early 1980s, this Sarajevo poet and writer was working on her aforementioned anthology *Od stiha do pjesme. Poezija žena Bosne i Hercegovine*, which includes a series of poems by the first nineteenth and twentieth century female poets. In this anthology, the author provides a brief description of each author, in some cases complete with a photograph. Zahirović compiled this information herself through interviews with the descendants or former neighbors of these women. During my visit to Sarajevo in June 2010, Ajša Zahirović very generously gave me access to her notes taken in the early 1980s, and for this I wish to express my deepest gratitude to her.

96 Šefika-Nesterin Bjelevac, "Odgovori i škola," *Biser*, no. 12 (1913): 274.

separate spheres, for example the writings of the aforementioned Jelica Belović-Bernadzikowska, stressed that in order for a woman to be fulfilled she should not be confined to motherhood and marriage, but have access to education and the public space.<sup>97</sup> Be that as it may, the majority of Muslim women limited themselves to supporting female education in state schools, without openly contesting domesticity, the segregation of the sexes or the practice of veiling. This convergence between the public discourse of Muslim women, and that of their male counterparts can at least partly be attributed to the relationships that existed between them, both in public and private life. For the former, Muslim women did not organize their own journal to speak out independently, but instead published their contributions in journals run, and controlled, by Muslim men. As for the latter, the affinities between these two groups of educated Muslims, in at least two cases, were not limited to the literary field; Nafija Sarajlić was married to Šemsudin Sarajlić (1887–1960), a writer and contributor to *Biser* journal, and Šefika Bjelevac became the wife of Abdurezak Hivzi Bjelevac (1886–1972), a well-known writer and journalist.<sup>98</sup>

Muslim women writers generally focused on the issue that lay at the core of the Muslim woman question in Habsburg Bosnia—that is, the opportunity for Muslim women to become educated in state schools. In order to support this position, in the journal *Gajret*, Hatidža Đikić (1889–1918) from Mostar published in 1910 her “Daughters’ Prayer to Their Fathers,” a poem in which she directly addressed Muslim fathers and called for more education for Muslim girls:

Oh honored fathers  
 the dawn is coming, the day is rising  
 awoken from your deep slumber!  
 Lift your heavy heads  
 from the pillow of indolence  
 that the sun of joy and knowledge  
 may rise also for us!

97 J. Zdero, “Jelica Belović-Bernadzikowska (1870–1946),” in *A Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movement and Feminism*, 52.

98 Zahirović, *Od stiha do pjesme*, 95–7.

Open your sleep-clouded eyes  
and behold the city of Baku  
the Muslim women who live there  
and their knowledge in every field of learning.  
Behold, and remember  
that you err, you err greatly  
as you also could educate  
your daughters in this way.  
Do they truly deserve  
such injustice and violence, as depriving them  
of the beauty of knowledge [*ilum*], a flower as precious as gold?  
Oh our dear fathers  
open your eyes wider  
let your daughters enter  
the vast realm of knowledge.  
They too wish to learn  
and drink from the spring of knowledge.  
Your daughters—your progeny  
deserve the attention of their fathers.  
Oh honored fathers,  
your daughters beseech you  
do not remain indifferent  
to our wretched condition!<sup>99</sup>

Interestingly enough, these lines, written more than twenty years after the end of Ottoman rule in Bosnia, refer only to the Muslim cultural landscape; the positive example of female education is taken from Baku, the cultural capital for Muslims in the Caucasus, a population that like the Bosnian Muslims was living as a minority under Christian rule. In addition, the word used for “knowledge” is taken from Islamic terminology (*ilum*, from the Arabic *ilm*, literally “religious knowledge”). Finally, the entire poem operates within an explicitly paternalistic configuration. In Đikić’s lines, the fathers, and not the daughters, are the actors entitled to authorize and spread education among the Bosnian female population.

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99 Hatidža, “Molba kćeri očevima,” *Gajret*, no. 4 (1910): 59.

For these Muslim women writers, the argument for women's education was often accompanied by criticism of specific Western practices. In an article entitled "About the Woman Question" published in *Biser* in 1914, a certain Razija (she omits her last name), condemned the "excesses" occurring in the West, and more generally among non-Muslims, excesses that had accompanied changes in the conditions for women in society, in particular desegregation between men and women. According to the (semi-)anonymous Muslim female writer, the Muslim woman question:

can be resolved only by turning to modern science, schooling, and education, that we women might become good housewives, ladies of the house, wives and mothers, in the present and in the future. While this is an absolute necessity, we do not envy the tango or other European vices [*pikanterije*], as we find the excesses of European civilization abhorrent.<sup>100</sup>

The writer's reference to tango—a dance that intrinsically requires sensual and public contact between men and women—as a metaphor for "European vices" is not insignificant. As we will see in Chapter Six, in the early 1900s public balls had started to become more and more prominent in Bosnian urban centers, and their participants were not only Habsburg civil and military officers serving in the province, but also the emerging local, mostly non-Muslim, middle class.<sup>101</sup> Here again the reference to the European gender regime is ambiguous, representing both an ideal model that ought to be adopted, and one that ought to be rejected. In the same text, Razija openly defended veiling, saying that "the veil [*koprena*] defends our honor, and if it were to fall from our faces it would be impossible to continue to claim to have a high level of morality."<sup>102</sup> At the same time, she underlines its perfect compatibility with education in state schools. She also explicitly fixes the limits and principles that ought to guide the transformation of Muslim women's status. In her discourse, Islam remains the light that can guide the transformation of the social condition of women, which should be modified only "within the constraints of sharia and according to God's will."<sup>103</sup>

100 Razija, "O ženskom pitanju," *Biser*, no. 17–18 (1914): 282.

101 Besarović, *Iz kulturnog života*, 43–67.

102 Razija, "O ženskom pitanju," 282.

103 Razija, "O ženskom pitanju," 282.

Nonetheless, in some cases public writing also became a way for Muslim women to criticize the existing conditions of female education, and also the educational trajectory that the Habsburg administration and Muslim male notables had prearranged for them. In one of her short stories published in *Biser* in 1918, for example, Nafija Sarajlić described her brief teaching experience in one of the reformed *mekteb* of the country, and especially the reaction of Muslim local notables to her efforts to improve education for girls:

I've been punished. I've been punished because, my own volition and outside of school time, I started to initiate the cleverest of my school girls in ethics and reading. For this choice I have been scolded in front of the girls by the [communal] School commission, with the argument that I did not have to do such a thing because these subjects are not necessary for girls. I saw how clever girls can be reduced to passivity, I saw how old the methodology is that we use with them, I saw the loss of time—and all the rest; I was aware of how nowadays it is expected of women to have more knowledge, and I felt I would have committed a mistake in not helping them. “Dear girls—I said when they gave me back their exam papers—they do not let us learn!” [*Ne daju nam učiti!*]. The schoolgirls kissed my hand, and started to cry. Without knowing what I could do, I started to cry as well on their small heads.<sup>104</sup>

In the public writings of this generation of Muslim women, references to non-Muslim women were almost entirely missing. This circumstance is far from surprising, if we consider that in Bosnia, as in many other areas of both the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, ethno-religious communities were not particularly permeable, especially when—as was the case for Bosnian Muslims—they considered themselves to be a threatened minority. As we have already seen, mixed-faith state schools only very rarely became a place where Muslim and non-Muslim girls could interact, and the same was true for voluntary associations, established along religious lines and in which Muslim women did not enroll until the end of the First World War.<sup>105</sup>

104 Nafija Sarajlić, “Nova škola,” *Biser*, no. 15–16 (1918): 240.

105 On Muslim women's participation (or lack thereof) in voluntary associations in the Habsburg period, see Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu*, 260–1.



Despite these circumstances, a few Muslim women used literary writing in order to imagine forms of interfaith solidarity between women throughout Bosnia, and beyond its borders. In 1907, a student from Sarajevo called Nafija Zildžić published the poem “Onward!” in the literary journal *Behar*:

Onward, onward fellow women  
 let us hasten only onward  
 let us adorn our youth [žiče] / with science!  
 Only onward  
 dear sisters  
 as time passes quickly  
 and thanks to science—we know already  
 we can reach our golden future  
 let us go onward, my dears  
 we have spent many years living in ignorance [neznanje]  
 as if blind in this world  
 Oh, let us lift the veil from our eyes [ah, trgnimo veo oka]  
 let us look onward with audacity  
 let us dispel the heavy shadows  
 that cloud our placid brows.  
 Onward, sisters! Let the armor  
 that has imprisoned our centuries-old dream shatter  
 let us too become worthy daughters of our people [vrjedne kćerke roda svoga]  
 ...  
 So go now, my poem  
 to the cities and the villages  
 Greet my friends  
 and share with them the desires of my heart!<sup>106</sup>

These lines portray women as the actors of what we could legitimately call an emancipatory process through education, without delegating a role to Muslim male notables. Interestingly enough, the author chooses the veil as a metaphor for ignorance (“let us lift the veil from our eyes”), a choice

<sup>106</sup> Nafija Zildžić, “Napred!,” *Behar*, no. 17 (1907–1908): 267–268. Prior to this poem, she had already published N.[afija] Zildžić, (ružđijanka), “Proljeće je granulo,” *Behar*, no. 2 (1907–1908): 27. On Nafija Zildžić see also Zahirović, *Od stiha do pjesme*, 88–9.

that, in a Muslim society, one can hardly imagine to have been accidental. In contrast with the other texts, in Zildžić's writing there is no reference to Islam or to a specific Muslim cultural context. On the contrary, religion seems to be irrelevant, and the reference to the "worthy daughters of our people [rod]" could be read as a call to a national, or at least areligious, sisterhood.

Zildžić's words allow us to touch on another feature of Muslim women's public writing: the near absence of references to national belonging. This silence is in contrast with the gradual politicization of Bosnian society in the years preceding the First World War. As a consequence of the annexation of the province by Vienna in 1908, and the 1912–1913 Balkan wars, nationalism—Croatian, but even to a greater extent Serbian and Yugoslav—was spreading in the Bosnian urban population, mainly among male secondary-school students. The only Muslim woman to have publicly expressed her national affiliation before the war seems to have been the aforementioned Hatidža A. Đikić, the sister of Osman Đikić, a writer and pro-Serbian politician who considered the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina to be authentic Serbs "by blood and language"<sup>107</sup> and who, as seen in Chapter One, was at that time the leading figure of the cultural association *Gajret*. Hatidža A. Đikić also became a pro-Serbian sympathizer. In 1914, a couple of months before the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, she published "To the Heroes," a poem celebrating Serbian national independence fighters, fighters that the Habsburg government considered to be rebels.<sup>108</sup> The publication of the poem not only caused the newspaper to be shut down, but also—at least, according to one source—the accusation and subsequent imprisonment of Hatidža A. Đikić for subversive activities. She died of tuberculosis in prison a few years later.<sup>109</sup>

In a few cases, public writing became a tool for overcoming physical distances, and for putting Muslim women who were living in very different social conditions in contact with each other. In 1910, for example, the student Munira (her family name is not given), from Sarajevo, published an

107 Xavier Bougarel, "Bosnian Muslims and the Yugoslav Idea," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992*, ed. Dejan Djokić (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 100–114.

108 Published on April 5, 1914 in *Srpska riječ*, as part of the supplement for the Easter holidays. Over the course of my research in Sarajevo, I was unable to track down a copy of this poem, cited in Nusret Kujraković's dissertation, *Žensko pitanje i socijalni položaj bošnjakinje u Bosni i Hercegovini između dva svjetska rata* (M.A.diss., University of Sarajevo, 2008), 112.

109 Zahirović, *Od stiha do pjesme*, 90–2. I could not find any confirmation of this information in the archives.

article called “The Life of the Muslim Woman” in *Gajret* journal. The author complained about Muslim families’ scarce interest in, and in some cases open hostility toward, an education for their daughters that was more than just of a practical nature (e.g., embroidery and handiwork). The female student lamented the lack of places for socializing outside of the domestic space, and addressed Muslim male notables, urging them to reserve access to Muslim reading rooms for Muslim women on Fridays, in order that they might have access to more journals and books.<sup>110</sup> In the next issue, the *Gajret* editorial board published a letter sent to the journal by an anonymous Muslim woman from Krajina (Northern Bosnia), addressed directly to Munira.

The anonymous woman from Krajina expressed first of all her satisfaction that Munira and her fellow students were enrolled in Sarajevo Muslim Girls’ School, and at the same time complained of the audacious coquetry and love affairs of Sarajevo Muslim women. The anonymous woman dedicated the rest of her letter to explaining to Munira how she had learned to read and write in a rural area where modern female schooling was almost entirely absent. As was the case for many other Muslim girls, her only extra-domestic education had been dispensed by the local *mekteb*, an education she openly qualified as disappointing. In the Muslim communal school she had only been able to leaf through a few books in the Ottoman language, “*Bergivija, Šuruti-salat, Tedžvid*, etc.”<sup>111</sup> but she had not found these religious texts particularly interesting. She described the *hodža*, the teacher of the communal school, as an incompetent educator whose teachings were incomprehensible to her:

Here is how the *hodža* talked to me: *Farz je ono, što je Bog bez Šubhe delilom emr učinio* [a combination of Serbo-Croatian and Ottoman]. Of course, I did not understand a word, I blindly followed the *hodža* and I learned phrases by heart, without understanding their meaning. And this was not my fault: *hodžas* still teach this way today!<sup>112</sup>

After the *mekteb*, the anonymous correspondent was able to continue her education at home thanks to a male cousin, who had not only taught her

110 Munira, “Život muslimanke,” *Gajret*, no. 7–8 (1910): 106–7.

111 “Pismo iz Krajiške,” *Gajret*, no. 9 (1910): 134. These were religious volumes.

112 “Pismo iz Krajiške,” 134.

many things about Islam, but also how to read and write using the Latin alphabet. Her choice to pursue some form of education that was not exclusively religious was met with the greatest hostility from her family and neighbors:

What lengths I went to in order to hide it from my parents, what scolding I endured from my female friends. But it was all to no avail, nothing could hold me back. When my cousin gave me books to read... it was as if, at that precise moment, I had seen the world with my own eyes, a world that until then had been shrouded in a dense fog. And at that moment I had the feeling that no one was happier than I. Soon my cousin procured for me copies of all the books that had been translated into our language and printed in the Arabic alphabet, and I was thus able to make up for everything I had not understood during my childhood at the *mekteb*. My cousin then sent several newspapers, which I read regularly, at the same time writing to me with news of everything interesting that he noticed in Sarajevo.<sup>113</sup>

This informal domestic education led her to support female education in schools, and to address the Muslim women of Bosnia through the pages of the *Gajret* review, asking them to fight for modern schooling, and in particular to learn how to read and write:

I beseech all of my like-minded sisters, especially those in Sarajevo—those of you who can do so—to fight [*zauzimati*] for progress as much as possible, so that each of us (only if she so wishes) may at least have the opportunity to learn to read and write, and certainly handiwork and sewing as well. And that we not be afraid to ask someone to explain what we do not know... What an effort I made to understand what I read, without the *ruždija* [meaning here the state school] and asking only my dearest cousin; today I thank God for this gift, which enables me to write on paper, albeit very modestly, what I desire [*svoju želju makar i mršavo na papir napisati*].<sup>114</sup>

In a Muslim society where non-domestic spaces for women to socialize were lacking, and their mobility restricted by segregation according to re-

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113 "Pismo iz Krajiške," 135.

114 "Pismo iz Krajiške," 135.

ligion and sex, this exceptional correspondence gives us a glimpse of what public writing could represent for Muslim women—at least for those who were able to read—a way to reflect upon their living conditions, bridging geographical and social distances. Thanks to these semi-anonymous exchanges, Muslim women could express in public their first, hesitant claims for more spaces for education and sociability outside of the home.

\* \* \*

At the turn of the century, the legitimacy of the very existence of Muslims in post-Ottoman Europe was under constant scrutiny by non-Muslim scholars. With their white skin, speaking a Slavic (and thus considered European) tongue, espousing the Islamic (and thus considered non-European) religion, intellectuals from Central and Southeastern Europe tirelessly debated whether Muslims could or could not survive in the Balkans after the rollback from Ottoman rule. As the discussion evolved, the position of women became a powerful device for establishing and organizing the difference between Balkan Christians and Balkan Muslims. In other words, gender relations became a tool for validating, or invalidating, the belonging of certain groups to alternative imagined civilizational spaces, specifically Europe and the Orient. Practices such as veiling, and by extension segregation between the sexes, became symbols of the alleged backwardness and inferiority of the entire Muslim community, in this sense deemed radically unfit for a place in post-Ottoman southeastern Europe. At the turn of the century, a new generation of Muslim educated men proved themselves ready and willing to criticize these ideas. Thanks to a specific cultural capital developed at the crossroads of the Habsburg and Ottoman spaces, influenced by positivism, social Darwinism and Islamic modernism, these men rejected the anti-Muslim arguments widely circulating in their time, and on the contrary supported the thesis that, with some adaptations, Muslims were capable of joining their non-Muslim fellow citizens on the path to progress, and that Islam and modernity could go hand in hand. In their bid to reject anti-Muslim arguments, these educated men accepted several of its premises, in particular that gender relations were the litmus-test of the degree of civilization of a community. According to this line of reasoning, improving the education of Muslim women—which aimed to scientificize their alleged natural and theological purpose, motherhood—was considered an essen-

tial requirement for adapting to the new political circumstances. However, when we look at their texts debating the Muslim woman question, in the pre-war period, improving the condition of Muslim women did not mean, for Muslim progressives, challenging the rules of sexual and confessional segregation, let alone contesting the veiling practice.

What is more, exploring the debate on the woman question in the Muslim press can be misleading. As the only members of the Muslim population using this medium to discuss gender issues, one might have the mistaken impression that the ideas of these progressive writers had become hegemonic among the Muslim elite of that time. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the press at that time rested in the hands of a loud educated minority who considered public writing to be a performance of their own modernity, while a silent majority, far more socially conservative, was not interested in speaking out in public. When, following the 1908 annexation, new forums of decision-making were allowed by the Habsburg authorities, the true power balance within the Muslim elite surfaced. The leaders of the community were not inclined to introduce the adaptations that progressives were loudly calling for in the domain of female education. Ironically enough, the only solution they found to challenge the progressive discourse in the press was to borrow the words of a woman—a Serbian Orthodox educated woman who, for a few weeks, became the spokeswoman of the Muslim conservatives. The 1911 debate analyzed in this chapter testifies also to the difficulty that socially conservative members of the Muslim elite had with, or indeed their lack of interest for, writing in public, a fact that would also stay true in the 1920s.

In this loud-spoken early-twentieth-century debate on Muslim women, real Muslim women who gained access to the press were a minority, and their voices were less audible. The education that they had received in Habsburg schools represented the principal marker of legitimacy for public writing and for testing different literary genres from both the Ottoman and European cultural spaces. While participating in the debate around the Muslim woman question, women expressed, albeit while keeping to the status quo of their milieu, different ideas of appropriate Muslim post-Ottoman femininity. According to the available sources, Muslim women seemed to be largely convinced of the inadequacy of the gender regime inherited from the late-Ottoman period. Even though they avoided participating in the bit-



Hasnija Berberović



Nafija Zildžić



Hatidža Đikić



Šefika Bjelevac



Nafija Sarajlić



Zulkida A. Tuzlanka Berberović

Figures 9-14: Portraits of the first generation of Muslim women writers.

Source: courtesy of Ajša Zahirović.

terest polemics, Muslim women firmly explained that a purely religious, oral, and domestic education was no longer sufficient to meet the needs of a Muslim post-Ottoman society.

The majority of Muslim women who spoke out in the press seemed to support the new gender regime proposed by Muslim Western-trained notables, a gender regime shaped by the policies of Habsburg imperial power and legitimized with the modernist ideas circulating in the Ottoman space. Conjugating female education and domesticity, the proposed regime did not substantially challenge the ideology of the separate spheres. Nevertheless, a few women also used public writing to imagine a future that was different at least in part to the aforementioned gender regimes. In some of their writings, Muslim women seemed to imagine, albeit reservedly, several different forms of sisterhood—among Muslim women, and sometimes among women beyond confessional differences. It is probably not a coinci-

dence that these first Muslim female writers—Hasnija Berberović, Šefika Bjelevac, Nafija Sarajlić—also became the first Muslim women in Bosnia and Herzegovina to establish and participate in voluntary associations after 1918, thus entering the public space not only through the medium of writing but also visibly and physically.





## CHAPTER 3

### MUSLIM, FEMALE AND VOLUNTEER



As we have seen, in the Habsburg period Muslim women did not directly participate in the nebula of associations that were blossoming in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Great War abruptly changed this state of affairs. In a context in which society was coming to terms with the devastating consequences of war, and the region was torn in the process of the establishment the first Yugoslav state, Muslim women began to engage directly in volunteering. The following pages thus focus on the social circumstances that made this new form of engagement possible, and on the strategies Muslim women elaborated in order to participate in different kinds of voluntary associations, namely philanthropic, cultural and feminist. Special attention will be dedicated to the specific ways in which Muslim women appropriated volunteering, a practice that openly challenged the rules of sexual and confessional segregation still being enforced in Bosnian urban centers.

This chapter also insists on another point: that the trajectories of Muslim women did not play out in a vacuum, and that Muslim women's engagement in volunteering cannot be separated from Bosnian Muslim, and more broadly Yugoslav, political history. For the entire interwar period, associations had intimate relations with Muslim and non-Muslim political parties, different branches of the Yugoslav administration, and religious institutions—relationships that were always far from stable, and at constant risk of upheaval and renegotiation.

## BEGGARS AND PROTESTERS

On June 28, 1914, the day commemorating the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, a defining moment in the Serbian national mythology, a group of Bosnian activists belonging to the secret society *Mlada Bosna* (Young Bosnia) succeeded in their plot to murder archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, along with his wife Sofia during the couple's visit to Sarajevo. After their arrest, the perpetrators, ostensibly backed by part of the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbia, openly called for the liberation of the South Slavic populations from Vienna's rule, and the establishment of a common, independent nation-state for South Slavs. Considering the Kingdom of Serbia to be the official instigator for the homicide, the Habsburg authorities rapidly delivered an ultimatum to Belgrade, setting into motion opposing networks of international alliances, which had been established over the previous decades. A month later, at the outbreak of war, South Slavs found themselves on both sides of the conflict; Habsburg subjects from Croatia, Slavonia, Istria, Dalmatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina served in the ranks of the Habsburg Army for the Central Powers, while people from Serbia and Montenegro fought on the side of the Allied Powers. In a little over four years of war the populations of this region paid a high price in human lives—approaching 1,900,000 dead, according to some estimates. Out of this heavy toll, the population the hardest hit in numbers was that of the Kingdom of Serbia, which lost approximately 20% of its entire population during military offensives and occupations.<sup>1</sup>

As historians have already amply shown, the Great War had a significant impact on gender relations, a change that varied sensibly according to the country and the social class under scrutiny.<sup>2</sup> At the risk of oversimplifying, one could state that among South Slavs, women's involvement in the war effort followed two different patterns, depending on which opposing

1 Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1978* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1980), 35.

2 For an overview of this debate, see among others Birgitta Bader-Zaar, "Controversy: War-related Changes in Gender Relations: The Issue of Women's Citizenship," in *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, eds., Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014), DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10036. On the same topic, see in particular Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, "Introduction: Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe," in *Gender & War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, eds., Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1–22

front they found themselves on. Women in Serbia and Montenegro, in continuity with what had happened in the wars fought in previous decades—against the Ottoman Empire (1876–1878), against Bulgaria (1885), and during the two Balkan Wars (1912–1913)—were significantly involved in the battlefield, mostly as doctors, nurses and caregivers in general.<sup>3</sup> In 1914, the patriotic Serbian women’s association *Kolo Srpskih Sestara* (The Circle of Serbian Sisters) alone was capable of mobilizing a cohort of 1,500 nurses, accompanied by 25 female doctors to support the Serbian army.<sup>4</sup> Several women from both Serbian and Montenegrin royal families strove to set an example. Jelena, the daughter of King Petar I Karađorđević, or Milena, Ksenija and Vjera, respectively the wife and daughters of King Nikola I Petrović-Njegoš, took part in caring in person for wounded soldiers, fostering an image of Serbian and Montenegrin women as valiantly standing at their soldiers’ sides.<sup>5</sup> In a few cases, women were not uniquely limited to these auxiliary roles, but also participated in the fighting. Especially in operations against the Habsburg army in 1914, and during the withdrawal of the Serbian army throughout Albania in the autumn of 1915, women joined the ranks of Serbian army units as volunteer fighters. Serbian women also took part in the Toplica Uprising (24 February–22 March 1917) against Bulgarian occupying troops, and served in the resistance movement, supplying fighters with food and clothing before the outbreak of the military revolt.<sup>6</sup> Even if they remained exceptional cases, these women contributed at least temporarily to subverting gender norms, and to redefining war heroism into something that was not exclusively a male affair. In the aftermath of the war, this double contribution by Serbian women during the Great War—as the mothers and wives of soldiers, but also as fighters—appears to have contributed to the idea that Serbian women were those who had sacrificed the most to the national cause among Yugoslav women.

3 Vera Gavrilović, *Žene lekari u ratovima 1876–1945. na tlu Jugoslavije* (Belgrade: Naučno društvo za istoriju zdravstvene kulture Jugoslavije, 1976), 23–50.

4 Jelena Savić, “Kolo srpskih sestara – odgovor elite na žensko pitanje,” *Glasnik Etnografskog Muzeja* 73 (2009): 115–32.

5 Božica Mladenović, “Women’s Mobilization for War (South East Europe),” in *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10167.

6 Monica Krippner, *Žene u ratu: Srbija 1915–1918*, (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1986). For the impact of the First World War on families in Serbia, see Božica Mladenović, *Porodica u Srbiji u Prvom svetskom ratu* (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 2006).

South-Slav women in the Habsburg regions also went through a terrible period of extraordinary economic privations, hunger, and disease. Family units were dealt a heavy blow. However, generally speaking their trajectory was different from that of their Serbian and Montenegrin counterparts. For the women of the Habsburg provinces, the battlefield remained a distant reality. In particular, Bosnia, which in the summer of 1914 had been at the focal point of European diplomacy, rapidly lost its importance, becoming a secondary scene for military operations. Episodes of violence—such as the pogroms against Serbs that followed the attack—remained limited to the regions bordering Serbia.<sup>7</sup> In the urban centers of the Habsburg Empire women assembled, sometimes succeeding in circumventing the ban on gatherings imposed by the authorities at the beginning of the conflict. As shown by research done on Zagreb and Croatia more broadly, urban women successfully organized into philanthropic organizations for the care of wounded and invalid soldiers, to supply food to the families of mobilized soldiers, and to care for orphans and pregnant women. All of these initiatives were of course undertaken within a patriotic discourse, and in support of the Habsburg military effort.<sup>8</sup>

Although a large-scale study of women's experiences in the Yugoslav space during the Great War remains to be done, it can be said that these provinces did not see the same phenomena that historians have observed in other contexts, such as in France and Great Britain—namely, widespread access to salaried work for women. It occurred neither in occupied Serbia and Montenegro, nor in the Habsburg regions that were not directly affected by the conflict. As has been highlighted by a recent study, there was no surge in women's access to work, though as had been the case before 1914 there was a minimal continued increase in numbers. Though limited in quantitative terms, this phenomenon was qualitatively important. In the urban centers of the Habsburg Empire—Zagreb in particular, but also Sara-

7 Pero Slijepčević, *Napor Bosne i Hercegovine za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje* (Sarajevo: Izdanje Oblasnog odbora Narodne odbrane u Sarajevu, 1929), 219–77.

8 Vijoleta Herman Kaurić, "Koliko je društava djelovalo u Zagrebu za vrijeme Prvog svjetskog rata?" *Historijski Zbornik* 62, no. 2 (2009): 427–63; Lucija Benyovsky, "Dobrotvorna gospojinska (ženska) društva u Hrvatskoj od osnivanja do Prvog svjetskog rata," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 30, no. 1 (1998): 73–93; Branka Boban, "Sabor Kraljevine Hrvatske, Slavonije i Dalmacije o problemima prehrane tijekom i svjetskog rata," in *Zbornik Mire Kolar-Dimitrijević: zbornik radova povodom 70. rođendana*, ed. Damir Agičić, (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Press, 2003), 315–28. On the same topic, see also Mira Kolar, *Zbrinjavanje gladne djece u Hrvatskoj za Prvog svjetskog rata* (Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2008).

jevo—a growing number of women entered “male professions,” for example as postal or railway workers, telegraph operators, and laborers.<sup>9</sup> This sexual redistribution of labor brought about by the war gave an increasing visibility to women in the public space, drawing the attention of the press. This visibility became, in a few cases, openly political; in 1917 feminist women from Croatia asked the Croatian Diet for the right to vote, and a year later women from Slovenia organized public rallies calling for peace and equality between men and women.<sup>10</sup>

The Great War was just as heavy to bear for the Muslim populations of the Yugoslav space. In rural areas, where at least half of the Muslim population lived, women were forced to shoulder the burden on behalf of the men who had left to serve in the Habsburg army. Despite the harsh living conditions, their proximity with the land, woodland and livestock made survival possible for these women, as well as for the rest of the male population that had not been enlisted into the army. The Muslim women who suffered the most were of course those living in urban centers, where in the first three years of war the price of basic necessities tripled, while salaries remained almost completely stagnant.<sup>11</sup> The Habsburg authorities’ efforts to control prices and combat the growing black market gave only very limited results.<sup>12</sup> Especially after 1917, when the province was hit by all-out famine, a few Muslim women began working outside of the domestic sphere. The Muslim press reported, for example, that to support themselves and their families after the departure of a husband or a father for the front, some chose to work in the family shop.<sup>13</sup> This kind of initiative remained, however, extremely limited, as a consequence of the enormous social pressure on Muslim women. In 1917, some Muslim religious officials strove to improve the situation of urban Muslim women and to introduce them into salaried work. The main promoter of this initiative was Mehmed Džemaludin Čaušević (1870–1938), the newly-elected *Reis-ul-ulema*. Čaušević tried to come to an agreement with the Habsburg authorities and organize the employment of poor Muslim women from Sarajevo in extra-domestic workshops for the

9 Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, *Rodni Stereotipi i politika Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca (Kraljevine Jugoslavije)* (Ph.D. diss., University of Zagreb, 2011), 106.

10 Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 16–22.

11 Nedim Šarac, *Sindikalni pokret u Bosni i Hercegovini do 1919 godine* (Sarajevo: Narodna Prosvjeta, 1955), 177.

12 Fedžad Forto, “Afere i prevare u BiH 1914–1918,” *Prilozi Instituta za istoriju*, 34 (2005): 67–78.

13 H.H., “Iz ženskog sveta,” *Budućnost*, no. 3–4 (1919): 56.

manufacture of uniforms for the Habsburg Army. However, these first steps remained limited in scope, riling local Muslim notables hostile to the idea of Muslim women working, even at the behest of a member of the religious hierarchy. In Bosnian urban centers the war thus first of all gave visibility to a growing population of Muslim women begging in the streets or seeking the meager aid offered by the authorities.<sup>14</sup>

The growing numbers of Muslim women counted amongst the poor and their increasing visibility in urban spaces were not the only consequences of the war. After 1917 some of the city's Muslim women had other reasons to take to the streets. Following the deterioration of socio-economic conditions, Muslim women joined other Bosnian women in public protest. Between 1917 and 1920, at a time when discontent over the high costs of living was mixed with enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution, a "euphoric red wave" swept across Europe, sparking labor strikes, protests, and land occupations. This phenomenon, visible too in Germany, Hungary, and Austria, came in the form of real attempts to incite insurrection, and spread to Bosnia. On March 3, 1918, together with the unions, socialist activists in Sarajevo organized a general strike against the high cost of living and poor access to supplies. Of the 2,000 women who took to the streets in protest, for the most part laborers in the manufacturing sector, 400 were Muslim.<sup>15</sup> The socialist press welcomed the presence of Muslim women at the protests with a great deal of enthusiasm; as the newspaper *Glas Slobode* (Voice of Freedom) observed, it was "the very first time Muslim women have taken part in a public protest. Their unexpected presence has left a very positive impression on the participants of the protest, as well as the organized workers of both sexes." According to the same article, "the Muslim women were favorably impressed by our protest too. Many of them personally expressed their satisfaction."<sup>16</sup>

14 Adnan Jahić, *Islamska zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini za vrijeme monarhističke republike Jugoslavije (1918-1941)* (Zagreb: Islamska zajednica u Hrvatskoj and Medžlis islamske zajednice u Zagrebu, 2010), 25–7.

15 Ilijas Hadžibegović, *Postanak radničke klase u Bosni i Hercegovini i njen razvoj do 1914. godine* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1980), 134–20. For a comprehensive overview of the rise of the Communist Party in Yugoslavia in the aftermath of the Great War, see Ivo Banac, "The Communist Party of Yugoslavia during the Period of Legality, 1919–1921," in *The Effects of World War I: The Class War After the Great War: The Rise of Communist parties in East Central Europe, 1918–192*, ed., Ivo Banac (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 188–230.

16 *Glas Slobode*, March 6 (1918) quoted in Nevenka Bajić, "Pregled učešća žena u radničkom pokretu Bosne i Hercegovine do Obznane 1921. godine," *Glasnik arhiva i Društva arhivskih radnika Bosne i Hercegovine* 2 (1962): 247.

The attention that the socialist press gave to this episode was not only a consequence of the avid interest that Yugoslav socialist parties (at least six, before the war) traditionally devoted to the emancipation of female workers.<sup>17</sup> According to the editors of *Glas Slobode*, thanks to their participation in public demonstrations Muslim women had shown themselves to be far more progressive than their fathers, husbands, and brothers. While the all-male Muslim political elite continued to “organize on the basis of religious principle [*konfesijonalni ključ*], refusing to go beyond an irremediably outdated, feudal, and conservative model [of political participation],”<sup>18</sup> Muslim women workers had taken an important step in overcoming the boundaries of religious identity. By taking to the streets alongside their non-Muslim co-workers, Muslim women were, according to the socialist press, discovering national and class consciousness. The socialist groups’ strategy, which formed a single party for the entire Yugoslav region, in 1919 appeared to bear fruit. Early the following year, in fact, the Communist Party—which in the elections for the constituent assembly would garner nearly 200,000 votes, becoming the fourth largest party in the country<sup>19</sup>—counted more than 3,000 female members in Sarajevo alone, including approximately 500 Muslim women.<sup>20</sup>

“LET US UNVEIL THE WOMEN!”

In 1918, when the collapse of the Habsburg Empire had become inevitable and the foundations for a new Yugoslav state were gradually being laid out, the moment was ripe for a reappraisal of the debate around the Muslim woman question. While Muslim women had become increasingly visible in urban centers both as beggars and as protesters, Bosnian newspapers spread the news coming from Zagreb and Ljubljana that organized women’s movements were taking to the streets, calling for full political

17 For a comprehensive review of the the different Bosnian Social Democratic groups in existence before the First World War, see Elvis Fejzić, “Rana bosanskohercegovačka ljevica i njene socijalno-političke preokupacije,” *Diwan*, no. 21–22 (2007): 153–70.

18 Quote originally published in an article in *Glas Slobode*, January 7 (1919), and cited by Atif Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija u političkom životu Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1977), 49.

19 Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History and Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 328.

20 Bajčić, “Pregled učešća žena,” 247.



rights. In the same period, the Sarajevo-based journal *Jugoslavenski List* (Yugoslav Journal) published contributions from the likes of Tomáš Masaryk, or the British feminist activist Edward Carpenter, advocating full equal rights for both men and women in the new post-war European order.<sup>21</sup> The pre-war debate on Muslim women, which had focused on appropriate forms of, and spaces for, female education, suddenly seemed to be completely outdated.

In late 1918, a twenty-five-year-old man from Sarajevo, Dževad Sulejmanpašić (1893–1976), took it upon himself to relaunch the debate based upon these new terms. This young man's family name was of course well known in Bosnia. As one of the most prominent Muslim landowning families in the region, the Sulejmanpašićs had in fact already distinguished themselves as public figures in the nineteenth century, as supporters of the Ottoman *Tanzimat* in the 1830s, and as the incumbents of important offices in the Habsburg provincial administration after 1878. Born after the occupation, Dževad Sulejmanpašić had pursued his studies first at the royal secondary school of Sarajevo and then at the Faculty of Law in Vienna. In the Empire's capital, he had discovered a love for writing and for journalism in particular. After having briefly served in the Habsburg army on the Western front, Dževad Sulejmanpašić returned to Sarajevo and began to write.<sup>22</sup> In December 1918 he published his first text, a pamphlet entitled "A Contribution to Solving our Muslim Woman Question". As explained in his Introduction, dated November 25, 1918, the paperback had originally been intended to be published "seven months earlier"; at the time, however, the Habsburg authorities had forbidden its publication, deeming it *anastöszig* ("untimely," in Hungarian in the text).<sup>23</sup>

The starting-point for Sulejmanpašić's argument is fairly well known, and it is in substantial continuity with what Muslim intellectuals had already been writing during the Habsburg period:

21 "Masaryk o ženi i ženskom pitanju," *Jugoslavenski List*, November 27 (1918): 2; November 28 (1918): 2–3; Edward Carpenter, "Sloboda žene," *Jugoslavenski List*, January 12 (1919): 2; January 15 (1919): 2–3.

22 On the Sulejmanpašićs, see in particular Husnija Kamberović, *Begovski zemljišni posjedi*, 448–53. On the ideas and cultural references of this Muslim intellectual, see Evelin Memić, "Politička i socijalna misao Dževada Sulejmanpašića," *Godišnjak Bošnjačke zajednice kulture Preporod* 4 (2004): 109–24.

23 Dževad *beg* Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog rješenju našeg muslimanskog ženskog pitanja* (Sarajevo: Daniel & A. Kajon, 1918). The text has recently been reprinted in Enes Karić, ed., *Bosanske muslimanske rasprave*, vol. 3 (Sarajevo: Sedam, 2003), 9–39.

the current condition of the Muslim women of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in particular those living in the cities, clearly indicates that they, thanks to their misery [*bijeda*] and backwardness [*zaostalost*] will lead all of the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina collectively into misery and backwardness—and consequently to their extinction [*izumiranje*], unless rapid and radical changes are introduced.<sup>24</sup>

However, in the first pages of this text the author stresses that his contribution will be a radical departure from what had been written until then: “I know I am the first to approach the issue in this way, and with such a degree of liberty; I assure you that I am fully aware of the step I am taking and of its consequences, and how far they could take us.”<sup>25</sup> For the author, as a result of the Great War, described in the text as a point of no return for all of the populations of the Yugoslav space, and especially for Bosnian Muslim women, it was imperative to explore new, entirely different methods for reforming Muslim society.

What did the war do to women? Their guardians—their fathers, husbands, and brothers—were far from home, and they were left alone with the children. This same woman, who in times of peace and plenty, with her face veiled, would never have been capable of accomplishing even the simplest extra-domestic economic activity has somehow been forced into it, because the war and its many tragedies made the fight for survival harder and harder. Let us take a very common example; a man, who thanks to his work fed his wife and his five children, had to leave the house for three or four long years. Here is [a description of] his wife (but such a description can be applied to all Muslim women); ignorant and illiterate, appearing in public is shameful to her, and to ask for example for a job, or even for charity—this is completely impossible for her, as long as her face is veiled.<sup>26</sup>

This pessimistic, in some points disdainful, picture of Muslim women in the wartime and post-war Yugoslav space is even less appealing when compared with that of non-Muslim women. While urban Jewish and Chris-

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24 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 6.

25 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 6.

26 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 20.

tian women had “become employees, drivers, shopkeepers,”<sup>27</sup> and thus learned to earn a living through salaried work while their fathers and husbands were absent, Muslim women “did nothing of the sort.”<sup>28</sup> According to Sulejmanpašić, the backward, illiterate and shameful Muslim women had had no other choice than to participate in an economic activity that required—at least according to him—no specific skills: sex work. Supporting his claim with data collected by the Sarajevo police department, the author claimed that the vast majority of prostitutes operating in the main Bosnian towns were desperate Muslim women—a miserable state of affairs in itself, but which also brought shame upon the entire Muslim community.

Displaying a taste for provocation, Sulejmanpašić informs his reader of a practice that, according to his observations, was widespread in Sarajevo. The veil, both in the form of the *zar* and the *feredža*, was commonly used by the prostitutes working in town, regardless of their religion. By entirely covering their faces, the veil ensured a certain invisibility and freedom of movement for these prostitutes in urban spaces, and prevented police officials from tracking them. Moreover, since 1878 the number of foreigners in town had been growing, and the veil—an object upon which the Western (male) imagination had projected all kinds of erotic imagery—had become an instrument with which to ensnare new, non-Muslim clients, especially the soldiers of the Habsburg army living in town. Non-Muslim prostitutes thus began to wear veils and pretend to be Muslims, “insofar as for foreigners and non-Muslims, the Muslim woman is quite an exotic delicacy.” In complete opposition with the common perception of this garment, according to Sulejmanpašić, “here the veil worn by Muslim women has become a mask for interreligious fornication [*bludnica*].”<sup>29</sup>

In this 36-page text, Dževad Sulejmanpašić stressed that, in order to radically transform their miserable condition in Muslim society, Muslim women had to have free access to education and salaried work, even if this went against accepted religious law. Even though, at the beginning of the text, the author suggested that the Muslim woman question belongs to the religious sphere, describing it as a “sacred issue” (*sveti predmet*),<sup>30</sup> the pam-

27 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 21.

28 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 21.

29 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 16.

30 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 5

phlet unmistakably calls for the adoption of a rational approach. As stated a few pages later: “the implementation of these changes... is more or less in direct conflict with the precepts of Islamic law. In these circumstances, we must unwaveringly choose to conform to the pressing needs of our times.”<sup>31</sup>

At the very core of Sulejmanpašić’s argument was an issue that pre-war Muslim intellectuals had been carefully avoiding—the question of the veil. The title of the essay’s first section illustrates rather eloquently the importance that Sulejmanpašić placed on this issue, as the primary obstacle to social transformation for women: “Four decades in contact with European culture—and the faces of our women are still covered.”<sup>32</sup> The author started by accusing the Habsburgs of having done nothing to abolish this practice, as Vienna “did not really wish for the Muslims of Bosnia to become enlightened [*prosvjetliti*] and civilized [*civilizirati*], seeing in them a horde of religious fanatics indifferent to any form of national awareness—a useful tool in preventing the national awakening of the Serbo-Croatian people.”<sup>33</sup> Pointed out as the very manifestation of the norms of sexual and religious segregation that lay at the root of Muslim women’s backwardness, Sulejmanpašić summarized his thesis in three points:

- 1) Veiling does not fulfill in any way its mission, e.g. to preserve female morality.
- 2) [Veiling] is not only useless, but it also prevents us from adapting to the “new era.”
- 3) Consequently, [veiling] is the primary obstacle to the progress of the Muslim people.<sup>34</sup>

In conclusion to these theoretical premises, Dževad Sulejmanpašić had no reservations about proposing a radical solution for improving the conditions of Muslim women:

Let’s uncover our women’s faces, in a way that gives them access to the world and also allows them to evaluate what a child really needs in order to be happy in this world; let’s give them the means to see with their own eyes the negative side of the “new era,” so that they can be more protected from it. Because

31 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 14.

32 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 9.

33 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 3.

34 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 27.

our children's education depends upon the unveiling of our women, and through them the future of our people, and such a thing does not have a price.<sup>35</sup>

At the very end of his text, Sulejmanpašić pushed this anti-veiling zeal even further, expressing his desire for the forced de-veiling of women:

were I to have the power, by way of laws and by way of bayonets I would have that thoroughly backward *hadith* [which compels women to wear the veil] removed; I would have the faces of Muslim women uncovered by force... Even if all this were at the cost of the emigration of half of the Muslim population of Bosnia, I would have it done as the remaining half would have been the only ones truly fit [*sposobna*] for modern life...

Let us unveil the women!

And their social progress will bring forth the quality that makes a man a real man in their hearts: devotion and love for their own home.<sup>36</sup>

An additional point in Sulejmanpašić's treatise needs to be stressed here. In the final part of his text, the author mentioned "the speed, equal to that of electricity, with which a large number of Muslim women in the city of Sarajevo have joined socialist organizations."<sup>37</sup> According to the author, who seems somewhat sympathetic to the growing political awareness of Muslim women, the reason behind this success is that: "socialist ideas, the ideas of those dissatisfied with the existing order, were the first to put the impossible into practice; to let Muslim women go out into the world [*da muslimanka izade u svijet*]."<sup>38</sup> Lamenting the fact that almost none of the Muslim politicians of the city were concerned by the number of "once modest Muslim women [who], after having uncovered their faces and bodies, had rushed into the arms of socialism,"<sup>39</sup> the author warned Muslim notables that:

35 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 28–9.

36 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 34.

37 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 25.

38 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 25.

39 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 25.

the power of the *čaršija* [the main commercial and artisan square in Sarajevo, meaning here, by allusion, the Muslim traditional elite] stops at the door of the House of the People. In there, there are only comrades, in there Muslim women sit beside non-Muslims, drinking and talking with them; this is the point at which the Muslim masses give way to the proletariat, organized according to the principles of international socialism.<sup>40</sup>

At the very end of the pamphlet, the author turned to both the temporal and religious authorities, namely to the religious hierarchy—“and in particular to his enlightened and powerful Highness, *Reis-ul-ulema* Čaušević”<sup>41</sup>—and to the new government, asking them to hear his plea. Sulejmanpašić openly invited them to avoid making the same mistakes as Vienna had, “which came to us with the courtesy typical of Western countries, believing we would be capable of seeing for ourselves where true progress lies and of putting aside old and harmful traditions.”<sup>42</sup> For the author, the new Yugoslav state coming into being ought to take upon itself the implementation of this kind of progressive measure on Bosnian Muslims, “otherwise, Muslims will hold onto these traditions forever, which is why our government must swiftly change tack, passing from a passive to an active role.”<sup>43</sup>

Many criticisms could be levelled at this early text of Sulejmanpašić—a lack of theoretical coherence, a certain disregard for Muslim women, a clumsy desire to assert his status as social reformer on the Muslim intellectual scene—but not that its radical statements went unnoticed. According to several sources, the distribution of the pamphlet early that year was soon followed by infuriated sermons by several *ulema*. Copies of the brochure were also publicly burned in the courtyard of the Gazi-Husrevbeg mosque, the largest mosque in Sarajevo. An angry mob moved from there to the home of the Sulejmanpašićs, where the author had barricaded himself in, and began to throw stones. Only the timely intervention of the *Reis-ul-ulema* Čaušević, and his appeal for calm was able to calm spirits and defuse the situation.<sup>44</sup>

40 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 25.

41 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 25.

42 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 35.

43 Sulejmanpašić, *Jedan prilog*, 35.

44 Abduselam Balagija, *Les Musulmans yougoslaves* (Alger: La Maison des Livres, 1940), 117.

In the following weeks, a Muslim religious scholar wrote a series of articles published in a Muslim newspaper, attacking Sulemanpašić's thesis, stressing its incompatibility with Islamic law, and the author's lack of competence for dealing with these subjects.<sup>45</sup> In any case the pamphlet marked a point of no return in the debate on the Muslim woman question. By calling for Muslim women to participate in extra-domestic work, Sulejmanpašić had challenged the entire ideology of the separate spheres. The principle by which contemporary needs should take precedence over sharia law had been explicitly expressed. The veil, the manifestation of Muslim woman's sexual and religious segregation, had been attacked and despised in the public eye, and highlighted as a symbol of all the constraints burdening Bosnian Muslims and their survival in their post-Ottoman geopolitical setting. It was no longer possible to simply reduce the Muslim woman question to a debate on education; it had now taken on a political, economic and national dimension.

#### ENTER PHILANTHROPIC ASSOCIATIONS

In 1919, the Provincial Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina—the political body ensuring the transition from the Habsburg to the Yugoslav state—restored the associational rights that had been suspended at the beginning of the war. This decision marked the emergence of a radically new phenomenon in the Bosnian public space; for the first time, Muslim women began directly participating in voluntary associations. In August 1919, upon the initiative of the members of the local Muslim craftsmens' association *Ittihad* (Union), the *Muslimanska ženska zadruga* (Muslim Women's Association) was founded in Mostar.<sup>46</sup> Five months earlier, six Muslim women from Sarajevo had already published an open letter to the public on the front page of *Pravda* (Justice), the newspaper around which the city's Muslim political elite was reorganizing. This short text, entitled "Dear Sisters", which was also distributed in flyer form in Sarajevo, explained that a small group of Muslim women were establishing their own philanthropic association. The

45 Ibn Muslim, "Muslimansko žensko pitanje," *Vrijeme*, February 11 (1919): 2–3, February 15 (1919): 2–3, *Pravda*, March 4 (1919): 2–3, March 8 (1919): 2–3, April 8 (1919): 2–3, April 19 (1919): 2–3.

46 AHNK, MŽZM, 12, Minutes of MŽZM's Constituent Assembly (August 13, 1919).

promoters who signed the open letter were the Muslim elementary school teachers who had been trained at the Sarajevo Muslim Girls' School.<sup>47</sup> In April of the same year, nearly sixty Muslim women met for a public assembly at the reformed female *mekteb* of Džinin Alley and officially founded *Osvitanje* (Dawn). Unlike *Muslimanska ženska zadruga*, which had rapidly ceased to be active, this Sarajevo association met with considerable success. Within a year, it had grown from 51 to over 300 members, not only from Sarajevo, but also from other towns throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>48</sup>

The launch of these first Muslim female charitable associations was favorably received by all, both in Bosnia and in the rest of the country in formation. In the aftermath of the war, several Muslim male notables from different Bosnian towns spoke out, asking women to have a more active role in the internal affairs of Muslim society. Ahmet Đumišić, an activist of the Muslim charitable association *Spas* (Salvation) from Banja Luka, publicly addressed the issue of female engagement in voluntary associations in early 1919. In his pamphlet, "Who is Hindering the Progress and Education of Muslims, and in Particular of Muslim Women?" he denounced the miserable conditions of urban women, and the need for every Muslim—man and woman—to act. Đumišić attacked both "our Muslim intelligentsia (as the press regularly started to call the Muslim educated elite), our *hodžas* (honor to the few exceptions), and our fellow rich and elderly Muslims"<sup>49</sup> for allowing this state of affairs to continue. If the religious officials were accused of spreading false and pernicious ideas in their sermons at the mosques (for example, that literate women "will fall into *džehennem*," or hell in Islamic tradition),<sup>50</sup> the intellectuals *à la* Sulejmanpašić, as well as wealthy merchants and craftsmen, were similarly to be blamed for having done nothing tangible. According to the author, greater engagement by Muslim women in the public debate was not only necessary, but also legitimate according to Islamic tradition, and had been especially true during the first centuries

47 "Osvitanje," *Pravda*, March 4 (1919): 1.

48 "Skupština Osvitanja," *Pravda* February 10 (1920): 1. For more on the association *Osvitanje*, see the article by Kujraković, "Osvitanje," 145–164.

49 Ahmet Đumišić, *Ko smeta napretku i prosvjećivanju muslimana, a osobito muslimanki?* (Banja Luka: Izdanje musul. prosvjetno i potporno društvo "Spas," 1919). The pamphlet was recently reprinted in Enes Karić, *Bosanske muslimanske rasprave*, vol. 3 (Sarajevo: Sedam, 2003). The quotation comes from Đumišić, *Ko smeta*, 3.

50 Đumišić, *Ko smeta*, 4.



of Islam. “Read the Islamic history of the Arabs,” Đumišić again incites his readers, “and you will see how many Islamic female poets and writers there were at that time, you will see how Zaynab, daughter of Ali, impressed her audience with her eloquence at the great assembly of Kufa.”<sup>51</sup> In conclusion, the Muslim philanthropist from Banja Luka called upon Muslim women “who have sufficient time and means” to help “[their] poor sisters, alongside [their] husbands and [their] community.”<sup>52</sup>

The voice of Đumišić was not an isolated one. Even the editors of *Pravda* supported the involvement of Muslim women in voluntary associations with an official statement, claiming to see in this initiative a “middle way [*srednji put*], both tangible and practical, without clamor or rhetoric”<sup>53</sup> for improving the conditions of Muslim women. Words of praise also came from several members of the religious hierarchy who, while irrevocably condemning Sulejmanpašić’s radical statements, saw in Muslim female associations a commendable way to approach the needs of the community. For all these male notables, the Muslim character of these initiatives was crucial, insofar as “only in Islam, in culture and mutual support, only in true Islamic culture lies our salvation.”<sup>54</sup> The news of the establishment of the first Muslim female associations in Bosnia also crossed borders within the Muslim population. In early 1920, the Belgrade-based feminist newspaper *Ženski Pokret* (The Women’s Movement), also devoted several pages to enthusiastic articles about these two organizations, seeing them as a sign that Muslim women were ready to join other Yugoslav women in their common struggle for civil rights.<sup>55</sup> Though for different reasons, this new engagement in voluntarism by Muslim women was thus warmly welcomed both inside the Muslim community and by others outside of it. As stated in March 1919 by Hasnija Berberović, the writer and teacher who had been elected to be the first president of *Osvitanje*, “there is no place large or small in our country... from which we do not receive support from our brothers and sisters, with monetary contributions or warm letters, full of kind thoughts and thanks to the women that have begun to make this noble idea a reality...”<sup>56</sup> These words

51 Đumišić, *Ko smeta*, 15.

52 Đumišić, *Ko smeta*, 57.

53 “Osvrt na proglas muslimanki,” *Vrijeme*, January 28 (1919): 1.

54 Ibn Muslim, “Muslimansko žensko pitanje,” *Pravda*, no. 19 (1919): 2–3.

55 Hasan Rebac, “Pojava muslimanke među sestrama jugoslovenkama,” *Ženski Pokret*, no. 4–5 (1920): 26.

56 “Osvitanje,” *Pravda*, March 4 (1919): 1.

are revealing of the trust and optimism for a new era of Muslim women's activism and visibility in the Bosnian public space.

The practice of establishing associations based upon the *Osvitanje* prototype, i.e., autonomous, city-based associations set up along sexual and confessional lines, saw a certain degree of success in the interwar period, especially in Sarajevo. In the main cities of Bosnia, archival records tell us that Muslim women established this kind of organization from time to time—such as the *Muslimanski ženski klub* (Muslim Women's Club) active in the late 1920s, or the *Jugoslovensko muslimansko dobrotvorno društvo* (Yugoslav Muslim Philanthropic Association) active in the first half of the 1930s. However, these experiments remained rare occurrences, as did women's participation in interfaith philanthropic associations.<sup>57</sup> In most cases, Muslim women entered into existing charitable organizations that had equipped themselves with separate structures and specific female branches. For example, the Muslim charitable association *Budućnost* (Future) in Banja Luka added a female branch known as *Fidaka*,<sup>58</sup> as did other similar associations—*Bratstvo* (Brotherhood) in Gornji Šeher in 1929,<sup>59</sup> *Dobrotvor* (Benefactor) in Stolac, as well as *Merhamet*, *Bratsvo* (Brotherhood) and *Jedileri* (Seven) in Sarajevo in 1931, 1933, and 1939 respectively.<sup>60</sup>

The rise and visibility of the Muslim woman activist, working for an organization that acted outside of the domestic space, and interacting with people who did not necessarily belong to her own family was in itself problematic; it challenged the norms of sexual segregation still being enforced in Muslim urban society. This novelty thus required some careful justification before Muslim society. For those who supported Muslim women becoming involved in the public space, the principal justification was the effects of the war. Hasnija Berberović and the other Muslim teachers who

57 For example, on the second association see Samija Šarić, "Aktivnost udruženja univerzitetski obrazovanih žena i Glavnog Odbora Udruženja jugoslovenskih domaćica u Sarajevu (1933–1941)," *Glasnik Arhiva i Društva arhivskih radnika BIH* 22 (1982): 33–4.

58 AJ, 14, F63/J194/12, Statute of *Budućnost* (undated). For further information on the activities of the *Budućnost* association and its female branch, *Fidaka*, see Perko Vojinović, "Ženski Pokret u Banjoj Luci (1918–1941)," *Zbornik Krajiških Muzeja* (1973): 113–23 and Dana Begić, "Antifašistički pokret žena u BiH u vremenu od 1937. do 1941. godine," *Prilozi Instituta za istoriju* 1 (1965): 137–98. From the literature and available sources, it is not possible to determine with certainty whether the association had nationalist orientations.

59 AJ, 14, F63/J194/2, statute of "*Bratstvo*" *muslimansko dobrotvorno društvo* (1929).

60 HAS, J175, statute of *Humanitarno muslimansko društvo "Jedileri"* (undated).

had signed the *Osvitanje* address, for example, claimed that in consequence of the Great War, women needed to act: “Muslim women fall into decadence in the following manner: hunger brings Muslim women out into the streets, then leads them to beg, until they have reached the lowest point to which an individual can fall: immorality [*nemoral*]!”<sup>61</sup> Here again, the text appears to allude to the rise in the number of sex workers among poor Muslim women, an issue that surely had the power to distress even the most conservative elements in Muslim urban society. Similar reasoning was also given in the statutes of Mostar’s *Muslimanska ženska zadruga*, and by 1919 was still given as the justification for the association’s foundation, with the aim to “compensate for the lack of religious and domestic education [*vjerski i kućni odgoj*], maintain good habits and reject bad ones, counter ostentation [*raskoš*], unemployment, debauchery [*raskalašenost*], and begging.”<sup>62</sup> The enrolment of Muslim women into voluntary associations was thus presented here as a hard necessity of history, and as the lesser of two evils.

In any case, the challenges to traditional sexual segregation brought about by women joining associations should not be overestimated. On closer analysis of the practices of these philanthropic associations, one finds a very nuanced reality. Muslim philanthropic associations, as well as non-Muslim associations in the Yugoslav space, operated on what we might call a gendered division of associational labor. Through the male branches of a given association, male members focused their activities on the male population in urban areas—beggars, the unemployed or day labourers. Female members, through their female branches, concentrated on what was usually called at that time “the female world” (*ženski svijet*)—the female urban poor. Generally speaking, women activists involved in philanthropic associations focused on three domains of action: providing economic aid for elderly women, single mothers, or abandoned children; organizing literacy and handiwork courses for women excluded from a state education; and establishing small economic initiatives, like sewing and embroidery workshops, to provide women with some form of economic integration. These initiatives were of course legitimated in religious terms. For instance, according to the statutes of *Merhamet*’s female chapter created in Sarajevo in

61 ABiH, ZV2, 86/140/136, *Apel Osvitanje* (undated).

62 ABiH, ZV, 18/26/29, Statute of *Muslimanska ženska zadruga* (1919, undated), article 3.

1931, the branch's first goal, "through a well-intentioned propaganda campaign among the female population," was "to strengthen Muslim awareness [*muslimanska svijest*] as much as possible, spread the idea of mutual solidarity, unity, and love, instill in our female population the importance of saving money and distain for superfluous luxury [*luksuz*]."63

In summary, Muslim women began participating in charitable associations essentially from within the confines of the Muslim community space. These organizations had an explicit policy of being open uniquely to Muslim women—as was the case for associations like *Osvitanje*—or uniquely to Muslims, in the case of mixed organizations. Thus, Muslim women's participation in philanthropic activities was closely tied to that of their male counterparts.

### IN THE MIDST OF POLITICAL TURMOIL

According to their statutes, Muslim philanthropic associations were not political associations. At their conception the intention was for them to act for the common good of the Muslim community as a whole, and as organizations indifferent to party affiliation. In practice, from the very beginning their activities often did not follow this precept.

After four years of inactivity, in mid-February 1919, a group of Muslim ex-representatives of the Bosnian Diet, intellectuals and members of the religious hierarchy started to re-organize themselves as a political entity. The new party, soon baptized Yugoslav Muslim Organization (*Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija*, JMO) was established in Sarajevo and headed by an eminent member of the Islamic hierarchy, *muftija* Ibrahim Maglajlić (1861–1936).64 Out of the minority that did not adhere to the constitution of the new party, in addition to a group of prominent Muslims close to the Serbian Radical Party, a group of Muslim political activists close to the Democratic Party emerged. This group rapidly rallied around the newspaper *Jednakost* (Equality) and, in opposition to Maglajlić's party, they founded the Yugoslav Muslim Democracy (*Jugoslovenska Muslimanska Demokracija*, JMD) in Sarajevo.65

63 Munir Šahinović Ekremov, *Spomenica dvadesetogodišnjice opstanka i djelovanja Muslimanskog dobrotvornog društva "Merhamet" u Sarajevu: 1913–1933* (Sarajevo: Merhamet, 1933), 4.

64 Filandra, *Bošnjačka politika*, 65–82 and Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija*, 47–8.

65 Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija*, 54–5.

Despite that they both agreed on the establishment of a constitutional monarchy under the Karadžević dynasty, the two factions were divided over several issues. The JMO campaigners believed that the Muslims of Bosnia should form a unified political entity, independent of the other parties and capable of protecting its interests through direct negotiation with the central government—first and foremost an agrarian reform that would limit losses for Muslim landowners. According to Maglajlić's party, only a state that allowed for broad forms of autonomy could best safeguard Muslim interests. This autonomy would need to have at least two dimensions: territorial, with the protection of Bosnia and Herzegovina's historical administrative borders, and religious, guaranteeing that the Statute for the Autonomy of Religious Affairs of 1909 be preserved and that the courts of Islamic law be maintained. At the same time, the JMO leadership stressed the importance of ensuring that the Bosnian Islamic religious officials remain in contact with the *Šejh-ul-islam*, "just as the Catholics are in contact with the papal see."<sup>66</sup> This aspiration to be autonomous and remain distinct from non-Muslims was reflected in the issue of national identity, a topic upon which members of the JMO remained quite prudent—and they would remain to be so for the duration of the interwar period. As stated in the party's official program, "we believe in the full equality of the three tribal names [*potpune ravnopravnosti plemenskih imena*]" and "as for the question of nationalization [*nacionalizovanje*], we are of the opinion that this falls within the cultural domain of society, and is not a matter that regards everyday politics." According to party leaders, "efforts in this domain must be based upon tolerance and caution, understanding and progress. For this reason, we are opposed to all pettiness and inconsideration, and we are particularly opposed to the conspicuousness of any one ethnic group. We will come closer together, therefore without parting ways. We cling to Yugoslavism as the most suitable path to conciliation and unification."<sup>67</sup> Despite lending a national description to their party name ("Yugoslav"), the party chose not to give a clear position on the crucial question of what nation the Muslims of Bosnia belonged to.

66 Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija*, 418–20.

67 Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija*, 418–20. For an interpretation of the relationship between the JMO and Yugoslavism, see Banac, *The National Question*, 359–77 and Bougarel, "Bosnian Muslims," 100–114.

The JMD partisans, on the other hand, had a long tradition of affinity with, though not actual political support for, Serbian parties, in particular the Svetozar Pribičević's Democratic Party. For *Jednakost* sympathizers, a political group based purely on religious principles was to be strongly avoided, as it was an irremediably outdated, pre-modern solution, and linked to the imperial past. Muslim interests, like those of South Slavs in general, could only be defended through the creation of a centralized state, and by redefining its administrative borders in order to overcome historic regional divisions. Such measures could thus guarantee the country's progressive social integration, preventing old differences from resurfacing. Although the issue of maintaining the central role of Islam in public life appears to have been much less pronounced in the party's program and in the pages of *Jednakost*, compared to the JMO's position, the issue of Muslim nationalization—in a pro-Serbian and pro-Yugoslav sense—was viewed as a crucial step.<sup>68</sup>

Muslim voluntary associations—male but also female—were rapidly drawn into the political debate between these two groups. For both the JMO and JMD leaders, the most relevant bone of contention was of course represented by *Gajret*, the most well-established and prestigious Muslim cultural association in the province. While awaiting the election of a new central branch scheduled for September 19, the members of the pre-war central branch had administered the association ad interim. Shortly after, the tormented *Gajret* re-establishment assembly closed with a victory for the JMD; in the weeks that followed, despite a great deal of controversy in the press, court appeals, and the defection of several local chapters close to the JMO, *Gajret* had resumed its activities under the direction a clearly pro-Democratic leadership. As highlighted by Ibrahim Kemura, the JMD victory had only been possible thanks to the decisive support of the prefect and police forces, at that time close to the Democratic Party, which had had no qualms in condoning blatantly illegal actions in order to bring victory to the JMD. In the run-up to the elections for the Constituent Assembly, *Gajret's* members started to support the Democratic Party and to broadcast its position to the Muslim population.<sup>69</sup>

68 Filandra, *Bošnjačka politika*, 82–92.

69 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 150–3.

During the same months, *Osvitanje* also became involved in the rivalry between Muslim political factions. At its first assembly, *Osvitanje* had elected to the control committee, the only organ of the association in which men were present, Edhem Mulabdić, Abdurezak Hivzi Bjelevac and Šemsudin Sarajlić. As seen in Chapter One, these three men had already distinguished themselves before the war for their support of education for Muslim women, and their engagement in the public sphere. Since 1914 Mulabdić had been the director of the Muslim Girls' School in Sarajevo, while Bjelevac and Sarajlić were the spouses of two female writers, Šefika Bjelevac and Nafija Sarajlić. These men were not only close to the female cause, but also among the earliest JMO campaigners.<sup>70</sup> In the following months, multiple signs indicated that *Osvitanje* was being drawn more and more into the orbit of Maglajlić's party. Prominent figures from the JMO were also the association's most generous donors, which the wives and daughters of the party's Sarajevo militants had quickly joined.<sup>71</sup> In June 1919 the party decided to entrust the activists of *Osvitanje* with the creation of a supplement for the party house organ.<sup>72</sup>

*Gajret* activists quickly reacted to what they considered to be the takeover of the first Muslim female association by a rival political party. Šukria Kurtović, one of the association's most prominent figures at that time, attacked the JMO's interference in *Osvitanje* in the press, denouncing for instance the expulsion of a young female member, described as "a young woman who was married in accordance to Islamic law and who, in conformity with regulations, wears the veil,"<sup>73</sup> just because her husband was a *Gajret* sympathizer. Almost a year later, on the eve of the elections for the Constituent Assembly, *Gajret* supporters continued to denounce in the newspapers the pressure that exponents of the JMO were exerting on the activists of Sarajevo's first Muslim association.

In late 1919 the battle for *Osvitanje* seemed to have been irremediably lost. During this period, *Gajret* activists began preparing the way for taking on Muslim women in their association. First, in the spring of 1920, the association's central branch amended its own statutes, making it explicit that the

70 "Jedno saopštenje na članak: Osvrt na proglas muslimanki," *Vrijeme*, February 6 (1919): 3.

71 "Domaće vijesti," *Pravda*, no. 1 (1919): 4.

72 This special insert came as a four-page supplement with an issue of *Pravda*, no. June 26 (1919).

73 Šukria Kurtović, *Gdje je istina?*, an 8-page paperback printed separately and distributed with the newspaper *Budućnost*, with neither date nor publisher. Likely published with the issue of October 15 (1919).

association was open to “Muslim men *and women*.”<sup>74</sup> In October, *Gajret* publicly invited Muslim women to take part in their venture:

we turn to our women, in the hopes that they will support this initiative, which shall not be shaken by the frictions caused within *Osvitanje* by the various Korkut, Šerić and Sarajlić. The *Gajret* female branches [which are about to be formed] shall remain under the control of the association’s central branch, which knows and shall know no partisanship in our cultural endeavors and shall not permit what has already happened in *Osvitanje* to take place.<sup>75</sup>

Seventeen years after its establishment, the gates of the most important Muslim cultural association in the Yugoslav space had finally been opened to women.

#### ENTER CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS

The elections for the Constituent Assembly on November 28, 1920, held by universal male suffrage, concluded with a resounding victory for the JMO. Maglajlić’s party garnered nearly 111,000 votes, making it the leading party in Bosnia. Despite overt support from the police and the army, the JMD and other minor Muslim lists close to the Democratic or Radical party emerged from the electoral race utterly defeated.<sup>76</sup> The JMO’s success at the election for the Constituent Assembly was anything but its only victory; in all of the general elections of the 1920s—1923, 1925 and 1927—the party would maintain a firm hold on the electoral support of the vast majority of the Muslim population.

Following the trial of the Constituent Assembly, relations between *Gajret* and the JMO moved toward a *détente*, or rather an armed truce, at times more or less hostile. On the one hand, the JMO remained the only legitimized Muslim political actor, claiming to represent both the interests of Bosnian Muslims and the interests of Bosnia. On the other, *Gajret*’s leadership had demonstrated its ability to hold its own against the JMO’s attempts to delegitimize it, and to maintain its substantial monopoly over cultural activ-

<sup>74</sup> “Sa Gajretove skupštine,” *Obrana*, May 29 (1920): 2, emphasis mine.

<sup>75</sup> “Gajret,” *Glas Težaka*, no. 18 (1920): 1.

<sup>76</sup> Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija*, 69–80.



ities among Muslims. With the constituent elections, this polarization crystallized, with on the one hand a political entity, the JMO, and on the other, a cultural one, *Gajret*, with conflicting agendas and differing political projects.

In order to counterbalance the JMO's power, since the beginning of the 1920s *Gajret's* leadership had sought independent ties with the Government and the Court. This need was especially felt by Avdo Hasanbegović (1888–1945), a Muslim educated at the universities of Zagreb and Vienna who, during the war, had served as a voluntary officer in the Serbian army. A member of the Radical Party since 1918, Hasanbegović's name is mostly associated with his role as *Gajret's* president, a position that he occupied uninterruptedly from 1923 until the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>77</sup> In the first months of his presidency, Hasanbegović managed to place the main Muslim cultural association under the official Patronage (*pokroviteljstvo*) of Petar II Karađorđević (1923–1970), the heir to the throne born that year. This event, which was celebrated with an official ceremony in the Bajrakli mosque in Belgrade in the presence of representants of the court and the association, was not purely honorific; it marked the beginning of an increasingly strong relationship between the government and the court, and the association. Following this, Vojo Janić, Minister of Religious Affairs and mediator between the association and the court for the patronage, became an honorary member of the association. As a tangible sign of this political alliance, in its public documents and activities *Gajret's* Central Board increasingly turned its attention to the pro-Serbian nationalization of Muslims. Yugoslav patriotism, along with the celebration of the royal dynasty of Karađorđević, became an essential feature of *Gajret's* official discourse.<sup>78</sup>

In September 1923, aiming to give a more concrete dimension to its new political stance, *Gajret's* leaders managed to establish in Belgrade a sister organization, *Gajret Osman Đikić*, named after the well-known Muslim intellectual from Mostar who in the 1900s had given pro-Serbian leanings to the association. The establishment of an outpost in Belgrade was meant to favor the enrolment of a growing number of Muslim school graduates at the university of Belgrade, a place that was considered to be the “healthiest place [for the Muslim youth to receive an education] from a national point

77 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 156.

78 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 156.



Figure 15: The Central branch of *Gajret Osman Đikić* in Belgrade.

Source: ABiH, FG, 27, 193(2) (undated).

of view,” according to one of the leading figures of the association.<sup>79</sup> Attracting more students in Belgrade to higher education institutions also meant curbing the flow of Muslim students toward the University of Zagreb; especially after 1918, students had taken to pursuing their studies there, and often ended up identifying with Croatian nationalism. The leading figures that contributed to the establishment of this organization in the kingdom’s capital were Hasan Rebac (1890–1953) and *hafiz* Habduselam Džumhur (1885–1933). Rebac in particular had been a volunteer officer for the Serbian Army during the First World War, and after the war had been appointed to the Ministry of Religious Affairs as an advisor. Since its establishment, the Belgrade-based association *Gajret Osman Đikić* was able to count on generous financial support from several members of the Radical Party and of the capital’s bourgeoisie. King Aleksandar alone, as a personal contribution, regularly gave a monthly donation to the association amounting to 25,000 dinars, to which were added donations of 10,000 dinars for Christmas and other religious holidays.<sup>80</sup>

79 Hasan Rebac, “Osman Đikić,” in *Vardar. Kalendar “Kolo Srpskih Sestara”* (1923): 128.

80 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 160–1.

Muslim women joined *Gajret*'s ranks in this context of high political polarization. More often, they formed "local female chapters" (*ženski mjesni pododbori*), alongside the—unspecified, exclusively male—"local chapters" (*mjesni pododbori*). Sometimes, in areas lacking a sufficient number of supporters to justify a female chapter, a woman was appointed as local "commissioner" (*povjerenica*) for a certain period, with aims to recruit other women and form a local female chapter. In 1921, only two out of 44 local branches were female, in Stolac and Sarajevo, and in 1924, Stolac was no longer active and out of 60 local branches, only the one in Sarajevo still survived, alongside two commissaries (Bosanski Šamac and Čajniče).<sup>81</sup> In the second half of the 1920s, however, the number steadily grew, and female chapters were founded in Mostar, Bihać, Tuzla, Derventa, and Livno, reaching a total of 13 by 1929.<sup>82</sup> After 1929, the number stabilized at around fifteen and would remain constant until the Second World War.<sup>83</sup> The female chapters remained a small percentage of the local chapters, with a ratio of 2 to 44 in 1921, 13 to 139 in 1929, and 18 to 170 in 1933, thus never exceeding 15% of the total number of chapters.<sup>84</sup> In 1932, the number of Muslim women throughout the entire province with regular memberships in the association would reach 4,000, alongside 20,000 men; these numbers made *Gajret* the largest-reaching Muslim association in Yugoslavia.<sup>85</sup>

The vigorous pro-Serbian shift that had been under way since 1923 also affected the activities of the female local branches. After repeated calls from the Central Branch, *Gajret* female volunteers began collaborating regularly with Serbian philanthropic associations, particularly with *Kolo Srpskih Sestara*.<sup>86</sup> Established in 1903 by women of the Belgrade bourgeoisie, in the interwar years this association extended its network of local chapters to areas

81 HAS, G4, *Zapisnik XVIII. glavne godišnje skupštine Glavnog odbora društva Gajret u Sarajevu – Izvještaj Tajnika*, reprinted in *Gajret*, no. 12–13 (1924): 189. Among the members of the female board of Sarajevo were Šemsa Čengić, Seadet Šarac, Fata H. Karić, Ema Lutvo, Šefika Bjelevac, while Hafiza Vajzović was the representative for Bosanski Šamac and Fata H. Smajlović, for Čajniče.

82 "Osnivanje Lijevnu Gajretovim Ženskim odborima," *Gajret*, no. 7 (1929): 126.

83 HAS, G4, *Izvještaj Glavnog odbora Gajreta o radu u društvenoj godini 1930-1*, reprinted in *Gajret*, no. 13 (1931): 320. Of 154 local branches (24 more than the previous year) and 190 delegations (77 more than the previous year) there were 16 local branches and 7 female delegations.

84 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 275.

85 HAS, G4, *Zapisnik XXVI. redovne glavne godišnje skupštine društva Gajreta*, reprinted in *Gajret*, no. 10 (1932): 225.

86 Viktor Manakin, ed., *Almanah Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenanca*, vol. 1 (Zagreb: Glavno uredništvo almanaha, 1921–1922), 363.



Figure 16: A Panslavic party organized by *Kolo Srpskih Sestara* in Travnik, in 1928.

Source: *Vardar. Kalendar "Kolo Srpskih Sestara"* (1928): 139.

inhabited by Serbs across the country, in many cases assimilating pre-war philanthropic organizations. Adopting the national theory spread by Serbian scholars at that time, the leaders of the association considered Slavic-speaking Muslims to belong to the Serbian nation. During the Balkan Wars, when the association was working in support of the Serbian Army by furnishing nurses and clothes, Serbian middle-class women engaged in voluntary action were already referring to Slavic Muslim women in their public addresses as “Serbian women of Muslim faith” (*srpkinje muslimanske vere*).<sup>87</sup> In keeping with these premises, the association (which in the interwar years could count on the generous support of the royal court, among others) consistently worked in support of the “national awakening” of Muslim women and their integration into the Serbian national community.<sup>88</sup> This ambitious goal, to reach beyond the limits of the Orthodox-Serbian population through the association’s activities, did not just aim to include Muslim women; in the name of common South Slavic origins, *Kolo Srpskih Sestara*’s branches multiplied activities of a Panslavist flavor with the other female associations of Yugoslavia, stressing the need to build a sisterhood between all

87 IAB, 1084, Društvo “Kneginja Ljubica”, 76.98.48, Pozdrav srpkinjama-muslimankama (undated).

88 “Jugoslovenske sestre,” *Vardar. Kalendar "Kolo Srpskih Sestara"* (1921): 7.

the different confessional and tribal segments of the Yugoslav population. A photograph published in 1928 in the association's official journal, showing a Panslavic celebration organized in the Bosnian town of Travnik, is particularly illustrative of the association's ambitions to foster ties between different segments of the female population of the new country. *Kolo Srpskih Sestara* was not unique in aspiring toward this: in the aftermath of the war, the press was unanimous in confirming that "without Yugoslav women, there would be no Yugoslavs at all."<sup>89</sup>

The rapprochement between the *Gajret* female branches and *Kolo Srpskih Sestara*—by 1928, the latter could already count on approximately twenty chapters throughout Bosnia<sup>90</sup>—did not only come in the form of meetings, co-organized parties, workshops or literacy courses. From the mid-1920s, Mirka Grujić and Delfa Ivanić, the president and vice-president of *Kolo Srpskih Sestara*, also sat at the *Gajret Osman Đikić* in Belgrade, thus ensuring collaboration between the two associational networks.<sup>91</sup>

The dynamism of *Gajret*, and especially its reinforced proximity with the main Serbian parties and associations, could not leave the leaders of the JMO indifferent. Even though they had no credible electoral rivals among the Muslim electorate, the JMO were greatly concerned by the growth of a pro-Serbian Muslim cultural association outside of their control. The party, after a brief alliance with the government of Pašić, which would cost *muftija* Maglajlić his position as president, had joined forces with the two main opposition forces in 1923, the Croatian Peasant Party and the Slovenian People's Party, in the so-called Block of Opposition. Opposing the government coalition centered on the Radical and Democratic parties, the Block called for a revision to the centralist kingdom's first Constitution, adopted in June 1921, asking for greater provincial autonomy. The leading figure of this political cause was Mehmed Spaho (1883–1939), secretary of the Sarajevo Chamber of Commerce, the man that until his death remained secretary of the JMO, and the most influential Muslim politician in interwar Yugoslavia.

89 "Jugoslavenska žena," *Nova Evropa*, 1 (1922): 1–3.

90 In 1928, *Kolo Srpskih Sestara* local branches in Bosnia were already established in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar, Bijeljina, Bihać, Bosanski Brod, Bosanska Gradiska, Bosanska Dubica, Bosanski Novi, Bosanski Petrovac, Gračanica, Konjic, Modriča, Prijedor, Rogatica, Travnik, Čajniče, and Čapljina. "Izvjestaj," *Vardar. Kalendar 'Kolo Srpskih Sestara'* (1928): 111–46.

91 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 161 and "Iz uprave Beogradskog Gajreta Osman Đikić," *Gajret*, no. 17 (1926): 272.

In 1923, in reaction to *Gajret's* increasingly pro-Serbian and pro-governmental stance, a group of Muslim notables from Sarajevo close to the JMO launched a new cultural association, called *Narodna Uzdanica* (Popular mainstay). Identical to *Gajret* in its aims and structure, the newly established cultural association's main goal was to curb *Gajret's* influence on the Muslim youth. Despite the hostility of the state administration, *Narodna Uzdanica* was able to hold its Constituent Assembly in Sarajevo on February 1, 1924. In the interwar years, *Narodna Uzdanica* became a platform around which the part of the Bosnian Muslim urban middle class that was of pro-Croatian leanings, or more generally that was not enthusiastic about *Gajret's* political orientation, could rally. Nevertheless, the fate of this second Muslim cultural association was not destined to be as successful as the first one. In its first three years the number of members in the association never exceeded 400.<sup>92</sup> In 1926, the association counted 18 local branches and 52 commissioners, but of these—as acknowledged by the central branch itself—only a quarter were truly active; in 1928, this fell as low as one fifth.<sup>93</sup> Within this network, local female branches also developed progressively, the first of which was established in Sarajevo in 1924. From its foundation to the outbreak of the Second World War, *Narodna Uzdanica* would count five female branches with approximately forty members in each, in Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla, Stolac, and Banja Luka.<sup>94</sup>

As its rival association had, *Narodna Uzdanica* was quick to seek stable alliances with non-Muslim associations, privileging the Croatian ones. Ever since its establishment, the association had continued to collaborate with *Napredak*, the Croatian cultural association in Bosnia, and with *Hrvatska Žena* (The Croatian Woman), the Croatian female association founded in 1921 in Zagreb. Though it had no official ties with the Croatian Peasant Party, the principal Croatian party of the interwar period, *Hrvatska žena* appears to have been very close to it, particularly due to family ties; the association's most prominent members were the wives of the leaders of the Croatian Peasant Party.<sup>95</sup> According to well-established discourse in Croa-

92 Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija*, 117.

93 Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija*, 117.

94 Kemura, *Značaj i uloga*, 110.

95 For more specific information on the Peasant Party's positions on women, see Suzana Leček, "'Dosada se samo polovica hrvatskog naroda borila.' Hrvatska seljačka stranka i žene (1918.–1941.)," *Historijski zbornik* 59 (2006): 93–130.

tian political history, the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina were considered to be “Croats of Muslim faith,” and Bosnia to be an integral part of the historic Kingdom of Croatia.<sup>96</sup> The collaboration between *Narodna Uzdanica* and Croatian associations led to the formation of a local *Narodna Uzdanica* chapter in Zagreb as early as 1923. This local branch fulfilled a very special role in interwar Yugoslavia, somewhat comparable with the significance of Belgrade-based *Gajret Osman Đikić* for *Gajret*. First and foremost, the structure linked *Narodna Uzdanica* to the Croatian intellectual and political elite, and secondly it became a reference-point for the many Muslim students studying at the University of Zagreb. The exceptional nature of this society was also apparent in its organizational structure; unique in the landscape of Muslim cultural associations of the time, between 1927 and 1935 it was under the direction of a woman, Anka Dinagl-Domaćinović, who was also the president of *Hrvatska Žena*.<sup>97</sup>

This chasm separating the two main Muslim cultural associations gaped even wider after 1929, when on January 6, in order to break the parliamentary instability of the 1920s, King Aleksandar launched a royal dictatorship.<sup>98</sup> The authoritarian reconfiguration of the state was accompanied by the announcement of a new official national discourse, referred to as “integral Yugoslavism.” According to this new national discourse, the existence of different “tribes”—Serbs, Croats and Slovenes—was no longer to be acknowledged. Only one national name would now be recognized and admitted: Yugoslav. The King and the state were in charge of erasing any “tribal particularism,” and of forging a national body that had at last been unified.<sup>99</sup> In order to homogenize the country, and to overcome the different administrative traditions, the internal administrative borders of the country were completely redrawn, and the country was divided into nine governorates (*banovina*), each one named after a river. With the political parties banned, including the JMO, *Gajret* drew closer to the administration, and became a

96 Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest Hrvatske seljačke stranke* (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 1999), 114–27.

97 Zlatko Hasanbegović, *Muslimani u Zagrebu 1878.-1945: doba utemeljenja* (Zagreb: Medžlis islamske zajednice u Zagrebu and Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2007), 91.

98 On the 6 January dictatorship, and especially on its repressive policies, see Ivana Dobrivojević, *Državna represija u doba diktature kralja Aleksandra 1929–1935* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2006). For more details on the dictatorship in (former) Bosnia and Herzegovina, see in particular Nedim Šarac, “Šestojanuarska diktatura 1929. godine na području Bosne i Hercegovine,” *Pregled* 4 (1974): 365–88.

99 Christian Axboe Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs. Identity in King Aleksandar's Yugoslavia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 77–87.

substitute intermediary between Belgrade and the Muslim population. The careers of *Gajret's* leaders offer striking examples of this governmentalization: president Hasanbegović, after holding other administrative offices, became first lieutenant governor of the Drina Governorate, and subsequently a minister; *Gajret's* vice-president Ibrahim Hadžiomerović succeeded him as lieutenant governor; Rebac, one of the leading figures of the Belgrade branch, was promoted to the administration of the Islamic religious foundations in Macedonia, and so on. *Gajret's* pro-regime trajectory also remained prominent after 1931, when a simulacrum of parliamentary life was resumed. That year, the King authorized the formation of a unified party, the Yugoslav National Party (*Jugoslavenska nacionalna stranka*), led by many supporters of the old Radical Party, and which acted in close collaboration with the Court. At the government's request, *Gajret* threw itself into popularizing the new party among Muslims, using the association's local chapters to host rallies of the new party, thus making *Gajret* an organ of government propaganda.<sup>100</sup>

Even though many local branches protested against such an openly political use of the main Muslim cultural organization, the association's new role led to a rapid increase in local branches and in enrolled members. On the other side, *Narodna Uzdanica*—perceived by state authorities as close to Croatian parties—went through very difficult times, a situation that improved only after the shooting of the King in Marseille in 1934, and the consequent relaxation of the authoritarian regime.

#### A MISSED ENCOUNTER? MUSLIM WOMEN AND THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

As we have seen until now, Muslim cultural and philanthropic associations became for the entire interwar period the principal sites of engagement for Muslim women. Nevertheless, in the post-1918 Bosnian associational landscape new kinds of associations appeared on the scene, in particular the feminist network. These organizations, which during the pre-war period had developed in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Novi Sad, even spread beyond the Drina and Sava rivers after the Great War. In September 1919, a group of feminist associations joined forces with other women's groups, establish-

<sup>100</sup> Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 206.



ing in Belgrade the first umbrella organization in the country, the *Narodni ženski savez Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* (Popular Women's Council of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes).<sup>101</sup> By 1921, 205 women's associations had joined the organizational network, making up a total of 50,000 activists throughout the country,<sup>102</sup> and encompassing a wide spectrum of associations ranging from philanthropic to professional, from nationalist to open advocates of women's suffrage. Soon after its foundation, the organizational network became affiliated with the first transnational women's association, the Washington-based International Council of Women.<sup>103</sup> Although there were differing opinions on this issue within the *Narodni ženski savez*, the primary objective that dominated the initial efforts of the association was to have universal male and female suffrage included in the constitution of the new kingdom, and to this end, protests and conferences were organized in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Sarajevo.<sup>104</sup>

The differing agendas of the member associations, however, would not take long to emerge. By *Narodni ženski savez's* second meeting, held in 1920 in Zagreb, it appeared clearly that the majority of associations were geared first and foremost toward philanthropy, assisting war orphans, and education, and considered the fight for women's right vote to be premature.<sup>105</sup> Twenty-six associations that were explicitly linked to the international feminist movement and that viewed women's suffrage as the main objective of

101 After the coup d'état, out of respect for the new unitarian position adopted by the Throne, the organization assumed the name *Narodni ženski savez Jugoslavije* (Popular Women's Council of Yugoslavia).

102 Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 170.

103 The International Council of Women, founded in 1888, was the first women's association to succeed in building a vast transnational network from Europe to the United States. Founded by Susan B. Anthony, May Wright Sewell and Frances Willard, the International Council of Women held its first conference in Washington in the spring of 1888, with representatives from women's associations from Great Britain, Ireland, France, Norway, Denmark, Finland, India, Canada, and the United States. As a result of the wide range of positions held within the organization, the International Council of Women never directly called for universal suffrage, instead focusing on social and economic objectives. For more information on the International Council of Women, see Leen Beyers, *Des femmes qui changent le monde: Histoire du Conseil International des Femmes, 1888–1988* (Brussels: Racine, 2005) and Leila J. Rupp, "Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women's Organizations, 1888–1945," *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1571–600.

104 Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 169–70.

105 These differences within *Narodni ženski savez* would lead the women's associations most hostile to the feminist agenda to pull out in 1926, and to the establishment of *Narodna ženska zajednica* (Popular Women's Union), with an agenda essentially limited to philanthropy. Within this new coalition, which brought together over eighty associations throughout the country, the Serbian philanthropic association that had retained the most extensive female associational network in the country throughout the entire interwar period, *Kolo Srpskih Sestara*, played a particularly important role. Cf. Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 171.

their efforts were already publicly expressing their need for a separate organization, to more effectively wage their own battles. In May 1923, a group of associations mostly based in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade launched a new organizational network called *Alijansa feminističkih društava u državi SHS* (Alliance of the Feminist Associations of the State of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes).<sup>106</sup> As its name clearly indicated, the coalition explicitly adopted the agenda of the international feminist movement, affiliating with the International Woman Suffrage Alliance as its first act.<sup>107</sup> The new coalition's agenda centered, in addition to women's right to vote in both political and administrative elections, around changes to the civil code concerning marriage law and inheritance, which penalized women, though to different degrees throughout the country. The associations that joined the coalition strove to effect profound changes in traditional customs that were seen to be patriarchal and antiquated, with the aim of achieving complete equality between men and women.<sup>108</sup>

In Bosnia, the feminist association that was most able to gain a wider visibility was *Društvo za prosvjećivanje žene i zaštitu njenih prava* (The Association for the Education of Woman and the Defense of her Rights), better known under the name of its official journal, *Ženski Pokret*. The organization had been founded in Belgrade in April 1919 by a group of teachers and journalists initially close to the Socialist Secretariat of Women's Affairs, and a *Ženski Pokret* chapter was established in Sarajevo in September of the same year.<sup>109</sup> The two associations had since the beginning participated together in the establishment of the pro-suffrage organization *Alijansa feminističkih društava u državi SHS*. Early on, the organization had some success in establishing chapters in the rest of the province; by late 1922, the association's journal reported that the network had already expanded into Tuzla, Doboj,

106 In 1926, the coalition would change its name to *Alijansa ženskih pokreta* (Alliance of Feminist Movements). For information on this period, see Božinović, *Žensko pitanje*, 116–8.

107 The International Woman Suffrage Alliance was formally established in Berlin in 1904 by a group of activists from the International Council of Women, whose main objective was women's suffrage. The coalition was quite active in the 1910s and 1920s, organizing a series of conferences in Europe. In the late 1920s, the coalition would change its name, becoming the Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship. Cf. Rupp, "Constructing Internationalism," 1588.

108 Božinović, *Žensko pitanje*, 117. Ograjšek-Gornjak, "Rodni Stereotipi," 250–73.

109 For information on the genesis and early years of activity of *Ženski Pokret*, see Gordana Krivokapić-Jović "Društvo za prosvjećivanje žene i zaštitu njenih prava: Radikali i žensko pravo glasa posle Prvog svetskog rata," in *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka*, vol. 2, Latinka Perović, ed. (Belgrade: Institut za Noviju Istoriju Srbije, 1998), 299–308 and Emmert, "Ženski Pokret," 33–50.

Bijelina, Mostar, Prijedor and Zavidovići.<sup>110</sup> However, compared with the enthusiasm of the Sarajevo-based feminist activists, the expansion of *Ženski Pokret* in Bosnia turned out to be a complicated task in the 1920s and 1930s; the response from Bosnian women was less enthusiastic than expected by the activists. The president of the association admitted in 1933 that: “*Ženski Pokret* Sarajevo also tried this year to extend its network into the province. Of the thirty women we wrote to... only two replied to our letter, and only to decline our offer.”<sup>111</sup> However, the following year a *Ženski Pokret* chapter was established in the city of Banja Luka, and the association would become highly active in the second half of 1930s (see Chapter Seven).<sup>112</sup>

*Ženski Pokret* was one of the few associations in interwar Yugoslavia to fully appropriate the demands of the international feminist movement, thus considering their essential objective to be the fight for political and civil rights. In the months leading up to the convening of the Constituent Assembly and during the drafting of the constitution, *Ženski Pokret*, in collaboration with other Croatian and Slovenian associations, organized public demonstrations, assemblies, and petitions throughout the country, urging the Parliament to recognize the right to vote for women. The *Ženski Pokret* chapter in Sarajevo regularly spoke out in favor of female civil and political rights: “the main aim of these interventions was to make women familiar with politics, and with public activities more in general.”<sup>113</sup>

Given the lack of archival sources concerning *Ženski Pokret*, it is difficult to know how the associational network truly functioned, and especially what kind of link had been established between the Belgrade and Sarajevo chapters. As far as is possible to understand from the association’s journal, it seems that the feminist network had an archipelago-like structure; though the Belgrade chapter remained the unofficial center of the association, the chapters did not have institutional connections with one another. As specified by its president Jovanka Čubrilović in 1920, the Sarajevo chapter was

110 “*Ženski pokret*,” *Ženski Pokret*, no. 11–12 (1922): 351.

111 “Godišnja skupština Ženskog Pokreta u Sarajevu,” *Ženski Pokret*, no. 3 (1933): 36.

112 Vojinović, “*Ženski pokret*,” 113–24. According to Verica M. Stošić in her article “Pravila društva *Ženski Pokret* Bosanski Brod,” *Glasnik udruženja arhivskih radnika Republike Srpske* 2 (2010): 461–74, since 1934 there had also been a *Ženski Pokret* chapter in Bosanski Brod (northern Bosnia). However, a close reading of the association statutes shows that, despite their common name, this association was not a feminist one, but simply a philanthropic interfaith one.

113 “Skupština Sarajevskog Ženskog Pokreta,” *Ženski Pokret*, no. 3 (1928): 4.

autonomous but united to the Belgrade chapter by the same political agenda.<sup>114</sup> The role of the association's gazette, published in Belgrade but open to contributions from all activists, was to federate the various chapters.

Yugoslav feminist associations distinguished themselves, especially in the immediate postwar period, by giving particular attention to the female Muslim population which, after unification, had been integrated into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.<sup>115</sup> This effort to include Muslim women in the feminist network was most prominent in associations operating in close geographical proximity with the Muslim population, like *Ženski Pokret*. The first issues of the association's journal make it clear where their interests lay, at a time when euphoria over the unification of women's associations merged with the hope that the Constituent Assembly would rapidly allow women's suffrage. In August 1920, the association's house organ stated that "from now on... [we] will regularly publish contributions on the Muslim woman question, and we therefore encourage anyone to whom this issue is near and dear to send us a contribution."<sup>116</sup> There seems to have been a predominant optimism as to a rapid and inclusive solution to the Muslim woman question.

In the aftermath of the war, one specific episode appeared to support such optimism for the rapid and autonomous enrollment of Muslim women into feminist organisations. In late June 1920, the primary schoolteacher Rasema Bisić, an activist and promoter of *Osvitanje*, personally attended (probably thanks to the support of the local chapter of *Ženski Pokret*) the aforementioned Zagreb conference of *Narodni ženski savez*. As the press did not fail to underline, this was the first time a Muslim woman had participated in a conference outside Bosnia, and spoken in public before an audience of non-Muslim women. An episode linked to this trip, though the details remain unclear, contributed to further excite public opinion around the choice of Bisić. In the days leading up to her appearance, a telegram from Sarajevo had been delivered to her from undisclosed "traditionalist circles," forbidding her to speak, on pain of reprisals once she returned to Bosnia. This first encounter provoked mixed feelings among Yugoslav fem-

114 Jovanka Čubrilović, "Izveštaj o radu Društva prosvjećivanje žene i zaštitu njenih prava," *Ženski Pokret*, no. 4–5 (1920): 25.

115 Božinović, *Žensko pitanje*, 115.

116 Rebac, "Pojava Muslimanke," 25, editor's note.

inists. The *Ženski Pokret* journal celebrated as an important victory this first trip by a Muslim woman outside of the communal space and the province, as a sign that Muslim women would soon rejoin the ranks of Yugoslav feminism. At the same time, the feminist paper underlined the different reactions that her presence provoked among non-Muslim activists; Rasema Bisić's speech in Zagreb in 1920 was for many of the women present the first time they had seen a Muslim woman in real life.<sup>117</sup>

Despite this first contact, it does not seem that the Sarajevo branch of *Ženski Pokret*, nor those subsequently founded in the region, sparked the interest of Muslim women. Their ties to, and much less membership in, feminist associations remained extremely limited throughout the entire interwar period, except for a few isolated figures. As for the Sarajevo branch, there is no sign that a Muslim woman ever held office in the governing bodies of the association. According to the reports of the Sarajevo branch, during the 1920s only the aforementioned Rasema Bisić devoted her spare time to organizing literacy courses for poor women with *Ženski Pokret*.<sup>118</sup> The only clue that suggests a Muslim woman can be traced back to the Sarajevo feminist association dates from 1928, when Nafija Baljak, another elementary school teacher, described herself as a member of *Ženski Pokret* in a letter to a newspaper.<sup>119</sup> The *Ženski Pokret* chapter in Banja Luka, active since the early 1930s, counted only three female Muslim activists.<sup>120</sup> The same is true for the *Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena* (Association of University Educated Women), an association for female university graduates that Neda Božinović ascribes to the feminist movement; even in this organization, active in Bosnia from 1933 to 1941, Muslim women appear to have been all but absent.<sup>121</sup> In 1923 a non-Muslim activist from *Ženski Pokret* had already publicly lamented the difficulty of involving Muslim women in the association's activities, due to their "fear" (*bojažljivost*) of public activities: "Try to involve them in a somewhat larger project, that forces them to step

117 Rebac, "Pojava Muslimanke," 25.

118 "O radu Društva za prosvjećivanje žene i zaštitu njenih prava - Sarajevo," *Ženski Pokret*, no. 6 (1923): 268. "Ženski pokret u Sarajevo," *Ženski Pokret*, no. 1 (1925): 29–33.

119 Nafija Baljak, "O otkrivanju muslimanki," *Jugoslavenski list*, no. 14 (1928): 3.

120 Vojinović, "Ženski Pokret," 113–23.

121 Šarić, "Aktivnost udruženja," 33–4. For more information on this topic, see Andrea Feldman, "Prilog istraživanju ženskih organizacija: Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena," in *Žena i društvo: kultiviranje dijaloga*, Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, Zvonko Lerotić, eds. (Zagreb: Sociološko društvo hrvatske, 1987), 61–7.

outside of their homes and take a public stance,” the activist wrote “and immediately they will tell you: ‘No, No!—We can’t do that... such a project will never succeed.’”<sup>122</sup>

Several reasons might explain Muslim women’s reticence about gaining, or seeking, access to feminist organizations. One reason might have been that even Muslim male progressives who were active in voluntary associations distanced themselves considerably from the feminist agenda. In the aftermath of the war, several progressive Muslim intellectuals were doubtful about, or even opposed to, the idea of Muslim women becoming involved in feminist organizations. In February 1920, for example, when women all over the country were coming together enthusiastically in a unique movement, the journal *Budućnost* (Future), at that time led by the pro-Serbian writer and political activist Šukrija Kurtović, felt the need to stress that Muslim progressives “do not want our women to adopt the English suffragette as a model, but we want each and every modern science institution to be open to them.”<sup>123</sup> The same year, the journal *Domovina* (Motherland), directed by the aforementioned Avdo Hasanbegović, officially opposed the Popular Women’s Council’s project to co-opt Muslim women into its ranks. According to an article published in the journal, though “our Muslim women still have much to learn from the more acculturated sisters of other faiths,” this should not happen through direct participation in interfaith feminist associations. The explanation given was that “the Muslim woman has not yet matured [*još nije dorasla*] and is not yet capable of participating in the Association as an active member.”<sup>124</sup> This discomfort with regard to the Western feminist movement, expressed by what was at that time the most “progressive” section of Muslim society, surely did nothing to encourage Muslim women to join feminist organizations.

A second reason that surely accounts for Muslim women’s near lack of participation in feminist associations is sociological in nature. As shown by growing research on feminism in the Yugoslav space, activists that entered feminist networks and defined themselves as feminists usually shared two sociological traits; a higher, and sometimes university education, and often an independent profession, more often in education—especially primary or

122 Radinka Anđelković, “Nekoliko reči o Muslimanki,” *Ženski Pokret*, no. 8 (1923): 354.

123 Dr. Bećir Novo, “Muslimansko žensko pitanje,” *Budućnost*, no. 2–3 (1920): 22.

124 “Jedan apel Narodnog ženskog Saveza,” *Domovina*, no. 100 (1921): 1–2.

secondary school teaching—or graphic arts and journalism. This kind of trajectory for women was almost completely lacking in Muslim society at that time, where the near totality of women remained illiterate, and their access to salaried work remained extremely marginal (see Chapter Four).

#### GOSPOĐICE AND HANUME, FATHERS AND HUSBANDS

The sociology of Muslim women volunteers deserves closer attention. The six women who had signed the 1919 *Osvitanje* open letter—Hasnija Berberović, Šefika Bjelevac, Rasema Bisić, Almasa Iblizović, Umija Vranić, and Asifa Širbegović—were all former students of the Sarajevo’s Muslim Girls’ School and had some experience in public writing.<sup>125</sup> All of them had also shared a similar (however limited) teaching experience, both in community and state schools. Hasnija Berberović, at the time she became the first president of the association, was employed as an elementary school teacher in Sarajevo. In 1921, the founders of the first *Gajret* female chapter in Stolac were seniors at the local teacher’s school.<sup>126</sup> In 1931, it was an “unveiled teacher” (as she was described in a report from the local to the Central branch<sup>127</sup>), a certain Šemsa Mulalić, that was appointed as *Gajret*’s local representative, and who rapidly organized a female chapter with more than eighteen women.<sup>128</sup> This strong link between teaching and activism is not something specific to Bosnian Muslims; on the contrary, the same pattern can be found across the entire Yugoslav region.<sup>129</sup> As a matter of fact, women’s associations were often set up at the initiative of female teachers. As evidenced in the trajectories of these teachers, associations, schools, and in some cases printing houses were considered to be an inseparable network of institutions charged with bringing about a cultural and national “awakening” in Bosnian society. In other words, investing their spare time in founding and working for these associations was considered to be an integral part of their pedagogical duties.

A second group of Muslim women that rapidly became involved in voluntary associations were those from the most prominent Muslim families.

125 “Drage Sestre,” *Vrijeme*, January 28 (1919): 1.

126 ABiH, FG, 2, MŽPG Stolac to GOG (1921, undated).

127 ABiH, FG, 10, 3517, ŽMPG Tešanj to GOG (August 13, 1931).

128 ABiH, FG, 10, 2247, MPG Tešanj to GOG (June 28, 1931).

129 Božinović, *Žensko pitanje*, 70–4.

If we again take *Osvitanje* as an example, in the association's ranks were: Halida and Hafa Šahinagić, respectively the daughter and daughter-in-law of Avdo Šahinagić, one of the province's most prominent merchants; Remzija Dugalić, the wife of Asim *beg* Dugalić, an insurance executive; Šehzada Bašagić from the family of Safvet *beg* Bašagić, the well-known landowner and writer; Esma Spaho, from the family of Mehmed and Fehim Spaho, the former director of the Sarajevo Chamber of Commerce and subsequently secretary of the JMO, and the latter the future *Reis-ul-ulema*; Šemsa Čengić, from a renowned Sarajevo Muslim family of landowners, and so forth. As can be seen from this example, a significant number of the Muslim bourgeoisie rapidly joined the teachers in volunteer initiatives. Muslim women from prominent families also entered Muslim cultural associations such as *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica*. This latter group differed from the first not only in terms of class, but also in terms of where they had received their education, and what kind. While the teachers had been educated in state schools—the Habsburg and later the Yugoslav Female Teachers' Schools—the women from wealthy families had been able to count on an education provided usually within the domestic sphere. Some of these women had benefitted from tutors and private teachers. Hafa Šahinagić, first secretary of the *Gajret* female branch in Sarajevo, had for instance received her education from a private French tutor. A second, more informal method was through male family members studying abroad, and the wealth of goods and knowledge they brought home with them in the summer when they returned from the universities of Europe. It is by means of this wealth—even in the literal sense!—of books, newspapers, clothing, and photographs that these Muslim women received an education and took up new habits and lifestyles without having ever left Bosnia or the domestic sphere.<sup>130</sup>

These teachers and wealthy women were divided up asymmetrically into the different associations. With the exception of *Osvitanje*—which, as a pilot

<sup>130</sup> In terms of the education of women in wealthy Muslim families, we come up against an almost complete lack of reliable documents and prior research. Carried out entirely within the limits of the domestic sphere, the education of these women has left almost no trace in the archives of associations or institutions, and not even in personal archives. In writing this section, I drew from informal interviews conducted in Sarajevo in July of 2010 – with Zulejha Merhemić and Zulejha Ridanović, the descendants of Hafa Šahinagić, elected the first president of the *Gajret* female branch in Sarajevo in 1921, and with Jasmina Cvjetić in Mostar, the descendant of several female members of the local chapter of *Merhamet* in the late 1930s.



experience, had involved both groups—from 1921 the former mostly rallied around cultural associations, while the latter remained predominant in philanthropic associations. It is no coincidence that *Osvitanje*, born of unitary and non-partisan ambitions, after the establishment of female *Gajret* branches (1921) and *Narodna Uzdanica* (1923) in Sarajevo, lost its most dynamic members and rapidly ceased to be active.<sup>131</sup> While the cultural associations had a mostly varied sociological profile—teachers, students, women from the emerging middle class, wives of state officials, members of land-owning families—philanthropic associations remained almost exclusively the domain of wealthy women. If we look at the profiles of the female members of the Sarajevo chapter of the philanthropic association *Merhamet* from 1931, we can see that this philanthropic association was composed predominantly of married women, probably more advanced in years than those involved in cultural associations, from rich Muslim families of “landowners, *ulema* and the professional milieu.”<sup>132</sup> The intelligentsia was strikingly absent from the philanthropic associations. The only exception seems to have been the couple of writers Nafija and Šemsudin Sarajlić, who were often involved with *Merhamet* in Sarajevo.<sup>133</sup> However, Nafija, who had been the first pre-war Muslim female writer, seems to have ceased her writing activities. According to some sources, she abandoned the pen following the death of her son, and by the interwar period had already withdrawn from public life.<sup>134</sup>

These differences, between the members of philanthropic and cultural associations, are also visible in the ways in which these women presented themselves; this is particularly striking when we compare two pictures, one of *Gajret* and the other of *Merhamet* female members (see figures 17 and 18). The members of *Gajret*'s local female branch in Konjic, when this picture was taken in 1921, presented themselves wearing European-style dresses, jewelry and haircuts, and did not wear the veil. Everything in their pose, from their crossed legs to their hands laid elegantly on their knees, radiates middle-class femininity. On the other hand, the women of *Merhamet* from Trebinje in the early 1940s put together a very different self-portrait. In this second picture, the activists wear clothes clearly covering their legs,

131 Its members migrated toward the two cultural-national associations, and by the late 1920s—if we exclude a failed attempt to revive it in 1934—it was no longer in operation.

132 Bavčić, *Merhamet*, 37.

133 HAS, M9, 8, *Tajnički izvještaj društva "Merhamet" za 1932. godinu* (January 21, 1933).

134 For this information, see Chapter Two, footnote 95.



Figure 17: *Gajret's* female chapter in Bihać, 1921.

Source: Hamza Humo, *Spomenica dvadesetipetogodišnjice Gajreta: 1903.-1928.* (Sarajevo: Glavni odbor Gajreta, 1928), 115.



Figure 18: *Merhamet's* female chapter in Trebinje, late 1930s or early 1940s.

Source: courtesy of Jasmina Cvjetić.

in most cases a veil is draped over their hair. Other elements of the composition are interesting as well, such as the carpets on the floor and Islamic calligraphy hanging on the background wall. The Muslimness of these two groups of activists, completely invisibilized in the first picture, is on the contrary very tangible in the second one.

Despite the egalitarian liberal principle at the foundations of this associational culture, class was not irrelevant to the internal life of the organizations. Based on the organizational structure of the local female branches, it seems justified to assert that this duality remained visible and relevant to the functioning of the association. From the associations' internal documentation, one can observe that women from important families were mentioned with the title *hanuma* (from the Ottoman *hanım*, or "Madam") if they were married, or *hanumica* if they were single, while teachers were simply referred to as *gospođica* ("Miss" in Serbo-Croatian) and were often mentioned after the former in lists of names on official documents. This distinction seems apparent in the division of labor within the associations; in *Gajret* and in *Narodna Uzdanica*, for example, the *gospođica* nearly always played an operative role as the chapter's secretary, while the *hanuma* took on the role of president. A local female branch's ability to integrate the traditional elite often made the difference between failure and success for the association. It seems that the prestige of women from important local families could be transferred to an association. Thus, though the associations were a place in which women could bridge their different social backgrounds and socialize, class distinctions were nevertheless not erased so much as institutionalized.

The sociological profiles of these female Muslim activists would be incomplete without relating them to those of their male counterparts. Much of the first generation of activists came from families with a history of involvement in culture and politics; in other words, the members of the first female chapters were often the daughters and wives of notable urban cultural and political figures. As already mentioned by Ibrahim Kemura, "the wives and daughters of the important notables of the JMO and *Narodna Uzdanica* activists"<sup>135</sup> participated in forming local female chapters. Habiba *hanuma* Spaho, president of the female branch in Sarajevo from 1926, was the

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<sup>135</sup> Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 277.

wife of Mehmed Spaho, leader of the JMO.<sup>136</sup> It is important to highlight the extent to which women's access to the public space through the associations was rarely achieved uniquely on their own initiative. On the contrary, more often than not a woman's path toward membership in an association began under the careful guidance of her husband or father, or less often, of her brother. It is therefore possible to identify within the life of the associations recurring male-female relationships, both of the father-daughter and husband-wife variety. As evidence of the importance of these family relationships, and more specifically of couples, some activists are listed in official communications as "wife of"; this was true of the *Merhamet* association in Sarajevo, where appellations such as "*hanuma* Memnuna of Mr. Mutevelić," "Halida of Doctor Bakarević" or "*hanuma* Fatima of Doctor Hadžikadić" were quite frequent in internal documents.<sup>137</sup> In some isolated cases a wife and husband were involved in different organizations, but nearly always in outlying areas, not in Sarajevo. For example, the secretary of the *Gajret* branch in Ključ was also a member of *Narodna Uzdanica*, and the wife of a *Narodna Uzdanica* commissioner was in turn the local commissioner of the *Gajret* branch.<sup>138</sup> This says something about the difference between Sarajevo, where the central branches of the two rival, politicized, and deeply antagonistic associations were located, and the smaller towns, where political and national differences were less pronounced and where the recreational and cultural aspects of these associations prevailed over political and national agendas.<sup>139</sup>

This form of access to the associations, through father-daughter or husband-wife relationships, was not at all coincidental. As evidenced, for example, by the numerous articles published by the two cultural organizations, their members defended and celebrated this type of virtuous collaboration between men and women. An eloquent example is the 1938 portrait of an "emancipated Muslim family" published in the *Gajret* journal. This short article celebrates the choices of a Muslim father, Ali *efendi* Midžić, retired director of the Gradačac tax office who, despite the usual "conservative spirit" (*konzervativni duh*) so common among the Muslim men of his generation

136 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 110.

137 HAS, M9, 8, *Tajnički izvještaj društva "Merhamet" za 1932. godinu* (January 21, 1933).

138 Kemura, *Značaj i uloga*, 123.

139 Kemura, *Značaj i uloga*, 123.

decided to send all his offspring—one son and four daughters—to school. The picture (most probably a photomontage) associated with the text stages two different generations of progressive Muslims; at the very center, posing as the patriarch of the family, there is old Midžić himself, wearing a fez and mustache like a late-Ottoman gentleman. Arranged behind him, in a circle, his young son wears glasses, the daughters show off their short hair, v-necklines, and smiling faces. The message is clear: “awareness and understanding for the schooling of our Muslim women,” as the title states, produces stable, modern and even happy families (see figure 19).<sup>140</sup>



Figure 19: The paternalist emancipation.

Source: “Lijep primjer svijesti i razumijevanja prema školovanju naše muslimanke,” *Gajret*, no. 3 (1938): 56.

<sup>140</sup> “Lijep primjer svijesti i razumijevanja prema školovanju naše muslimanke,” *Gajret*, no. 3 (1938): 56.

**Портрети Гајретових радника**

У данашњем броју пројекције гаврају портрета Гајретових радника, са личном икономе националног и културног радника и старог вођина Гајретовог младићског тима, Салиха Ћишића, професора и његове госпође Фатиме, бивше третирано-Бенске одбора Гајрета у Мостару.

Госпођа Салих Ћишић спада у ову предврату револуционарну генерацију Срба муслимана, која

дуже смисли да се и његова госпођа, која и мамо своје деце и куће, издржује на три часа дневно дежурствима и послом на рад и једна посмисли и посмисли.

Њихов Салих рекао још једна особина која његова карактера, а то је његова доброта и скромност. За њега се слободно може рећи, да није никада ниша у јакости, на у његовој његовој држави.




**ПРОФЕСОР Г. САЛИХ ЋИШИЋ И ЊЕГОВА ПЛЕМЕНИТА ГЂА ФАТИМА**

су отворено изјављивали своје срце и ступили у борбу против Аустрије.

Радује се да је тајан човек, чим је букују јак отуђен као војводајак и осуђен на 5 година тешке тамнице, коју је издржао у Београду, а на Џеинице отишао на фронту. Чим се је сретно јак тима, Салих Ћишић поново улази у јавни живот, ради без престанка у Гајрету, где на њега има одлика на његовајаша дужности националног и културног радника. Ми знајемо и отворено морали признати, да је његова заслуга да је донело до остварења Гајретовог националног тима у Мостару, којег је водила на завидну висину. Ту, у 1899. гођ, две го-

дишње разлике да се појави на његова ала дела његова рада, јели да се особито његово пријатно.

Госп. Салих Ћишић родио се је у Мостару на угледне трговачке обitelji. Ту је завршио средњу школу, а онда се је 1912. год. уписао на филозофски факултет у Загребу и Београду, где га је завршио јак 1920. год. После завршене студије ступа у државну службу као професор познатије а касније учитељске школе, на којим се појавио и данас настави.

Ми овим приликом делимо њему и његовој госпођи дуг живот и здравље на корист њихова Гајрета.

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Gajret u svakoj kući, znači samo njezin napredak

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Figure 20. A gendered portrait of activism.

Source: "Portreti gajretovih radnika," *Gajret*, no. 12 (1931): 299.

Even more telling is a 1931 article published in the same paper, celebrating an activist couple from the city of Mostar, Salih and Fatima Ćišić (see figure 20).

This progressive couple is a poignant snapshot of the gender relations promoted by the leading Muslim cultural association. Salih, the husband, is described as “coming from a highly-regarded family of merchants”<sup>141</sup> from

141 “Portreti gajretovih radnika,” *Gajret*, no. 12 (1931): 299.

Mostar, of pro-Serbian leanings since the 1910s, and for this reason persecuted by the Habsburg authorities during the First World War. After studying philosophy at the Universities of Belgrade and Zagreb, Salih returned to Bosnia where he became a teacher, first at a secondary school and then at the teachers' school. In his spare time, as a member of *Gajret*, "he works tirelessly to fulfil the duties of every activist in the national and cultural sphere,"<sup>142</sup> and among many other activities he had founded the city choir. The description of his wife Fatima is far briefer and less complete; her educational background is unknown, and only the position she held in the association is mentioned ("ex-president of the local female chapter in Mostar"<sup>143</sup>), as well as her activities for *Gajret*: "after having cared for her children at home, she dedicated several hours a day to giving singing lessons."<sup>144</sup> The photos included in the article depict a couple dressed as members of the middle class, and the one of Fatima is particularly significant. Her hair is short and unveiled, she wears no earrings or make-up, and a very plain dress and glasses, symbolic of intellectual work.

#### BETWEEN SELF-INITIATIVE AND COOPTATION

After 1919 the encounter between Muslim women and associations took various forms. Naturally, in the absence of direct personal accounts from individual female activists, this process must be reconstructed using the few available sources at hand, including the archives of *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica*, and the press. Based on the information these sources provide, it is possible to identify three principal means by which Muslim women had access to associations: self-initiative, being co-opted by Muslim men, and being co-opted by non-Muslim women. Before going into detail on these three means of access, it is worth noting that it is not always simple to assign to one category the process by which Muslim women became involved in associations. For example, one can reasonably consider that, even in cases of spontaneous self-initiative on the part of Muslim women in any given place in Bosnia, there might have been interactions, pressure on the part of husbands, fathers, or supporters of the local intelligentsia, or influence

142 "Portreti gajretovih radnika," 299.

143 "Portreti gajretovih radnika," 299.

144 "Portreti gajretovih radnika," 299.

from women of other faiths who were already experimenting with associational work. For the same reason, even in situations where Muslim women appear to have been more passive in the formation of local female branches, we cannot exclude the possibility that these women had previously and informally expressed a desire to come together and form an association, a desire that the documents, in most cases formal exchanges between men, do not take into account. Despite the limits of the available sources, it is possible to identify a dominant modality in the processes that brought about the encounter between Muslim women and the associational phenomenon between 1919 and 1941.

One of the first forms of access to associations consists of what we might call self-initiative, when the formation of an association or female branch can be traced back first and foremost to the desiderata and needs of the women and future activists who are to become a part of it. It would seem reasonable to consider *Osvitanje*, for example, as a case of self-initiative; the actions taken at its foundation—an appeal signed only by women was drafted, using their first and last names, published in the press, and distributed in flyer-form—leave little room for doubt. The same can be said for the establishment of the first female branch of *Gajret* in the Herzegovinian town of Stolac in 1921, where an informal branch of women had already been formed the previous year, on the initiative of the students of the local female secondary school.<sup>145</sup> The vitality of this chapter is remarkable, especially considering the limited size of Stolac and its isolated geographic location; just a few months after its foundation the chapter already boasted nearly seventy members.<sup>146</sup> These cases once again highlight the driving role of teachers in the creation of associational structures for Muslim women.<sup>147</sup>

A second method consisted of Muslim men in a given association co-opting women into involvement; in many cases, an association would be founded thanks to the impetus of members already active in an urban center, or at least of the urban Muslim élite. This method was especially typical of the branches of existing associations, such as *Budućnost*, *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica*. In these cases, it was the local (male) branch that would appeal to its central branch for permission to form a local female chapter.

<sup>145</sup> ABiH, FG, 2, MŽPG Stolac to GOG (1921, undated).

<sup>146</sup> "Osnivanje pododbora u Stocu," *Gajret*, no. 6 (1928): 95.

<sup>147</sup> ABiH, FG, 10, 2247, MPG Tešanj to GOG (June 28, 1931).



Contact between the (aspiring) female activists at a local level and the leaders of the associations was thus not direct, but mediated by the existing male branches. For example, the *Gajret* female chapter of Bihać, the third largest in the province, seems to have been set up in 1928 on the initiative of local male activists. Based on a summary of the meeting minutes of the local branch, it appears that the local male activists discussed the possibility of forming a local female chapter. At the same time, however, reference is made to a *Gajret* party held for women (*gajretova ženska zabava*)—which suggests that separate gatherings for men and women were still being organized in the late 1920s!—during which the women supposedly independently discussed the creation of a female chapter.<sup>148</sup> According to the available information, it therefore seems that rather more complex forces lay behind the formation of the female chapter; the women discussed the matter at a party reserved solely for them, whereas the local male branch discussed it at an official meeting and formally communicated the request to the central branch. Needless to say, according to this second method, the relationship between the women of the provinces and the central authorities of an association, at least in the initial phase, relied on the mediation of men.

A third and final method, quantitatively less significant than the other two, involved non-Muslim female activists of the two cultural organizational networks, *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica*, co-opting Muslim women into the association. For instance, behind the female chapter of Tuzla, formed in October of 1929 and which would be one of the most active associations in eastern Bosnia and within *Gajret* itself for several years, was an Orthodox woman named Halka Hasanbegović, the wife of Avdo Hasanbegović, president of the association and adjunct governor (*podban*).<sup>149</sup> Having obtained a degree in medicine in Vienna and then worked as a pediatrician first in Mostar, then Sarajevo and finally in Tuzla, Halka became one of the most important female figures of the *Gajret* association, especially after 1929. At the Tuzla female chapter's inaugural speech, she was presented as a true patroness of the association. Immediately after the customary tribute to the king and the royal family—*Živjeli! Živjeli! Živjeli!* (Long live! Long live! Long live!)<sup>150</sup>—the chapter president, Ziba *hanuma* Kršlak, expressed her grati-

148 "Gajretov ženski pododbor u Bihaću," *Gajret*, no. 11 (1928): 175.

149 ABIH, PDS II, Halka Hasanbegović.

150 ABIH, FG, 9, 1815, MŽPG Tuzla to GOG (June 16, 1930).

tude to the *podbanica* and “honorary president Doctor Halka Hasanbegović, thanks to whose initiative our association was founded.”<sup>151</sup>

In the early 1930s, when the royal dictatorship was at its most severe, another woman was striving, in Sarajevo as well as the provinces, to bring Muslim women together in the more and more openly pro-Serbian and pro-government *Gajret* association: Vida Čubrilović.<sup>152</sup> A ministerial official, Čubrilović is, for example, mentioned as the promoter of the *Gajret* female branch in Rogatica, a town near Sarajevo, which had managed to recruit 70 Muslim women by early October 1931.<sup>153</sup> An activist of *Fidaka*, the female branch of the Muslim association *Budućnost* in Banja Luka, and of *Narodni ženski savez*, Čubrilović was one of the most active figures, in the press and at an organizational level, in working toward the pro-Serbian nationalization of Muslim women.

When a non-Muslim woman was at the origins of a chapter, her presence nearly always had an impact on its composition, in that members usually came from a greater variety of faiths. The *Gajret* female branch in Sarajevo, for example, entrusted the driving role of secretary to an Orthodox woman. The local female branch of Tuzla was able, for its part, to attract to its ranks a significant number of non-Muslim women; based on the minutes of the 1930 annual assembly, for example, 20% of the 160 members had non-Muslim names, which suggests that the association opened its doors to the Orthodox women of the city in particular, as well as some Catholics and Hungarians.<sup>154</sup> The (Muslim) president of the chapter did not fail to stress the significance of this fact:

I feel obliged to touch upon an aspect that brings us honor, that is to say the presence within our ranks of a great number of ladies of Orthodox faith. With their entrance into the association, they have visibly shown the support, love, and sympathy that they feel for us Muslim women and our *Gajret*—Hurrah!<sup>155</sup>

Giving access to and integrating Muslim women into the associations seems to have been a subject of disagreement for Muslim notables, pro-

<sup>151</sup> ABiH, FG, 9, 1815.

<sup>152</sup> ABiH, PDS II, Vida Čubrilović.

<sup>153</sup> ABiH, FG, 10, 4069, MŽPG Rogatica to GOG (October 6, 1931).

<sup>154</sup> ABiH, FG, 8, 665, MŽPG Tuzla to GOG (undated).

<sup>155</sup> ABiH, FG, 8, 665.

gressives and conservatives alike. Especially in the aftermath of the war, Muslim men had shown a great deal of institutional creativity in including women in the work of the associations, and in particular in allowing them to participate in the decision-making process. *Osvitanje* in Sarajevo appears to have been the association that afforded activists the greatest amount of autonomy; its president was a woman, its board of directors was composed of women, and the decisions were made by women. However, even this association maintained an Oversight Board whose members included men; both religious authorities and the husbands of the activists themselves. In the absence of specific records for this association, it is not possible to know whether this male oversight committee had a significant role in its activities.<sup>156</sup>

A contemporary of *Osvitanje* founded in Mostar, *Muslimanska ženska zadruga*, was particularly lacking in autonomy. The writers of the association's statutes, demonstrating unusual legal creativity, provided in its 11<sup>th</sup> article for the existence of two bodies, an *upravni odbor* (Board of Directors) and a *radni odbor* (Executive Board), entirely made up of men and women respectively. The former "administers the association's assets according to the spirit of the statutes, convenes the assembly, submits inquiries to the assembly, executes the decisions of the assembly... represents the association publicly," while the latter "auxiliary executive body," was nominated by the Board of Directors with the objective of "enacting the decisions of the Board of Directors within the association, conducting workshops and courses, carrying out the decisions of the Board of Directors."<sup>157</sup> The resulting access for women was placed in a clearly subordinate position. It was for this very reason, that is to say the "distinction between male and female members of the association,"<sup>158</sup> resulting in an ambiguous decision-making structure, that the Provincial Government refused to approve its statutes in February 1919. It is interesting to observe that associations hailed by both the contemporaries and by scholarship as the first female Muslim associations were not completely free from male interference and control.

In major centers like Sarajevo and Mostar, the problem was finding a way to integrate women into associational culture, while maintaining some

<sup>156</sup> Kujraković, "Osvitanje," 147.

<sup>157</sup> ABiH, ZV2, 18/26/29, Statute of *Muslimanska ženska zadruga* (1919, undated), 7–8.

<sup>158</sup> ABiH, ZV2, 18/26/29, Statute, 12.

form of control over them, thereby limiting their agency. In the provinces, however, the problem lay more often in the very visibility of women within the association, which was considered to be in flagrant violation of the rules of segregation between the sexes. The Muslim philanthropic association *Bratstvo* (The Brotherhood) in Gornji Šeher, a predominantly Muslim village only a few kilometers from Banja Luka, offers a particularly telling case of a Muslim male elite torn between the desire to integrate women into the associational workforce, while still preserving some form of segregation. The statutes of the association approved in 1929 did allow Muslim women to join its ranks, but at the same time decreed that “Muslim women do not have the right to participate in the assembly, nor to be elected to the boards of directors; they can send their vote by [written] mandate, drawn up in the presence of two witnesses.”<sup>159</sup> A unique case, this statute reveals the contradictory injunctions burdening the Muslim elite of the time, and the unresolved tensions between female segregation and participation in associational work.

Attempts of this nature remain isolated cases, and before long the Muslim philanthropic associations turned to a different tack for managing the presence of both men and women within their structures. Having been exclusively male for the first sixteen years of its existence, the Sarajevo association *Merhamet* created a female branch. The female branch’s statutes, adopted in 1933, unmistakably detailed the structure’s subordination; unlike the president of the association, the president of the female branch could not publicly represent the association, and did not enjoy financial autonomy. All decisions regarding the activities of the association were made by the male branch, while the female branch could at most submit non-binding written proposals (Article 8).<sup>160</sup> In other words, the *Merhamet* association of Sarajevo—which became a model for other Muslim philanthropic associations throughout Bosnia—saw its female branch as an interface with the female population, an instrument for raising funds and increasing membership, without however affording it any decision-making powers. Even when the amount of revenue directly attributable to the female branches in-

159 AJ, 14/F63/J194/2, Statute of *Bratstvo, Muslimansko dobrotvorno društvo u Gornjem Šeheru* (1929, undated), Article 12, pages unnumbered.

160 HAS, M9, 8, *Pravilnik o poslovanju ženskog odbora muslimanskog dobrotvornog društva Merhamet u Sarajevu*. The articles were approved by the central branch of the association on January 21, 1933.

creased progressively in the 1930s, this model of relations between male and female activists in the Muslim philanthropic associations was never called into question.

Other philanthropic organizations, however, did not go to the trouble of instituting different positions for men and women within the association. The majority of the associations referred to people, or “men and women” or “Muslim men and women,” without explicitly making gender distinctions. In practice, however, the “people” represented within the directing body were usually exclusively male throughout the entire interwar period. Other associations, rather than include formal limitations in their statutes, adopted them in practice. This is the case for the philanthropic and educational association *Budućnost* in Banja Luka, which, in its 1931 statutes boasted a strong egalitarianism—no structure was segregated by gender, each position was specified as male or female, etc.—with the exception of limiting the office of president to “one who possesses a university-level education,”<sup>161</sup> effectively limiting the likelihood of a woman holding the most important office of the association.

We might ask whether this subordinate position was exclusive to the philanthropic associations. How was the presence of women regulated within associations fighting for the transformation of Muslim women “in conformity with the spirit of the times”? *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica*, which despite repeated modifications to their statutes retained nearly perfectly identical structures, made no formal distinction between male and female members. At a local level, however, they provided for separate structures: “local branches” (unspecified) for men, and “local female branches.”<sup>162</sup> This set-up, segregated according to sex at a local level, was not the same at the highest levels of the two associations, where there was a single central branch elected by the annual assembly, held in Sarajevo, to which delegates from all of the local chapters participated. This central branch remained the sole prerogative of men for the entire interwar period.

The absence of women in the central branches of the two associations does not appear to have been a cause for particular concern for the female

161 AJ, 14, F63/J194/12, Statute of *Budućnost. Društvo za prosvjetno, ekonomsko i socijalno podizanje muslimana u Banjoj Luci*, (undated), art. 15.

162 *Gajret*, to be more precise, provided for *pododbori*, or local “sub-branches,” while *Narodna Uzdanica* maintained *odbori*, “branches.” The difference was, however, purely a matter of terminology.



Figure 21: Delegates to the yearly *Gajret* Assembly in Sarajevo, 1931.

Source: *Gajret*, no. 12 (1931): 369.

activists of *Gajret* or of *Narodna Uzdanica*. The only attempt to include female representation in the central branch can be credited to *Gajret*. In fact, following the reform of its statutes in 1929, the association had made provisions for a woman to be admitted into its central decision-making body, to represent its female membership. At the association's annual assembly the following year, it was proposed that aforementioned Halka Hasanbegović, be nominated as representative of the association's female component. Hasanbegović's greatest merit was not only her status as *Gajret* activist but especially... as the wife of the president, Avdo Hasanbegović. The proposition was rejected by Hasanbegović himself, who stated that he would prefer to consult with the female chapters, rather than impose a nomination from above.<sup>163</sup> The idea was not pursued further, and by the subsequent reform of the association's statutes in 1932, the passage that provided for female representation within the association's highest circle of decision-

<sup>163</sup> "Zapisnik XXIV redovne glavne Skupštine," *Gajret*, no. 11 (1930): 402.

making had been removed,<sup>164</sup> and was not proposed again, even under subsequent reforms.<sup>165</sup>

In a few cases, is possible to detect forms of resistance, and sometimes of open opposition, to this marginalization of women in Muslim associations. For the most part, activists chose passive resistance, for instance refusing to act as intermediaries for the female population, when the role was assigned to them by male activists and notables. An example of this silent form of insubordination can be found in *Osvitanje's* early history. In April 1920, the JMO and religious authorities launched the Initiative for the Defense of Morality in Sarajevo,<sup>166</sup> an initiative that aimed to “stem immorality among Muslims, and in particular in the female Muslim population of Sarajevo,”<sup>167</sup> and which for several months managed to act as a parallel police force in the city’s Muslim quarters. The initiative, presented as a coalition between different Muslim organizations, both civic and religious, in their founder’s minds intended to serve as a model for all predominantly Muslim cities in Bosnia. As can be gathered from the newspaper accounts of this initiative, *Merhamet* and *Osvitanje* were supposed to deal with the male and female populations of Sarajevo respectively, helping them to obtain forms of employment and ensuring Muslim customs be preserved through police action.<sup>168</sup> Confronted with this initiative, *Osvitanje* chose to exempt itself from participation; with some disapproval, the official accounts of the initiative in the press report that, from its very first session, all the associations were present “except *Osvitanje*,”<sup>169</sup> and even the following month, *Osvitanje* “had not nominated its delegates nor responded with so much as a single word to the three letters from the Initiative.”<sup>170</sup> During this time, the female activists, who had, among other actions, abandoned the veil, and who therefore probably did not feel particularly comfortable participating in an initiative whose main concern consisted in maintaining this practice, decided to turn their efforts to other independent initiatives, such as opening a sewing school and organizing literacy courses for Muslim women.

164 HAS, G4, 5, *Gajret* Statutes (1932): 12.

165 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 266.

166 “Akcija za zaštitu morala,” *Pravda*, April 17 (1920): 1.

167 “Iz Akcije za zaštitu morala,” *Pravda*, April 29 (1920): 2.

168 “Akcija za zaštitu morala,” *Pravda*, April 17 (1920): 1.

169 “Iz Akcije za zaštitu morala,” *Pravda*, May 22 (1920): 1–2.

170 “Iz Akcije,” *Pravda*, June 8 (1920): 3–4.

In a few cases, Muslim female activists vocally expressed their frustration over their marginal position in associational life, especially when more political issues were at stake. One example of this comes from the aforementioned *Gajret* female chapter in Tuzla, founded in 1929 and extremely dynamic in the early 1930s, when it counted over 160 members. The chapter's activities in its first year were impressive, and by far exceeded those of its male counterpart. The activists organized benefits and public lessons on children's education, collaborated with other local women's associations, and founded a home economics school for girls. The chapter was particularly efficient at fundraising; at just one event, the activists were able to collect the enormous sum of 34,000 dinars. It was perhaps at this very moment, when the local women's circle began to realize the importance of its contributions, that it introduced an interesting change to the terminology in its official communications; as early as 1930, it addressed the local branch as the local *male* branch, placing itself on an equal footing.<sup>171</sup> Curiously, the male activists seem to have accepted this terminological leveling imposed by the female activists, going so far as to add the adjective "male" in neat type beside their letterhead.<sup>172</sup> The visit of the president of the association Hasanbegović to Tuzla in 1932, however, was to put the female activists back in their place. A letter from the president of the female branch, written to the Central Branch, reveals that the female activists were not even invited to participate in the official meeting. "Not only did they not invite us, but they went so far as to keep the visit hidden from us."<sup>173</sup> Despite this, the president of the local female branch decided to go to the meeting in any case, "in order to see the president and give my regards to him independently." However, this attempt at insubordination ended with frustration: "I was finally admitted to attend the assembly, but only alone, and unprepared thanks to our brothers' lack of chivalry [*nekavalirstvo*], and I gave a clumsy speech..."<sup>174</sup>

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In the agitated months that followed the end of the Great War, and that coincided with the creation of the first Yugoslavia, a new phenomenon became

171 ABiH, FG, 9, 1815, MŽPG Tuzla to GOG (June 16, 1930).

172 ABiH, FG, 9, 3814, MŽPG Tuzla to MPG Tuzla (December 9, 1930).

173 ABiH, FG, 12, 1485, MŽPG Tuzla to GOG (June 10, 1932).

174 ABiH, FG, 12, 1485, MŽPG Tuzla to GOG (June 10, 1932).



visible in the Bosnian public space: a first group of Muslim women, mostly composed of teachers and students, engaged in volunteering activities. The forms of sisterhood tested in theory in their writing before the Great War started to become a reality in 1919, and took the form of different kinds of activities. For the entire interwar period, it seems that the Muslim communal space was considered by Muslim women to be the most appropriate one for their engagement: city-based philanthropic associations of Islamic inspiration, or Muslim cultural organizations were the places where female engagement converged. However, the communitarization of volunteering was not total. As we have seen, being a member of *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica* meant in many cases interacting on a regular basis with Orthodox and Catholic women in the name of national solidarity, thus pushing Muslim women beyond the perimeter of their community space. Across the fence, feminist associations, which appeared in Bosnia immediately after the war, and who openly called for full political rights, do not seem to have succeeded in involving a significant number of Muslim women in their ranks. As we have seen, each kind of association developed its own discourse on Muslim women, and legitimized their access to volunteering—and by extension, to the public space—by resorting to different keywords: Muslim solidarity, national solidarity, female solidarity. Beyond the various discourses, the experience of Muslim women in these different types of voluntary associations presented a common trait: they were substantially excluded from associational decision-making processes.

Different Muslim male political elites, important sectors of the Croatian and Serbian political leadership, and the Crown, appear to have been preoccupied with the engagement of Muslim women in associations, seeing it as a way to include them in the different ongoing projects of community-building. At the same time, family also seems to have played a role in fostering, or hindering, Muslim women's access to the different associational networks operating in the region. As we have seen, the ability of a specific associational branch to involve the female members of prestigious families in its activities could make the difference between success and failure for its activists. Father-daughter and husband-wife relationships were also crucial to recruitment strategies for new activists. Engagement in voluntary associations can thus only be understood by taking its porous relationship with state and family structures into account.

## CHAPTER 4

### CALLING FOR CHANGE



As we saw in Chapter Two, debating the Muslim woman question during the Habsburg period essentially meant discussing the contents, limits and spaces for an appropriate female education. The Great War, and the establishment of the first Yugoslav state, brought deep changes in this state of affairs, lending new words and themes to the debate. While, as we have seen in Chapter Three, voluntary associations were inviting Muslim women into their ranks, associational journals and printing houses became sites for the elaboration of new discourses on women, Islam and modernity. This chapter will focus on the three largely uncontested discursive threads that developed in the aftermath of the Great War, and dominated the Bosnian and Yugoslav public sphere until at least the early 1930s: secular progressive, Islamic progressive, and feminist. Special attention will be devoted to the exceptional cases of Muslim women who entered into the debate, to the specificities of their public words, but also to the possible explanations for their overwhelming silence. Drawing in particular from the work of Deniz Kandiyoti, this chapter will try to show how the Muslim woman question, in Bosnia as elsewhere, provided a vocabulary to discuss concepts such as cultural and national integrity, order and disorder, indigenous and alien; that it became, in other words, a terrain for confrontation between competing political projects.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, "Some Awkward Questions on Women and Modernity in Turkey," in *Remaking Women: Feminist and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 270–87.

## BACKWARDNESS, SHAME AND VEILING

The ideas presented to the Bosnian Muslim public by Dževad Sulejmanpašić in 1918, whose vehement anti-veiling stance attracted the wrath of the Sarajevo crowd against him, were not merely the ramblings of an eccentric man. Notions such as these were fairly popular among the thin trickle of educated Muslim elites who entered public life in the aftermath of the Great War, and who found in the cultural association *Gajret* their polar star. As seen in Chapter Three, this constellation of Muslim cultural entrepreneurs, self-defined progressives, shared the idea that, as a consequence of the Great War, and the recent creation of an independent nation-state for the South-Slavs, it was now necessary for Muslims to introduce a number of changes, both in individual and in collective life. Even more than in the 1878–1918 period, in this new context a new generation of Muslims would need to be trained to find their place in the forming fabric of Yugoslavia. For the progressives, the transformation of the social position of women, and with it gender norms within the Muslim community, were thus the precondition for the survival and success of the Muslim population as a whole within the Yugoslav polity, and by extension in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Leafing through the Muslim progressive press of the interwar years, one is left with a disconcertingly negative perception of Bosnian Muslim women. In the Muslim progressive journal *Budućnost*, for example, one author stated in 1920 that Muslim women “are not prepared for matrimonial life, they are not aware of their own rights, the vast majority [of them] consider their husband to be an almighty lord, their life and death in his hands.”<sup>3</sup> Their unpreparedness for modern life transcended the borders of the private space and spilled into the public one. The same article claimed that “they know that they have to pay taxes, but concepts like active and passive vote remain for them *terra incognita*.”<sup>4</sup> This dark portrait of the Bosnian Muslim woman’s condition was further darkened by comparison

2 For an overview of the intellectual debate within the Bosnian Muslim community in the interwar period, see in particular Enes Karić, “Aspects of Islamic Discourse,” 285–333; “Islamic Thought in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 20th Century,” *Islamic Studies*, 41, no. 3 (2002): 391–444; Enes Karić, *Prilozi za povijest islamskog mišljenja u Bosni i Hercegovini XX stoljeća* (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 2004); Karčić, *Društveno-pravni aspekt*, 210–36.

3 Dr. Bećir Novo, “Muslimansko žensko pitanje,” *Budućnost*, no. 2–3 (1920): 22.

4 Novo, “Muslimansko žensko pitanje,” 22.

with the country's non-Muslim women. While women in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana were celebrated for organizing and formulating their own political agenda, demanding social and political rights, Muslim women were accused of remaining "backward" (*zaostale*) and "uncontemporary" (*nesavremene*), who through their failing condemned the entire Muslim population to the same fate.<sup>5</sup>

The idea of drawing a link between women and community is of course neither unique nor new. What was new in the post-war Muslim progressive discourse was the clear intention to secularize the Muslim woman question, and to resolutely propel this debate beyond the borders of the religious, as stated for example by this article from 1919:

[the woman question,] whose resolution is dependent upon the development of the Muslim component of our people, ought to be important not only for the nationally aware Muslim youths, but also the educated circles of other religious groups... This issue is neither exclusively Muslim, nor exclusively religious [*vjersko pitanje*]; if we can solve this question rationally and according to contemporary socio-economic needs, our whole community will be stronger, enhanced with fresh drive from the Muslim population, in every direction of social and national development. For this reason, for the resolution of the Muslim woman question we need every progressive youth in the country, regardless of their faith, to take a radical look at the whole issue.<sup>6</sup>

These lines are emblematic of the major shift operated by post-war Muslim intellectuals, and announced in Sulejmanpašić's pamphlet. First of all, the Muslim woman question was no longer to be considered as a purely "religious question" (*vjersko pitanje*), but first and foremost as a "social question" (*društveno pitanje*). According to this line of reasoning, Islamic sources and the centuries-old exegetic work of Muslim scholars was no longer to be considered the most legitimate point of reference for framing this question, and for tracing a path to reform. New branches of knowledge—sociology, economics, political sciences, psychology, etc.—were to be considered the most appropriate tools for understanding, and redressing, the misguid-

5 Novo, "Muslimansko žensko pitanje," 22.

6 Jusuf S. Pe - - ić [*sic*], "Nekoliko reči o ženskom pitanju muslimanskom," *Budućnost*, no. 8 (1919): 115.

edness of the social reality. The consequences of this secularization of the question are twofold. First of all, Muslim *inteligencija*—as intellectuals with a secular education were often called in the press—began to claim for themselves the right to decide what kind of transformation of gender norms was the most desirable, marginalizing the *ulema*. Secondly, in the name of the national unification of the South Slavs, even educated non-Muslims (“every progressive youth in the country, regardless of their faith”) had their word to say on the question. As already noted by Nathalie Clayer for the Albanian case, pushing the woman question beyond the domain of the religious opened the door for intellectuals to claim their right to speak, and potentially to make decisions about the affairs of the Muslim community.<sup>7</sup>

This new radicalism, nourished by an enthusiastic trust in secular science, led the Muslim progressives to distance themselves not only from the traditional Muslim elite gathered around the JMO, regularly accused of being unfit to lead the Muslim population, but also from pre-war Muslim intellectuals like Bašagić and Mulabdić. This first generation of post-Ottoman Muslim intellectuals was openly blamed for having “allowed the [Muslim woman] question to fall into the domain of religion, thereby leaving it to the religious officials to discuss.”<sup>8</sup> As stated in the same article from 1919, Habsburg-era Muslim intellectuals had proved themselves lacking in courage:

[The Muslim woman question] was simply accepted to be a religious issue [*vjersko pitanje*], thus something that authoritative Muslim leaders undoubtedly should decide upon. Obviously, they were not able to see beyond the limited boundaries of their spiritual horizons. While the rest [of Muslim intellectuals] left the question in the domain of religion... the latter had no desire whatsoever to move on from traditional customs. Moreover, in times of political turmoil, particularly the [1908] annexation, great efforts were made to not challenge religious beliefs and social conservatism in Muslim society. It was therefore not deemed the appropriate time to discuss this issue.<sup>9</sup>

7 Nathalie Clayer, “Behind the Veil. The Reform of Islam in Inter-war Albania or the Search for a ‘Modern’ and ‘European’ Islam,” in *Islam in Inter-War Europe*, Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain, eds., (London: Hurst, 2008), 128–155.

8 Pe - - ić [*sic*], “Nekoliko reči,” 115.

9 Pe - - ić [*sic*], “Nekoliko reči,” 115.

In sum, post-war progressive intellectuals loudly and confidently claimed the right to talk about gender issues, which should be resolved using secular rationality. This new approach to the Muslim woman question testifies to the enthusiasm of a new generation of Muslim men—young, educated and at least to a certain extent, nationalist—who felt prepared to take on the historic role of reintroducing the Muslim community into a secularized world.

Proving themselves to have perfectly assimilated the arguments of Western orientalist discourse (see Chapter Two), Muslim progressive intellectuals began to speak more and more openly about the veil as both the cause and the symbol of the backwardness of Muslim women. Many of them, ignoring the fact that this practice was considered by the vast majority of Islamic scholars to be compulsory, did not hesitate to predict, and sometimes even to demand, the abandonment of the veil by the Muslim population. In some cases, the veiling practice was rejected in the name of women's individual rights, as a measure that could potentially advance her search for self-fulfillment. In 1928 for example, in the pages of the progressive journal *Reforma* (Reform), the writer Abdurezak Hivzi Bjelevac—himself married to one of the first unveiled educated Muslim women, Šefika (see Chapter Two)—stressed the importance of ending sexual and confessional segregation for Muslim women, underlining their right to autonomy and freedom of thought.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, these kinds of arguments were in the minority. For the entire interwar period, Muslim intellectuals seem to have had different preoccupations as regards the veil, particularly economic in nature. In their public writing, many authors close to *Gajret* explored the supposed tie between the veiling practice and the economic marginalization of Muslims in post-Ottoman times. As stated by Husejn Brkić, activist of the same association and headmaster of the Stolac high school:

A social group that can take advantage of a woman's contributions beyond the threshold of the home will always be in a better economic situation than a social group that cannot because of religious precepts. As a consequence, those who are economically weaker, so to speak those who have adopted the veiling practice, will not progress in the same way as those who are economically stronger.

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10 Abdurezak Hivzi Bjelevac, "Moralna orijentacija savremene muslimanke," *Reforma*, no. 1 (1928): 2.

The author expresses here a recurring argument of the progressive discourse: that the veiling practice hindered economic prosperity. This reasoning applied not only to broad human collectivities like religious or national groups, but also to the individual family. According to Brkić, “the sooner we conform to the needs of our time, the sooner we can help our families out of the crisis that we are in.” Economic prosperity could only be secured “with cultural progress, which in turn can only be obtained in freedom and with freedom.” In summary of his thinking, Brkić wrote that:

our women are denied rights by men; in a favorable social and economic position men have tolerated this state of affairs; democracy and the social and economic crisis has dragged us into a deep crisis; we can only get out of this crisis by strengthening our economic forces; economic strength implies cultural and educational progress based on freedom; our women are ready to choose freedom.<sup>11</sup>

Here again, progressive intellectuals were unanimous in seeing the war and its aftermath as the principal cause of this state of affairs. The human cost of the conflict, the famine that had accompanied its final phase, and especially the land reform that had led to the ruin of a large proportion of the Muslim land-owning elite, were frequently cited as the main causes of the economic weakening of the Muslim community as a whole. In his countless articles on Muslim women published in Yugoslav newspapers, Ahmet Muradbegović (1898–1972), a well-known novelist and journalist from Sarajevo, clearly expressed the link between these political and economic transformations, and the need for female emancipation. In one of his texts, published in the *Gajret* journal in 1930, Muradbegović argued that, in the “struggle for existence” that had sparked the First World War, “it has become necessary for women to help men to preserve themselves [*samoodržanje*] and to be independent [*neovisnost*], and that is why nowadays they are being afforded more freedom and are being asked to play a more significant role in life.”<sup>12</sup> Here again, the social Darwinist rhetoric is strident: “new forces

11 Husein S. Brkić, “Naše žensko pitanje,” *Gajret*, no. 5 (1928): 72–5.

12 Ahmed Muradbegović, “Problem akcije i reakcije u savremenom muslimanskom društvu,” *Gajret*, no. 2–3–4 (1930): 272–85.

that had never until this point been brought into play are therefore being mobilized so that society can remain afloat and not sink.”<sup>13</sup>

It is worth noting that this *Gajret* activist, like many of his contemporaries, considered himself to belong to a world divided into discrete national communities. As had been stated several years earlier in the same journal, nations, like all living things, were in competition with each other, and their struggle amounted to a veritable “national selection” (*nacionalna selekcija*).<sup>14</sup> According to this vision of the world, only the nations that were able to mobilize every ounce of their economic resources would be able to survive and prosper—the others were doomed to extinction. The veil and sexual segregation had pushed the female population out of active life, leaving the Muslim population deprived of half of its potential workforce. The danger was two-fold: the marginalization of Muslims within the Yugoslav national community, and the weakening of the Yugoslav nation as a whole in the global competition. Eradicating the veiling practice was thus first of all seen as a means to inject a fresh and underemployed workforce into the national economy, and thus contribute to the strengthening and success of the community—both religious and national. The post-1918 economic conditions therefore dictated that women must be allowed to work “beyond the threshold of the home.”<sup>15</sup>

Without a doubt, this mixture of macro- and micro-economic analysis, accompanied by a healthy dose of social Darwinism, represented the core of the Muslim progressive argument against the veiling practice, and for sexual and confessional desegregation. Nonetheless, another recurring, and far less rational, argument surfaces in the public writings of Muslim progressives—shame. In 1928, the aforementioned Husein S. Brkić comes back to the topic of gender relations and the compelling need to transform them, but this time putting forward different arguments. In another article published in *Gajret*, he offered an eloquent example of how veiled women in the public space could be a source of embarrassment and indignation for progressive Muslims.

This summer a large group of Swedish teachers, men and women, passed through our region [Bosnia]. I travelled with these civilized educators of

13 Muradbegović, “Problem akcije i reakcije,” 272–85.

14 V. P. “Nacionalna selekcija,” *Budućnost*, no. 5 (1919): 57.

15 Muradbegović, “Problem akcije i reakcije,” 280.



their own country as far as Tarčin [a village close to Sarajevo, on the way to Mostar]. At a small stop, where the train paused for just a few minutes, an old woman rushed to get on the train. She was holding a young girl in her arms and another girl by the hand. A man, who I understood to be the poor wretch's husband, walked indifferently and lazily behind her. Obviously, the woman was dressed up like an Egyptian mummy and the man, I realized by the next stop, had been drinking. Understandably, this sad picture of Muslim family life drew the attention of the foreigners, and I was extremely interested in the impression that *the least free women in Europe had left on representatives of the freest civilization for women in Europe*. I introduced myself to the guide and through him to the rest of the group. The women immediately bombarded me with questions about our women and their role in society. When I started to explain that the veil was an Eastern tradition and that it had been brought to us via Islam and that that was why it had become religious dogma, one of the women interjected that during her travels she had seen many Muslim men drinking alcohol, another practice prohibited by the Quran. The woman was amazed—why was it that a compromise could not be reached for the veil, which was after all a custom and not a dogma, whereas one had been reached for alcohol? At this point her companion, who had remained silent until now, spoke. She told her friend that we, Muslim men, were opposed to a compromise being reached, and as proof she told the story of the awful behavior she had witnessed just minutes earlier, when a woman had to climb onto the train carrying two children while her husband did nothing to help. To my great astonishment that noble lady said, “sir, if a man behaved like that at home, he would be lynched,” and as a sign of protest she moved away from me.<sup>16</sup>

Imagined or not, this encounter between Brkić and the Swedish teachers in the middle of the Bosnian countryside is loaded with meaning. In describing his encounter with the foreign delegation, Brkić—the headmaster of a school—shows open admiration and deference. In the first lines of his text, he demonstrates the extent to which he has internalized and accepted the hierarchy between different civilizations; the Swedes were at the top, the Bosnian Muslims at the very bottom. Despite this enormous gap, at the be-

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<sup>16</sup> Brkić, “Naše žensko pitanje,” 72.

ginning of the episode it seems that a dialogue between Brkić and the group is possible. Brkić's education, and supposedly his skill in foreign languages, allows him to at least temporarily bridge the gap. For a little while, their shared commitment to education creates a basis for mutual acknowledgment, making dialogue possible. However, entering into the domain of gender relations puts this dialogue under increasing stress. Despite the sense of unfamiliarity, and the open scorn he expresses for the poor country Muslim woman ("dressed up like an Egyptian mummy"), Brkić rapidly loses the foreigners' esteem. At the end of this episode, Brkić is no longer considered a colleague, on the contrary he is assimilated with the perpetrators of this shameful treatment of women. The very existence of veiled women in the public space turns this representative of the Muslim intelligentsia into a barbarian, depriving him of any remnant of civilization.

Brkić was not alone in expressing these ideas, and associating the veiling practice with the shaming Western gaze. That same year, Edhem Bulbulović, a pro-Serbian Muslim intellectual from Sarajevo, also made this association between the veil and shame. According to Bulbulović, "the Quran is not a fashion journal, preoccupied with setting some kind of dress code... A religion that dealt with such irrelevant things would not be anything serious. God does not tolerate men asking him for rules on how they should dress, or on other transitory aspects of human experience."<sup>17</sup> Abandoning the veiling practice was for the author a way of taking one's place among the civilized nations:

Without the veil and the fez we will become more accessible to others, and this greater accessibility will be charged with consequences; there will be more opportunities for ideas, culture and civilization to circulate... Europeans look at Orientals from top to bottom; they think they are dealing with inferior beings, not equal to them, and that it is therefore right to keep them as slaves, at their feet. The signs of such inferiority are the fez and the veil, and for this reason they should be abolished, in order to be equal in their eyes. The Turks have understood this very well.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Islam i nošnja," *Reforma*, no. 3 (1928): 2.

<sup>18</sup> "Islam i nošnja," 2.

Like their counterparts in Turkey, Bosnian Muslim progressives seem to have perfectly integrated one of the key points of the Orientalist discourse; gender relations, and in particular the position of women, ought to be seen as the main markers of Muslim civilizational inferiority. In order to climb the civilizational scale, the position of women had to be reformed, as did gender relations more in general. As long as this had not been achieved, the visibility of veiled women would be a shameful reminder of their distance from civilized peoples.

#### WOMEN, ISLAM AND NATION

Aside from linking the Muslim woman question to the state of the economy, and the interiorized Western gaze, progressive Muslim intellectuals also constantly stressed the link between women and the national question. As seen in Chapter Two, the group of men that took control of *Gajret's* central branch assigned the greatest importance to the Serbian and Yugoslav nationalization of the Muslim population. Timid Croatian nationalist leanings were also visible in *Gajret's* rival cultural association established in 1924, *Narodna Uzdanica*. Though this belief was held with different degrees of intensity, for Muslim progressives, becoming nationally aware was an essential step for becoming modern. As stated by Šukrija Kurtović in 1919, “our nationality is Yugoslav, respectively Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian... this fact is in keeping with the times [*savremen*], necessary and useful for the entire people.”<sup>19</sup> The establishment of a state for South Slavs produced among these men a marked optimism; as stated that same year by one of *Budućnost's* contributors, “today we are a united and politically free nation, on a journey toward harmony. All religious and tribal differences have been entirely overcome and will no longer be a cause of disagreement or revenge among our brothers.” How was it then possible, in the new Europe whose borders had been completely redrawn on the basis of national principles after the Paris Conference, to carry on defining oneself solely in religious terms? This discovery of national identity ought to involve the entire Muslim population, both men and women.

19 Šukrija Kurtović, “Prva reč,” *Budućnost*, no. 1 (1919): 3.

In progressive discourse, the relationship between Muslim women and the national question was often stated in varying, slightly contradictory terms. Some accused Muslim women of being one of the main causes of the Muslim population's near lack of national awareness. Ignorant and isolated from non-Muslim citizens, Muslim women were, according to progressive discourse, completely unaware of a sense of national belonging, or of any social reality that did not cross the border into their home and family, for that matter. How could such ignorant and segregated women, once they became mothers, transmit to the new Muslim generations any sense of national awareness? A *Reforma* article from 1928, for example, in an issue consecrated to the nationalization of Muslim women, stated that:

today Muslims also define themselves as "Turks" or "Bosnians". Neither today's generation [of intellectuals] nor yesterday's generation dedicated themselves enough to the population. Owing to this shortcoming, the national question among the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina remains unresolved. This situation, transported into the public debate, is extremely shameful.<sup>20</sup>

In order to change this state of affairs, a large-scale "national education of Muslim women" (*nacionalno vaspitanje muslimanki*) had to be organized, through the enrolment of the female population into the state school system. Putting an end to the religious segregation of Muslim women, and allowing them to study and socialize with their non-Muslim fellows was the only way to make them develop a national collective identity. Once again, Muslim progressives concluded that practices such as segregation had to be eliminated once and for all. As in other Middle-Eastern contexts, in particular Egypt and Turkey, Muslim progressives considered nationalization and unveiling to be on coinciding paths.

Upon closer inspection of the written sources produced by these men, however, it becomes clear that women were not just seen as a hindrance to Muslim nationalization. Intellectuals like the aforementioned Hasan Rebac drew a different parallel between Muslim women and the nation. A writer, journalist and ardent pro-Serbian nationalist, Rebac was one of the found-

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20 A. K., "Nacionalno vaspitanje muslimanki," *Reforma*, no. 4 (1928): 1.

ers of the Belgrade-based *Gajret Osman Đikić*.<sup>21</sup> Rebac addressed the Muslim woman question in numerous texts, published both in Bosnian and Yugoslav magazines. In 1925 he abridged his thesis in order to produce a pamphlet, entitled “The Beginning of the Emancipation of the Serbian Woman of Muslim Faith.” In this text, published by the Belgrade branch of *Gajret*, the author put down on paper his theory regarding the relationship between Muslim women and the nation, supporting it with references to the distant past. According to Rebac, Muslim women had played a key role in preserving Bosnia’s ethno-national integrity during the almost five centuries of Ottoman rule.<sup>22</sup> When the Ottomans arrived in Bosnia, part of the local population converted to Islam, “due to political circumstances and class interests.” Despite this choice, converted Muslims never let themselves become assimilated into the Ottoman Empire and never adopted the language and customs of the Turks; Bosnian Muslims “have always remained our children, they have never ceased thinking of their people [*narod*] and their country [*otadžbina*].”<sup>23</sup> Their loyalty to their nation was primarily evidenced by their language. In fact, after centuries, the converts continued “speaking pure Serbian”; this was why, despite their conversion to Islam—which Rebac called “the Turkish faith” (*turska vera*)—they had remained “sons of Serbia” (*srpski sinovi*).

If a sense of national identity had been kept alive among the Muslims of Bosnia, the credit, according to Rebac, could be attributed to none other than “their mothers, Serbian women of Muslim faith” (*srpkinje muslimanske vere*); in the privacy of their own homes, these women had kept Serbian customs alive through songs and poetry. As the author puts it, “our Muslim women never mixed with the Turks, never learned nor had any desire to learn the Turkish language, and were generally given in marriage only to their own people.”<sup>24</sup> The best evidence of this behavior is that—at least according to the author—even in the Anatolian villages that part of the Bosnian Muslim population had emigrated to after 1878, the women had kept the Serbian language alive within the confines of their own homes, refusing to learn any other language.

21 For a biography of Hasan Rebac, see Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 160–1.

22 Hasan Rebac, *Početak emancipovanja srpkinje muslimanske vere* (Belgrade: Društvo Gajret, 1925).

23 Rebac, *Početak emancipovanja*, 14.

24 Rebac, *Početak emancipovanja*, 14.

In support of his argument, Rebac relates the story of an encounter between a Serbian priest and an Ottoman governor of Herzegovina, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, at the latter's home in Prizren. After a friendly conversation, the master of the house, wishing to honor the presence of his guest, started to read a poem from the Serbian national epic tradition. When the governor read aloud a poem from the third book of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, the father of modern Serbian language and literature, "his mother, an old Herzegovinian woman, listened in delight... interrupting her son and continuing to recite the verses of the poem by heart, without reading, as she had learned it from her mother."<sup>25</sup>

Needless to say, the idea that Muslim women had acted as bastions against the Turkification of the Yugoslav region seems extremely improbable. Nevertheless, it does say a great deal about the concerns of nationalists such as Rebac, who attempted to make Bosnian Muslims an integral part of Serbian national history, a history that made much of heroic resistance against Ottoman invaders and the proud defense of national identity. Women were therefore used by Rebac to support his argument, which turned Yugoslav Muslims from the invaders' accomplices into defenders of Serbian national identity: "in history, Yugoslav women of Muslim faith have fulfilled their greatest calling as true daughters of our people and our country."<sup>26</sup>

In summary, be they at worst obstacles standing in the way of modernity, or at best guardians of a Serbian and Yugoslav national identity, the interwar progressives all stressed the same point about Muslim women; that they were intimately and inexorably tied to the nationalization of Bosnian Muslims. In both cases, the end result was the same: Muslim women also had to consciously take their place in the broader national community, side by side with Muslim men. In such a perspective the explicit hostility of Muslim progressives to the veiling practice acquires an additional meaning, and closely echoes Beth Baron's findings for interwar Egypt:<sup>27</sup> unveiling women became the condition, and even the very metaphor, for the integration of Bosnian Muslims into the broader national community, be it Serbian, Croatian or Yugoslav.

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25 Rebac, *Početak emancipovanja*, 14.

26 Rebac, *Početak emancipovanja*, 14.

27 Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 57–81.

## LOCALIZING AN APPROPRIATE EMANCIPATION

In the act of reframing the Muslim woman question, Muslim progressive intellectuals proved themselves well aware of the deep changes affecting gender relations on a global scale in the interwar period. In support of ending gender and confessional segregation, Muslim cultural entrepreneurs mobilised different models of women in their texts. Muslim educated women from the first centuries of Islamic history—the time of the Rightly-guided Caliphs—early twentieth century Muslim women from the Caucasus, Egypt, Afghanistan, educated and economically active women from the West, and in particular France, England, and the United States. Nevertheless, the *tur-ska žena* or *turkinja*, the Turkish woman of the republican period, rapidly became the most frequently cited model of appropriate Muslim femininity. Already visible in the mid-1920s, her success appeared to be unstoppable; the Turkish woman forged her way in Muslim newspapers, in the pages of associational gazettes, and became the main protagonist of dozens of different articles, from critical essays to gossip pieces. Muslim cultural entrepreneurs glorified her catalogue of virtues in public lectures in towns and villages, and even a few Islamic learned men expressed sympathy, if not open support, for her.

The Turcophilia among Muslims was far from an exclusively Yugoslav prerogative. Muslims from different parts of the world, and especially those from regions previously part of the Ottoman Empire, keenly followed the political transformations being experimented by the Republic of Turkey.<sup>28</sup> In the domain of gender, the reforms enacted by the newly-established Turkish state were objectively remarkable. In the interwar years, the Turkish State outlawed polygamy, granted equal rights to both partners in divorce and child custody, launched campaigns for women to have greater access to education and salaried work, and discouraged the practice of veiling. In 1930 women obtained the right to vote (in local elections, and, in 1934, in the general election).<sup>29</sup> These policies were followed with the greatest inter-

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28 François Georgeon and Iskender Gökalp, eds., *Kemalism et monde musulman* (Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'homme, 1987). On the Yugoslav case, see Fabio Giomi, "Domesticating Kemalism: Conflicting Muslim Narratives about Turkey in Interwar Yugoslavia," *Nostalgia, Loss and Creativity in South-East Europe: Political and Cultural Representations of the Past*, ed. Catharina Raudvere (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 151-87.

29 Nicole A. N. M. Van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish Women in an International Context," *Europe-*

est by Muslim cultural entrepreneurs in Yugoslavia. Bosnian Muslim progressive intellectuals imagined Turkey to be a sort of paradise of appropriate gender relations, where—to quote their own expressions—“female emancipation” (*emancipacija žena*), “male-female equality” (*ravnopravnost*) and even “feminism” (*feminizam*) had finally been realized on earth, sooner and better than in Western Europe. Turkey became an example, and increasingly the best example, of how to engineer Muslim post-Ottoman femininity in Yugoslavia.

Why was the Kemalist gender regime so popular? One explanation could be that Muslim progressives saw in the Turkish example a tempered form of male-led emancipation that allowed them to address the need to emancipate women, while at the same time avoiding the anxieties connected to female emancipation and agency. Fantasies of fear of an uncontrolled feminine sensuality and (individual and collective) decadence are recurring themes in Bosnian Muslim literature. *Iza žaluzija* (Behind Jealousy), a novel published by the aforementioned Muslim writer Ahmed Muradbegović, which tells the story of Selmana, a Bosnian woman who embraces a European lifestyle outside of the domestic space and falls victim to her uncontrolled sexuality, is a good example of this.<sup>30</sup> The glowing example of women’s emancipation set by Kemalist Turkey was set against its opposite, an unchecked and dangerous emancipation, in the public lecture “Right and Wrong Emancipation,” given in 1931 in Mostar, and published in the *Gajret* journal the same year.<sup>31</sup> The author, Vehbija Imamović, a secondary-school teacher and activist in the association, began his public lesson by showing his audience:

...two photographs. I’ll present a picture of an emancipated and progressive woman [*emancipovana i napredna žena*], who has all the qualities of the liberated woman in the right sense, and [secondly] that of a woman who thinks she’s emancipated, but in truth is not, as she has taken only the negative aspects of Western civilization.<sup>32</sup>

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*an Review* 13, no. 3 (2005): 459–79. For an overview of Turkish family and gender politics, in comparison with the Italian, Soviet, German and Spanish case, see Paul Ginsborg, *Family Politics: Domestic Life, Devastation and Survival, 1900–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

30 Enita Kapo, “Likovi žena u djelima bošnjačkih pisaca od Edhema Mulabdića do Ahmeda Muradbegovića,” *Godišnjak Bošnjačke zajednice kulture Preporod* 8 (2009): 323–40.

31 Prof. Vehbija Imamović, “Prava i loša emancipacija,” *Gajret*, no. 4 (1931): 84–5.

32 Imamović, “Prava i loša emancipacija,” 84–5.



This dualism, according to the author, could be found in every situation: “at home, in the family, in our associations, on the street and just about anywhere.”<sup>33</sup> The speaker focused primarily on the “picture” of a negative emancipation:

Emancipation meant removing the *zar* and *peča* [two traditional female garments covering the head and face of Muslim women], wearing their hair short, wearing a hat, painting their nails, even drinking alcoholic beverages, not to mention make-up and cosmetics, which have now become a daily necessity for the modern woman. Sadly, emancipation also means this: that it has become necessary to have scarves and blouses made with the most expensive silk, without consideration for their affordability. Emancipation also means this: that they send their children to a babysitter, or even leave them alone in the house, just to go to summer gardens to listen to gypsy music and stay out until late at night. “Emancipated woman” also means a woman who is lazy about caring for her father, brother or husband, letting them walk on the streets in miserable dress, ripped and worn out, without being bothered by this, while she dresses according to the latest fashions, and walks beside them without blushing. Not respecting any of the Islamic precepts, and worse still mocking them in public: this is also female emancipation... This kind of emancipated woman is not emancipated from the main characteristics of a primitive and backward woman [*primitivna i zaostala žena*], i.e. inactivity and laziness, and also gossip, defamation, envy, intolerance.<sup>34</sup>

The wrongly-emancipated body is identifiable here through notably erotic elements: makeup and short hair, and the latest fashion trends. According to Vehbija Imamović, this kind of emancipation brought about the ruin not only of a woman’s moral life, but also of her family as a cooperative unit; following the sirens of a wrong emancipation, a woman stopped collaborating for the common good of the family, sacrificing all for luxury and individual pleasure. “Father, brother and husband” are ruined and humiliated in public. The stress on women remaining economically inactive

33 Imamović, “Prava i loša emancipacija,” 84–5.

34 Imamović, “Prava i loša emancipacija,” 84–5.

(*nerad*), was a theme destined to gain increasing importance in the 1930s, when the consequences of the Great Depression reached Yugoslavia.

Where on earth was a “positive emancipation” to be found? For the author of the public lecture, it could be found in the Republic of Turkey. Turkey became the site of the most appropriate female emancipation, and female emancipation became the most powerful metaphor for the entire process of the regeneration of the Turkish nation. The author continues:

Last year I was on holiday in the Turkish Republic. Before going, I was naturally very curious to see the modern Turkish woman [*moderna turkinja*]. To be honest, I’m not sure I imagined I’d be presented with a good show, especially with regard to morality. I spent several days there, not only visiting Istanbul but also smaller places, and I was really surprised. I observed the Turkish woman in every situation, among the people, on the streets or in offices, in general, in every place where I found men. Everywhere I went I found seriousness, modesty, zeal, industriousness, bustle, and full devotion to their duties. I did not find any trace of licentiousness, nosiness, and the thing that surprised me the most, no trace of makeup or overdressing, what we encounter here amongst the people at every step.<sup>35</sup>

The author who found the definitive example of appropriate post-Ottoman gender relationships in the Turkish context was in good company. According to the Muslim progressives, the Kemalist gender regime was the most reassuring paradigm of emancipation. It proved that access to the public space, and even to politics, was possible for Muslim women, while carefully circumventing male anxieties connected to the end of patriarchal control over female bodies. Not surprisingly, for the entire interwar period secular progressives referred to the Turkish woman as the most vivid example for Muslim women in Yugoslavia.<sup>36</sup>

35 Imamović, “Prava i loša emancipacija,” 85.

36 Fabio Giomi, “Seduced by Gender Corporatism: Muslim Cultural Entrepreneurs and Kemalist Turkey in Interwar Yugoslavia,” in *Kemalism: Transnational Politics in the Post-Ottoman World*, eds. Nathalie Clayer, Fabio Giomi, Emmanuel Szurek (London: IB Tauris, 2019), 178–216.

## THE (UN)ISLAMIC VEIL

This conception of the Muslim woman question was not the only one that emerged among Muslim progressive circles in interwar Yugoslavia. Scholarly research often refers to a second group of Muslim progressives, one represented by the *vjerski modernisti* (religious modernists); that is, a group of Muslim intellectuals who mobilized Islamic modernism as their main intellectual frame of reference. Identifying less with nationalism, often employed within the Islamic institutions, these men developed a discourse in continuation of that of the pre-war Muslim intellectuals, seeing in Islam—and especially in a modernist interpretation of it—a rallying-point for Muslims in the first Yugoslavia. Of course, the frontier between these two groups was all but distinct; Muslims often had a mixed education, developed both in religious and non-religious schools. Many authors—such as Dževad Sulejmanpašić in 1919—were often capable of mobilizing both secular and Islamic progressive paradigms in the same text. In any case, the specific characteristics of this group, in terms of their intellectual references, their reasoning, and their proposed solutions, require specific treatment.

The “classics” of Islamic modernism circulating in interwar Bosnia were essentially the same as those being read before the First World War, and were republished several times. For example, in 1925 *Gajret* journal republished a 1913 text by the Ottoman modernist Celal Nuri Ileri (1877–1938) about Muslim women.<sup>37</sup> Around the same time, in 1926 another Muslim magazine started to publish the text “The Role of Women in Islam” as a series, written by one of the editors of the Berlin-based *Moslemische Revue*.<sup>38</sup> The principal means of circulating modernist ideas in Bosnia, however, was *Novi Behar* (New Blossom), in print between 1927 and 1945 in Sarajevo. The publication attracted the religious- and secular-educated intellectuals editing *Behar* before the Great War. Contributors included Safvet *beg* Bašagić, *reis-*

37 Dželal Nuri, “Pokrivanje žene i koprena,” *Gajret*, no. 24 (1925): 370–2; “Pravni položaj muslimanskih žena,” *Gajret*, no. 13 (1926): 195–7; “Muslimanska porodica,” *Gajret*, no. 21 (1926): 324–5; “Poligamija (višeženstvo),” *Gajret*, no. 23 (1926): 358–60; “Razvod braka i tjeranje žene,” *Gajret*, no. 1 (1927): 14–6; “Fizička i moralna dekadencija naših žena,” *Gajret*, no. 7 (1927): 108–10; “Aktuelno stanje muslimanske žene,” *Gajret*, no. 9 (1927): 141–3; “Potreba reforme muslimanskog braka,” *Gajret*, no. 17 (1927): 265–6; “Muslimanska žena u društvu i ekonomiji,” *Gajret*, no. 19 (1927): 297–9. On Dželal Nuri, see Günay Alpay, “Ileri, Djelal Nuri,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online, 2013, [http://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0361/](http://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0361/).

38 Sadrud-Din, “Uloga žena u islamu,” *Dulistan*, no. 3 (1926): 41–2.

*ul-ulema* Mehmed Džemaludin Čaušević, *kadija* Abdulah Ajni Bušatlić and Edhem Mulabdić, who for a brief period also edited the magazine. Though not formally connected to the association *Narodna Uzdanica*, the magazine very quickly began to publish all news relating to its activities in a dedicated column, showing its sympathy for the association.<sup>39</sup>

For the Muslim woman question, the main argument in modernist discourse was that practices such as the full veil and sexual segregation, though popular in Muslim society, were not to be considered Islamic practices at all—they ought to be considered to be mostly pre-Islamic habits that had spread throughout the Middle East before the time of the Prophet Muhammad. In his series of articles “The Woman Question in Islam”<sup>40</sup> published in *Gajret* in 1925, Osman Hadžić argued that the veil and segregation had been popular in the Arabian Peninsula well before the spread of Islam, and that they had also been popular among non-Muslims. On the contrary, Islam had brought to Muslim women new rights and protection, which in many cases were stronger than the ones enjoyed in Western Europe. According to this famous Muslim writer, “millions of Muslim women are still deprived of their rights [assigned to them in the Quran]; the high walls surrounding our courtyards, the slit-like windows, the bars on the windows of our houses and the *feredža*... pulled down over women’s eyes are the clearest markers of the social and cultural role played by women today.”<sup>41</sup> Incidentally, it is interesting to note that in 1925 Hadžić expressed himself in significantly different terms from those he used in 1894 (see Chapter Two), when he had claimed that veiling was not a practice that prevented women’s liberty. A few decades later, his point of view had changed, and he had adopted a clearly anti-veiling stance.

During the 1920s, and to a lesser extent in the following decade, prominent members of the Islamic hierarchy publicly expressed a modernist view on the Muslim woman question. One could cite *Reis-ul-ulema* Čaušević, of whom there will be reason to speak later, and Šukrija Alagić (1881–1936), teacher and activist of different Muslim cultural associations, the editor of *Novi Behar* and a leading figure in the Islamic institutions, who published a

39 Azra Kantardžić, *Bibliografija Novog Behara* (Sarajevo: Gazi Husrev-begova Biblioteka, 2007), iii–vii.

40 Osman Nuri Hadžić, “Žensko pitanje u islamu,” *Gajret*, no. 17–18 (1925): 259–60; 19–20 (1925): 301–2; 19–20 (1925): 324–5; 22–23 (1925): 344–6; 24 (1925): 369–70.

41 Hadžić, “Žensko pitanje u islamu,” 259.

text about the veil in 1934. Entitled “The Veiling Practice According to Islam” (*Hidzabul mer’etil fil islam*), the text was published in the yearbook of the association *Narodna Uzdanica*. It described the full veil as an “old custom that existed well before Islam and that continues to exist among people who know nothing of Islam. It can in no way be seen as a novelty introduced by Islam.”<sup>42</sup> Taking inspiration from a text written by Muhamed Tevfik Sidki, published in the Egyptian magazine *El-Menar* in 1910–11 and reproduced and commented upon in his text, the abolition of the full veil (a veil that completely covers the face) was primarily about eliminating a non-Muslim garment from Muslim life. According to Alagić, for Muslim women to show their faces in public was to purify Islam from unwanted contamination, and not to betray it.

According to Alagić’s reasoning, besides dirtying Islam, the veiling practice was also extremely harmful for the moral and physical integrity of women, and especially for the integrity of the Muslim community as a whole. The article made it clear that there were countless negative effects to completely covering the face. Since couples could not see each other’s faces before marriage, the veil was the cause not only of the numerous divorces afflicting Muslim families, but also of polygamy, a practice tolerated though certainly not encouraged by Islamic law. Covering faces was also an obstacle to the education of women, to poor women finding work and even to women’s health, given that the garment prevented them from breathing properly and enjoying the sunlight. At the same time, it encouraged a sense of mystery surrounding women’s bodies, making all women seem attractive in men’s eyes. Alagić went on to say that “from all this it can be understood that the *peča* [the semi-transparent black scarf covering the face] is the source of every ill, while not covering women’s faces is a guarantee of virtue [*krijepost*]; the *peča* is nothing but the source of our misfortunes and shame.”<sup>43</sup>

Though for men like Kurtović, Sulejmanpašić and Bulbulović, women’s dress ought to be transformed in order to comply with laws on social development, for men like Alagić the transformation ought to be justified from a religious perspective—that is, using the principal sources of Islamic law.

42. Šukrija Alagić, “Pokrivanje žene po islamu,” *Kalendar “Narodna Uzdanica”* (1934): 41.

43. Alagić, “Pokrivanje žene po islamu,” 44.

In that same article, the author supports his argument using different *suras*, *hadiths*, *tafsir* (interpretations of the Quran) and newspaper articles written by contemporary Muslim intellectuals. The main point of this second discourse was to prove that “uncovering the arms (the hands) and face”<sup>44</sup> was promoted rather than prohibited by Islamic scripture.

These two narratives certainly have some points in common. First and foremost, they recognized that the Muslims in Yugoslavia lived in a condition of “backwardness” (*zaostalost*) and that Muslims needed to find ways to “adapt” (*prilagođivanje*) to the new situation dictated by the “spirit of our times” (*duh vremena*). Secondly, both discourses accused the majority of religious officials of being ignorant of and instinctively opposed to any novelty, as well as to the *čaršija*, the urban Muslim economic elite. Aside from these two common arguments, the narratives diverge considerably. For most Islamic modernists, the aim was not to abolish the veil completely, nor was it to abolish the rules regulating women’s movements. Alagić, for instance, was not in favor of the abolition of every type of Islamic veil; he was merely opposed to the full veil which completely covered women’s faces, a garment that in Bosnia was known as the *jašmak*, the *vala* and more commonly the *peča*. A careful reading of Bosnian modernists’ work does not suggest in any way that they wished for a more radical transformation in women’s dress.

A sign of this moderation from Islamic progressives can be found in the final part of Alagić’s text, where he compiled a list of measures to counterbalance the risk of spreading immorality that the abolition of the *peča* could provoke. According to the Bosnian scholar, men and women who met in the street should lower their gaze and not look each other directly in the eye; men and women who were not in the same family must not, under any circumstances, be left alone and they certainly must not court; and women should only venture outside of the home if accompanied by a member of the family, preferably a man, etc. Moreover, according to Alagić, the abolition of the *peča* did not mean allowing complete freedom for Muslim women, in particular not complete freedom of movement. According to Alagić:

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44 Alagić, “Pokrivanje žene po islamu,” 44.

God the almighty prohibited women from venturing too far from their homes. Their nature—menstruation (*hajz*), pregnancy, childcare, caring for the family (*nifas*), breastfeeding, raising children—also prescribes this. Domestic chores also require this behavior, given that it is women’s duty, as housewives, to oversee the servants and organize all household activities.<sup>45</sup>

References are also made to different *surahs* in a bid to prove that the Quran only restricts women’s movements outside of the home. For instance, *surah* 33 is referenced to claim that “it is not nice for women to go out and about too much; it is dangerous for their activities as it eats away at their time and distracts their attention.” Movement outside of the house was therefore only permitted when absolutely necessary.<sup>46</sup> *Surah* 10 is mobilized to support Muslim women going out in search of an education: “to contemplate the beauty of nature and the arts.” Nevertheless, this type of outing was only allowed “from time to time, and not as often as is the case for European women today, who take part in any type of entertainment. Islam does not consent to this excess.”<sup>47</sup>

Even though secular and religious progressives established close relations, and especially at the end of the 1920s even tried to work together closely (see the following section of this chapter), differences remained in their vision of how the role of Muslim women ought to be transformed.

### WE’LL COME BACK TO GIVE YOU FREEDOM, SISTERS!

While the Muslim woman question was being reconfigured by secular and religious progressives, new voices began to make themselves heard from outside the Muslim community, those of feminist organizations. As seen in Chapter Two, the constitution of a Yugoslav state had made coordination easier between the different women’s organizations of the country. More present in the public debate, feminists were also more optimistic about the future of women in Yugoslavia. In the early 1920s, it seemed that Muslim women might also enter the Yugoslav sisterhood and join their fellow-citizens in the fight for social and political rights. This optimism was visible in

45 Alagić, “Pokrivanje žene po islamu,” 46.

46 Alagić, “Pokrivanje žene po islamu,” 46.

47 Alagić, “Pokrivanje žene po islamu,” 46.

many of the feminist journals, mostly—as already stated in Chapter Three, thanks to the pens of men from Muslim progressive circles. Hasan Rebac, for example, did so for *Ženski Pokret*, while Hamza Humo did the same for *Žena i svet* (Woman and the World), published in Zemun. Humo wrote about “Our New Muslim Woman”, painting an enthusiastic picture of changing Muslim women in the urban sphere, thanks to what he called “contact with European civilization.”<sup>48</sup> The latest news coming from the Republic of Turkey, where measures implemented by the Kemalst government openly promoted a transformation of gender relations, seemed to confirm that a rapid transformation of the status of Muslim women was now at hand. As stated for instance by a *Ženski Pokret* activist in 1923, the “New Turkish Woman” (*turska “nova žena”*) that the Kemalst regime was about to build, was “equal to man in terms of education, rights and duties,” and was the best proof of this imminent change.<sup>49</sup> And considering this, why should one not be optimistic about the future for Muslim women in Yugoslavia too?

Needless to say, feminist organisations did not simply give the floor over to progressive men regarding the Muslim woman question. In many cases, feminist women wrote directly on this topic, especially in *Ženski Pokret*. A text published in 1924, “For the Freedom of the Muslim Woman”, helps us to shed light on the feminist perception of the Muslim woman question in the early 1920s.<sup>50</sup> The author of this text, who writes in the first person, presents herself as a *Ženski Pokret* activist from Belgrade, who journeys to an unspecified village in Bosnia in order to pay a visit a Muslim woman belonging to a wealthy landowning family, and discover the life of Muslim women in her own country. Once she arrives in the remote unnamed town, the encounter between the traveler and the wealthy local Muslim woman is described as a long and complex ritual; having to wait or pass through various parts of the wealthy Muslim house, from the *selamlik* to the *haremluk*. Crossing the threshold, from the outside to the inside of the house, the place where women are finally accessible, is made possible through the mediation of one of the men of the house, in particular the lady’s son—“a young doctor,”<sup>51</sup> wearing glasses. Significantly, access to the Muslim women of the

48 Hamza Humo, “Naša nova muslimanka,” *Žena i Svet*, no. 12 (1926): 12–3.

49 Radinka Anđelković, “Nekoliko reči o muslimanki,” *Ženski Pokret*, no. 8 (1923): 354–60.

50 Sonja Feter-Čuk, “Za slobodu muslimanke žene,” *Ženski Pokret*, no. 1–2 (1924): 48–51.

51 Feter-Čuk, “Za slobodu muslimanke žene,” 49.



house is, in this story, made possible through the intercession of someone who is described as a male member of the Muslim intelligentsia.

Only after partaking of the traditional sweets and coffee “according to Muslim custom,” still in the presence of the young son, does the conversation between the author, the lady of the house, and her young daughter Aiša begin. The latter opens the conversation in a direct way, asking the traveler whether she is “a champion of women’s rights.”<sup>52</sup> Having received a response to the affirmative, the young girl openly laments the oppressiveness of her living conditions, particularly the veiling practice, the resistance in Muslim society to her education in schools, and the segregation imposed on Muslim women. After this speech, Aiša turns again to the Belgrade visitor and asks:

Thus you believe that we too should rid ourselves of our veils and circulate freely, given that we can bear this slavery [*ropstvo*] no longer? You believe that we too should have access to education, and that, imprisoned within the harem, we will never be able to have access to one?

Aiša is eager to show to the traveler how curious and thirsty for knowledge she is; she tells her that she reads a great deal, even the *Ženski Pokret* journal. Nevertheless, addressing the visitor from Belgrade, she adds: “what good does it do me to read, if I must live enshrouded by a veil [*moram da živim uvijena u zar*] and cannot even be among you, and must hide my desires?”<sup>53</sup> After having conversed for some time with each other, it is when they take leave of one another that Aiša once again addresses the activist, asking that she give her regards to her fellow feminists in Belgrade. “As soon as they have gained the right to vote” Aiša adds, “let them return to remove the veil from our eyes [*skinu nama zar sa očiju*], so that we too may contribute to securing complete freedom for women.”<sup>54</sup> In a crescendo of emotion, while she climbs into the coach that will take her back to Belgrade with her friend, the feminist activist casts a last look back at the house where the two women live, “toward the windows, which were covered by a grate. Behind

52 Feter-Čuk, “Za slobodu muslimanke žene,” 49.

53 Feter-Čuk, “Za slobodu muslimanke žene,” 49.

54 Feter-Čuk, “Za slobodu muslimanke žene,” 50.

it I was able to make out two graceful little heads, those of Aiša and Fatima [the second daughter], watching me as if to say, ‘sisters, do not forget us!’”<sup>55</sup>

Through the artifice of literature, the article offers an interesting insight into the perception that feminist activists from Yugoslavia could have of Muslim women. And indeed, this text makes an obvious if not explicit reference to the book “Letters from Niš Regarding Harems,” a semi-fictionalized portrait of life in the Muslim houses of Niš (Southern Serbia), during the years when the city was still a part of the Ottoman Empire, published in 1887 by one of the leading Serbian feminist and social reformers, Jelena Dimitrijević’s (1862–1945).<sup>56</sup> In this 1924 text, all of the topoi of what has usually been called feminist Orientalism can be found: Muslim women are represented by their European, non-Muslim counterparts as oppressed by the double prison of the veil and the harem, “enslaved and animal-like” (*rop-ski i životinjski*), to quote one vivid expression used in the article, and in desperate need of being saved by Western feminists.<sup>57</sup> Despite viewing patriarchal oppression as universal and transcultural, it seems that the *Ženski Pokret* activists recognized that Muslim women suffered from worse oppression than the other women of Yugoslavia. As stated in a different article also published in the same journal, Muslim women were “miserable on two accounts; as women and as Muslims.”<sup>58</sup> Like many other feminist activists of that period, Yugoslav feminists seem to have seen themselves as the saviors of their Muslim fellow citizens. Returning to the same rhetoric often used by European feminists in the colonized Muslim world, Christian feminists saw themselves as charged with saving Muslim women from the oppression imposed by Muslim society. These saviors here were not women of a foreign colonial power, but Christian, educated women from the urban milieu of the same country. Upon close inspection of the feminist author’s recommendations, it becomes evident that this process of salvation had its own specific features and agenda: it had to happen after victory had been won for non-Muslim women; non-Muslim women would be the ones to liber-

55 Feter-Ćuk, “Za slobodu muslimanke žene,” 50.

56 Jelena Dimitrijević, *Pisma iz Niša o haremima* (Belgrade: Narodna biblioteka Srbije, 1986). For a critical analysis of this text, see Svetlana Slapšak, “Haremi, nomadi: Jelena Dimitrijević,” *Pro Femina*, no. 15–16 (1998): 137–49.

57 Charlotte Weber, “Unveiling Scheherazade: Feminist Orientalism in the International Alliance of Women, 1911–1950,” *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 125–157.

58 Radinka Anđelković, “Nekoliko reči o Muslimanki,” *Ženski Pokret*, no. 8 (1923): 354–60.

ate Muslim women; and finally, this liberation had to coincide with the renouncement of the veil.

The author of “For the Freedom of the Muslim Woman” is unclear about one specific point—and this was the case for the feminist discourse as a whole—whether or not Islam per se could be considered to be an oppressive and misogynistic religion. At some point, she states that the *ulema* are to be blamed for female oppression, and especially for the veiling practice, “of which there is no trace in the Quran.”<sup>59</sup> A few lines later, she adds that Islam, no matter how much truth it might contain, “will be unpopular among the new generations of Muslim women, insofar as it reduces them to slavery.”<sup>60</sup> Reading these lines it is very difficult to say whether, from a feminist standpoint, being Muslim and being free were really compatible with each other.

The Yugoslav feminist discourse on the salvation of Muslim women was often accompanied by an openly hierarchical perception of the different female groups in the newly-established state. In other words, there were groups (Christians, Jews) that were more educated and on the road toward complete emancipation, and others (Muslims) that were not only very far from it, but also unable to achieve redemption on their own. An article series published by *Ženski Pokret* in 1925, and authored by Radenka Anđelković-Čubrilović, provides us with other elements for understanding the feminist perception of Muslim women. This long text, published in three parts and entitled “About Our Women”, gives an overview of the women of the different regions and religious groups in the country, giving each of them virtues and traits (Roma women, it goes without saying, are not even mentioned).<sup>61</sup> After having described all of the women in the country, at the very end of the text the author addresses Muslim women. Their position in Yugoslav society is described as “specific,” and depicted as completely removed from the historical transformations occurring at that time. Out of the mosaic of different women that made up the Yugoslav society in formation, Muslim women were considered to be the least well-off: “intelligent, keen, blessed with all qualities, but enslaved.” Such backwardness was deemed unjust, not only

59 Feter-Čuk, “Za slobodu muslimanke žene,” 51.

60 Feter-Čuk, “Za slobodu muslimanke žene,” 51.

61 Radenka Anđelković-Čubrilović, “O našoj ženi,” *Ženski Pokret*, no. 4 (1925):139–49; no. 5 (1925): 188–204.

compared to the lot of non-Muslim Yugoslav women, but also compared to other women in the rest of the Muslim world, in particular those from the Republic of Turkey:

Today our Muslim woman has the same role she had several centuries ago, while her sister in Turkey enjoys all civil rights and has the highest roles in society. While in our country her education is still a subject of mockery... the Muslim woman in the feminist East [*feministički Istok*, that is, in Turkey] walks without the veil just like us, holds public meetings and takes part in every activity of public life, even in state, military and political institutions.<sup>62</sup>

The very end of the article seems to express a certain sense of resignation regarding the future in store for Muslim women. According to the author, “it is up to Muslims to find a way to resolve this state of affairs”; thus, for the author the resolution of this issue ought to be left in the hands of the Muslim intelligentsia. Again, the Muslim woman question was discarded by non-Muslim feminists, and pushed back within the borders of the Muslim community space. The enthusiasm present in the aftermath of the First World War for a rapid and easy construction of a Yugoslav trans-confessional sisterhood seems to have been replaced by pessimism and disillusionment.

Others expressed doubts about the likelihood of a Yugoslav feminist sisterhood including Muslim women. Such is the case for Jovanka Šiljak (d. 1962), a feminist activist from Sarajevo engaged in many local female associations, including *Ženski Pokret*.<sup>63</sup> In a couple of texts published in the pages of *Đulistan* (The Rose Garden—a Muslim journal published in Sarajevo that will be described later in more detail) in 1926, Šiljak remarks that in the eight years that had passed since the unification of the country, representatives of every component of the female population in Yugoslavia had taken part in the fight for female rights. All but one group:

there is only one segment of our women, who for that issue did not take on any role, and those are the women of Muslim faith. Muslim women are at the

62 Anđelković-Čubrilović, “O našoj ženi,” 202–3.

63 Nusret Kujraković, “Đulistan, književnohistorijska monografija i bibliografija,” *Anali Gazi Husrev-begove biblioteke* 17, no. 31 (2010): 273–96.

margins. Their cultural and social role does not allow them to interest themselves in what happens outside of their own affairs. Religious customs keep Muslim women distanced from their sisters of different faiths.<sup>64</sup>

This bitter remark—namely, that it was impossible for Muslim women to become involved in the feminist struggle due to the cultural and social conditions in which they lived, is somewhat mitigated by the following considerations:

Women from Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia advocate the inclusion of Muslim women in this fight for women's rights. They aim for this because they do not know the mentality of Muslim women, they do not know their soul, their conception of life, marriage and family. Someone who does not know the inner life of the home, in the families of Muslim women, would think that the Muslim woman is the most enslaved member of society, and the most deprived of their rights. On that issue, I, in my experiences with the study of the role of Muslim women, can't agree with the women of other regions in our country. In my opinion, the Muslim woman is in many respects in a better position than we, her non-Muslim sisters. Sharia law gives to Muslim women rights greater than any other court in the country has given to women in any other province. The Quran, wherein the faith of Muhammed is integrally exposed, gives the right place to women, in the family and in the home. It protects women from all that can harm them.

Thanks to her proximity with Muslim women in Bosnia, Šiljak here denounced what nowadays we would call an Orientalist perception of Muslim women, imagined as intrinsically enslaved. At the same time, a more cautious, nuanced attitude is expressed here. Šiljak asks a rhetorical question; should Muslim women take part in the feminist movement?

Here is my idea; that we, their sisters, who are ready for that fight, should work for ourselves as well as for Muslim women. We should share all of the successes of our battles with them, as sisters. And while we fight, I would suggest to Muslim women that they, with work and education, prepare for

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64 Jovanka Šiljak, "Muslimanka i žensko pitanje," *Dulistan*, no. 2 (1926): 28–29.

the new time that will come, that will give to each citizen independently of their gender the same rights and the same duties. That time of social justice and education will come even for our Muslim women whose eyes are tied by customs, and not by religion. We must wait, and prepare for this Great Time [*veliko doba*].<sup>65</sup>

Šiljak seems to acknowledge that Muslim women were, in the mid-1920s, useless to the feminist cause; for this reason, they first had to prepare in advance the social and cultural conditions for their own participation in the emancipatory movement. Until then, Muslim women had to delegate, albeit tacitly, their agency to non-Muslim women, who could then lead the fight in their own place. In another article published that year in the same journal, Šiljak directly addressed Muslim women, calling them “my own sisters,” and warning them of the danger of moving too quickly:

With which instrument do you enter into the fight for freedom? I fear for you. I fear that you will fall... because of your haste. Remain in your rose garden [*đulistan*] and there prepare yourself, learn, toughen yourself up, ennoble your heart, and only then, when you will be capable of standing up high, high over all the evils that are begotten in liberty, only then will you be able to savor the taste of liberty, and that liberty will not stain nor empoison you.<sup>66</sup>

#### ADVOCATING LEGAL REFORM

Muslim cultural and feminist associations did not limit themselves to broad demands for the transformation of women’s roles, and of conditions that were considered to be unfit for modern times. Throughout the entire interwar period, these organizations were also at the forefront in asking for reforms in the laws that structured and maintained this sexual segregation, especially in civil law. As has been shown by a great deal of previous research, these political forces urgently called for civil rights reform in Yugoslavia, in order to make conditions for women more equal compared to men, especially in the domain of family and marriage law, and succession.

65 Šiljak, “Muslimanka i žensko pitanje,” 28-29.

66 Jovanka Šiljak, “Svojim sestrama,” *Đulistan*, no. 1 (1926): 6.

In this respect, since its establishment the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had turned out to be a veritable legal patchwork. In her book on female political engagement in interwar Yugoslavia, Jovanka Kecman highlights the fact that, although the population lived in one polity, each region had its own individual jurisdiction—Serbia and Macedonia, Vojvodina and Međumurije, Montenegro, Croatia and Slavonia, Slovenia and Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina—inherited from the pre-1918 period. At the same time, with the exception of Vojvodina, where civil marriage also existed, throughout the country the only possible marriage was a religious one, according to twelve different canonical legislations. Just in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were five different legislations, administered by five different canonical courts—Islamic, Christian-Catholic, Christian-Orthodox, Sephardic-Jewish, Ashkenazi-Jewish and Evangelical respectively. As regularly denounced by the feminists, the legal status of women in the first Yugoslavia varied radically, depending on the woman's place of residence and religion. Despite this difference, "in each jurisdiction" Kecman adds, "women did not have the same rights as men. Their role was regulated by obsolete laws and customs that sanctioned the inequalities between the sexes, and in family and marriage assigned to the father and husband the role of the head of the household."<sup>67</sup> This position of inequality, which has already been underlined, was sanctioned by the exclusion of women from active and passive suffrage, and also further entrenched by labor legislation (see Chapter Five).

Since the establishment of the new state, many political actors in Yugoslavia had spoken out in favor of changing this situation, which clearly represented a major obstacle to the creation of an integrated, homogenous Yugoslav society. Among the most vocal promoters of the unification of the kingdom into a single jurisdiction, there was of course the Democratic Party, which in the name of its strong commitment to the Yugoslav idea vocally expressed its support for sweeping away legal pluralism, to replace it with the principle of one state, one right. Legal experts and lawyers were also very vocal in their demands for the unification of rights, a necessary measure for eliminating the endless disputes between different courts that the existing legal patchwork systematically set off in many domains. Among the most vocal supporters of a unified family law for all Yugoslavia, there

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67 Kecman, *Žena Jugoslavije*, 56–62.

was for instance Bertold Eisner, professor at the University of Zagreb, who in 1934 proposed a reform in this domain, with aims to improve conditions for women in the country.<sup>68</sup> Feminist movements were also relentless in their demands for the end to a situation that generated inequality, drawing up and submitting many memorandums and declarations to the government and the different political forces throughout the entire interwar period. In any case, the unification of the different legal systems turned out to be a chimera; with the exception of the adoption of a unified criminal law code in 1929, successive governments in Belgrade were unsuccessful in producing any marked advancements in the domain of civil law. A project for a unified civil code, essentially modeled on the legislation of the former Habsburg provinces, was presented by the government in 1934, but it remained dead letter and was never discussed by the Parliament. As lamented by Kecman, “no action [undertaken by feminists in the interwar period] for the transformation of legal conditions for women, within the framework of the existing state, produced any results.”<sup>69</sup> Thus it was up to activists of all sorts to navigate in, and fight against, this patchwork of legal systems.

Because they were mainly centered around the northern provinces, feminist networks mostly dealt with the improvement of the civil status of Christian women in their area, and only episodically ventured into the complex and highly specialized domain of the reform of sharia law. In Bosnia, and in the areas inhabited by Muslim populations, it was principally Muslim male intellectuals who became the most vocal in calling for Islamic law reform, a set of norms that—it is useful to recall—in the interwar years applied only to issues of personal status, family and inheritance law, and pious foundations. In the 1920s, these men used cultural associations and the press in order to support different projects of sharia reform, and to popularize them within the Muslim population all over the country. However, it is worth stressing that the overwhelming majority of Muslim intellectuals never called for the complete abolition of Islamic courts in Yugoslavia. Rather, Muslim intellectuals asked for a reform of them in accordance with the “spirit of the times.”<sup>70</sup>

68 Bertold Eisner, *Privatno-pravni položaj žene po današnjem pravu Jugoslavije i njegovo uređenje u jedinstvenom Građanskom zakoniku za Jugoslaviju* (Belgrade: Globus, 1934).

69 Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 63.

70 Fikret Karčić, *Šerijatski sudovi u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941* (Sarajevo: Fakultet islamskih nauka, 2005), 98–100.



In its efforts to direct the wind of reform into the domain of Islamic law, *Gajret* in particular supported different pro-reform voices coming from within the Islamic institutions, and in particular from the ranks of the *kadija*, or judges of Islamic law. It is not by chance that these officials were associated with the reform movement; in the Ottoman and post-Ottoman world these were figures known for their high level of education, and they often acted as reformers in different contexts, for example in Albania and Turkey. In the Bosnian case, the *kadija* had been educated since 1887 at the School for Sharia Judges, founded in Sarajevo by the Habsburg authorities, and transformed in 1937 into the Higher Islamic Theological School (*Viša islamska šerijatsko-teološka škola*).<sup>71</sup> This pedagogical institution, which gave its graduates access to a university education, offered a particularly broad curriculum, including Islamic, Latin and German law, the Arabic, Turkish and German languages, as well as history, math and many other topics. Thanks to this training, the men who went through the school felt comfortable with both Ottoman, Islamic and European cultural traditions and generally became more receptive to the idea that there might be a need to reform sharia law. As we saw in Chapter One, *kadija* were the most likely social group to send their children of both sexes to a state school in the late nineteenth century, take part in associational life and adopt non-traditional lifestyles. Moreover, during the interwar period *kadija* were considered to be both officials of the Yugoslav state (they administered the law in the name of his Royal Highness the King, and were paid by the state treasury) and officials of the Islamic institutions.<sup>72</sup> All of these features made the *kadija* something of a transitional figure, capable of mediating between state and religious institutions, between secular intellectuals and Islamic scholars, and between different legal and cultural traditions.

The most significant example of these transitional figures of reform can be found in *kadija* Abdullah Ajni Bušatlić (1871–1946), who during the interwar period enjoyed the constant support of *Gajret* in his projects to reform Islamic law in Bosnia and Yugoslavia. Born in Vlasenica in Eastern Bosnia, Bušatlić had completed his education at the *medresa* in 1891, and

71 For an overview of the evolution and pedagogical contents of these institutions, see Omer Nakičević, "Šerijatska sudačka škola: Fakultet islamskih nauka," in *Zbornik radova FIN-a*, ed. Omer Nakičević (Sarajevo: Faculty of Islamic Studies, 1994): 125–33.

72 Ibrahim Džananović, *Primjena šerijatskog porodičnog prava kroz praksu vrhovnog šerijatskog suda 1914. – 1946.* (Sarajevo: Fakultet islamskih nauka, 2004), 23.

at the School for Sharia Judges in 1896. After his graduation, he served as *kadija* in several Bosnian towns, an experience that had allowed him to acquire a very sound knowledge of the legal practices of the different Islamic courts of the province. Alongside his work as judge, since 1911 Bušatlić had been working as a professor in the same School for Sharia Judges in Sarajevo, a position that he occupied until his retirement in 1930. Besides his professional activities, he also proved himself to be highly industrious in the establishment of a Bosnian Muslim social life, actively participating in the establishment and early life of *Gajret*, as well as writing for different Muslim journals.<sup>73</sup> His position, calling for a comprehensive reorganization of Islamic law in Yugoslavia, is most visible in two article series published by *Gajret* journal in 1925–1926, entitled “Islamic Marriage Law” and “Muslim Family and Kinship Law.”<sup>74</sup> In this series, Bušatlić covered all of the most important provisions for Islamic marriage according to the Hanafi school: the circumstances for contracting a marriage (*šuruti nikah*), opposition to a marriage (*džihaz*), dowries (*mehr*), the rights and obligations of the contractors, divorce (*talak*), and so forth. Moreover, in 1926 Bušatlić proposed a first systematization of his interpretation of Islamic family and inheritance rights, and how to reform it, in a book entitled “Muslim Family Law and the Right to Succession,” which was even presented to the Congress of Yugoslav Lawyers the following year.<sup>75</sup> By the mid-1920s, *kadija* Bušatlić had already earned the reputation of being one of the most important Muslim reformers in the country.

A close reading of these two texts allows us to better understand the contents and limits of *kadija* Bušatlić’s project of juridical reform. On the condition of women, the Bosnian judge begins his reflection by stating one very clear point: the deep conviction that sharia was generally more favorable to women than European law, insofar as it gave women more autonomy to dispose of their wealth as they pleased, and to ask for divorce if they considered their husband to have failed in his marital duties. According to Bušatlić, the

73 Azra Gadžo-Kasumović, “Hafiz Abdullah Ajni-ef. Bušatlić,” *Anali Gazi Husrev-begove biblioteke* 10, no. 17–18 (1996): 323–333.

74 Hafiz A. Bušatlić, šer. sudac, “Muslimansko bračno pravo,” *Gajret*, no. 12 (1925): 182–3; 17–18 (1925): 268–72; 19–20 (1925): 308–11; 21 (1925): 330–3; 22–23 (1925): 358–60; 24 (1925): 377–9. Hafiz A. Bušatlić, “Muslimansko roditeljsko i rodbinsko pravo,” *Gajret*, no. 17 (1926): 268–71; 18 (1926): 283–6, 19 (1926): 292–3, 19 (1926): 298–9, 20 (1926): 312–14, 21 (1926): 331–33, 22 (1926): 345–6.

75 Abdulah Bušatlić, *Porodično i nasljedno pravo Muslimana: Glavne ustanove i propisi* (Sarajevo: Islamska dionička štamparija, 1926).

problem with sharia lay not in its general principles, but in how they were put into practice. Thanks to his extensive experience as a judge in several Islamic courts around the province, Bušatlić vehemently denounced the abuses that were regularly committed at the expense of Muslim women by Muslim men. In particular, their isolation and ignorance made these rights in many cases illusory in reality, insofar as women did not know their own rights, and had to suffer abuses from male family members, with the collusion of judges and other religious officials.

Even in this domain, it is interesting to note the Muslim progressive intellectual's interest for the newly established Republic of Turkey, and for the policies being implemented under Mustafa Kemal's leadership. In an article from 1924, to support his idea of a general reform of this issue, Bušatlić wrote enthusiastically of the reforms in family law that were developing in Turkey at that time, and the discussions around family rights law (*hukuki oile kanun-namesi*). What interested him was that in the Turkish case, even "intelligent Turkish ladies" (*inteligentne turske dame*), took part in the debate on this topic through the press, showing themselves capable of giving relevant advice on these matters.<sup>76</sup> Even though he was positively disposed toward the reforms in Turkey, which had completely abolished polygamy, the *kadija* proposed for Yugoslavia a less radical solution. In his articles Bušatlić suggested that measures be introduced aimed at protecting women's rights in case of divorce, especially reducing the right of the husband to unilaterally repudiate his wife. In the meantime, the *kadija* also proposed to drastically restrict—but not abolish—the cases in which polygamy could be considered permissible, a practice that was in any case very rare in Bosnia.<sup>77</sup> Unfortunately for Bušatlić, throughout the interwar period his proposals for reform were to remain dead letter.

#### VOICES FROM THE MARGINS

As we have seen thus far, the social position of Muslim women was a constant subject of preoccupation for several actors throughout the 1920s—men and women, religious and secular, Muslim and non-Muslim. Although

76 Hafiz A. Bušatlić, "O mnogoženstvu i razvodu braka kod muslimana," *Gajret*, no. 17 (1924): 270–3.

77 Bušatlić, "O mnogoženstvu," 270–3.

their ideas differed, they at least shared one common one: that the social position of Muslim women in Yugoslavia had to change, and that that change could only be brought about through confessional and sexual desegregation, and in some cases, by ending the veiling practice. But what about Muslim women themselves? Did they participate in the public debate on post-Ottoman gender relations? And when they did, how did their word differ in respect to the discourse of other agents—Muslim progressive men, non-Muslim feminist women—busy debating the Muslim woman question?

One fact should be borne in mind when seeking to answer to these questions: for the entire interwar period, the number of Muslim women that took part in the public debate—on the Muslim woman question as much as on any other topic—remained extremely limited. And this despite the fact that the years that preceded the Great War, in which a growing number of Muslim women were speaking out in public, might have led one to imagine a different future. This absence had already been remarked on by contemporary observers, such as the journalist Maksim Svara, who proved to be an astute observer of the social transformations of his Muslim fellow citizens in Sarajevo. In 1931 for example, assessing the emancipation of Muslim women in Yugoslavia and in other Muslim contexts, he was particularly pessimistic, yet largely accurate, in his assessment of the (lack of) participation of Muslim women in the debate concerning their own private and public life. According to Svara, at least until then, among the Muslims of Bosnia there had been “no woman who, not even from a far distance, can be compared to Halide [Edib Adıvar] *hanuma*,” who, more than any other woman had “spoken out for emancipation.”<sup>78</sup> Far from being something that should be taken for granted, this silence needs then to be addressed and explained.

To be sure, if Muslim women were almost totally silent in the Bosnian and Yugoslav public debate, this was in part because the first Muslim women to take their first steps in public writing at the very end of the Habsburg years did not continue their literary careers after the war. If we follow the life trajectories of the Muslim women mentioned in Chapter Two, we can see that they stopped writing in the early 1920s, for different reasons. Nafija Sarajlić, who, with the launch of her short story collection *Teme* in 1913 had become

78 Maksim Svara, *Emancipacija muslimanke u svjetu i kod nas* (Sarajevo: Komisiona naklada J. Studnička i dr., 1931), 38.

the first Muslim woman to publish in prose, soon abandoned writing. According to some sources, this decision was connected to the death of one of her children. As a result, this left her husband Šemsudin Sarajlić, who on the contrary continued to be a prolific author, as the only remaining writer in the family.<sup>79</sup> Well before her death, Nafija Sarajlić's pioneering role had been almost completely forgotten. Šefika Bjelevac, the second promising pre-war Muslim writer, episodically republished her works in the early 1920s, but she rarely issued new material. There is little information on her life; according to some sources, Šefika Bjelevac was criticized in particular in interwar Sarajevo for her emancipated style of dress, and her too-Western lifestyle. This constant criticism from her social milieu, which became in many cases violent, purportedly sent her into a depression, followed by a serious respiratory illness, which provoked her death. Even the collective memory of Šefika Bjelevac, still alive during her lifetime, rapidly disappeared after her death. Finally, teachers like the Berberović sisters decided for unknown reasons not to take up the pen after the war, preferring to invest their energies in their families and professional lives and, in the case of Hasnija, in volunteering.<sup>80</sup>

The few Muslim women who started writing in the interwar period did so from the pages of the Muslim progressive press, *Novi Behar* and in particular *Gajret* journal. In the case of the former, the Bosnian women who saw their texts in print wrote short poems, dealing with "female themes."<sup>81</sup> And for the latter, Muslim women wrote mostly in prose; what seems to have been a common trait among the women who put pen to paper for *Gajret* journal, unsurprisingly, was that they were usually members of the cultural association itself. In 1924, a certain Asija Kavazević, to whom the association had granted a scholarship, published in *Gajret* journal a long poem celebrating both the role of the association in awakening a sense of national identity in the Muslim female population, and praising King Petar I Karađorđević—"Serbian

79 Nafija Sarajlić, *Teme* (Sarajevo: Dobra Knjiga, 2010): 11. Sarajlić's complete works would only be published in 1986, 16 years after her death.

80 For this information, I used Ajša Zahirović's notes (see footnote 95, Chapter Two).

81 Munevera Čalkić, "Novac," *Novi Behar*, no. 7–10 (1939–1940): 113, Senija Dizdarević, "Bratu Ekremu i Nusretu," *Novi Behar*, no. 16 (1928–1929): 249, Hatice Hatip, "Stolareva kćerka," *Novi Behar*, no. 23 (1933–1934): 353–4, Jasmina, "Jeseni štimung," *Novi Behar*, no. 9–13 (1935–1936): 145, Jasmina, "Ne može biti istina," *Novi Behar*, no. 7–8 (1935–1936): 104, Jasmina, "Sreća," *Novi Behar*, no. 4–5 (1936–1937): 64, Dževahira Kadrić, "Slučaj," *Novi Behar*, no. 21–23 (1937–1938): 345–6, Makkbula, "Ramazanske noći," *Novi Behar*, no. 6–9 (1936–1937): 91, Fikreta Pjanić, "Prosjak," *Novi Behar*, no. 5 (1941–1942): 158, Fikreta Pjanić, "Prosjakinja," *Novi Behar*, no. 1–6 (1939–1940): 52.

falcon... Karadžorđe's fortunate son, whose soul soared to heaven"<sup>82</sup>—in his role as unifier of the country. Alongside schoolgirls, primary-school teachers were also making their voices heard in the public space. The teacher Suada Muftić, for example, a former pupil and then activist of the association, published in 1932 a long text entitled "*Gajret* and the Education of Muslim Women."<sup>83</sup> It is no surprise then that her article, drawn from a lecture she had given at the *mevlud* (the celebration of the birthday of the prophet Muhammad) organized by the *Gajret* female branch in Sarajevo that year, celebrated *Gajret's* role in improving access to female education by providing numerous student scholarships, running student dorms, and schools for the education of housewives.<sup>84</sup>

During the 1930s, when the first Muslim women were beginning to further their education in Yugoslav universities (see Chapter Five), few female Muslim university students raised their voices in public. In 1938, Razija Šerifović, probably a student at the Faculty of Medicine, published in the same review a text entitled "On the Relationship Between Intelligence and Desire", in which she demonstrated her mastery of the ideas of several Western thinkers such as Newman, Lombroso and Fichte.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, the Muslim woman who was by far the most prolific author in the interwar years was probably Razija Handžić. Born in Banja Luka in 1909, she received her education at the local high school from 1920 to 1924 and continued her education at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade from 1928 to 1941, thus becoming one of the first Muslim women to gain access to a university education, and to experience mobility inside the country. In contrast with older generations, she continued to publish in several Bosnian Muslim and more broadly in Yugoslav literary reviews even after her marriage in 1934.<sup>86</sup>

As can easily be gathered from these examples, the few women who did decide to speak in public—or to be more precise, those who were permitted to speak in public through the journals directed by Muslim progressive men—were all different examples of the "New Woman" that the Mus-

82 Asija Kavazević, "Protektoru Gajreta," *Gajret*, no. 21 (1924): 294. On Asija Kavazević's scholarship, see ABiH, FG, 2, 1140, *Gajret* female student dorm (July 30, 1921).

83 ABiH, FG, 13, 2847, GOG to Ministry of Education (June 30, 1932).

84 Suada Muftić, učiteljica, "Gajret i prosvjeđivanje muslimanki," *Gajret*, no. 21 (1932): 344–5.

85 Razija Šerifović, "Odnos inteligencije i volje," *Gajret*, no. 1 (1938): 4–5.

86 On Razija Handžić, see Hamid Begić, "Handžić, Razija," in *Leksikon pisaca Jugoslavije*, vol. 2 (Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 1979), 363. For critiques and a bibliography of Handžić's most important works, see Zahirović, *Od stiha do pjesme*, 221–2.

lim progressive elite was trying to promote among the broader population: young, educated, economically independent, sometimes patriotic and nationalist. From the pages of the progressive press, these women showcased a modern, Western-like femininity, while at the same time carefully avoiding the thorniest issues embedded in the interwar Muslim women question, including the veil.

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to think that the only Muslim women to raise their voices in the public space were those close to cultural associations and who shared, completely or partially, the ideas of the Muslim progressive elite. On the contrary, if we take other Muslim publications into account, it appears clear that women had and expressed very different opinions on the Muslim woman question, and in particular on the Muslim progressive obsession with the veil.

It already seems fairly clear that, in the midst of the 1919 debate that followed the publication of Dževad Sulejmanpašić's famous thesis, all Muslim women were neither dreaming nor waiting for a rapid end to the veiling practice, and an end to sexual segregation. In the weeks that followed the publication of the pamphlet, as already mentioned in Chapter Three, a certain Šadija wrote a direct reply to the progressive intellectual in the pages of the Muslim newspaper *Vrijeme* (Time). This woman took to the pen and spoke out against the thesis of the young Muslim progressive man, thus endorsing the condemnation of his ideas by religious officials in the pages of the same journal.<sup>87</sup> In her article, Šadija strongly defended the need for the veil for any morally-intact Muslim woman. In her text, she also ruled out any form of education that implied Muslim women exiting the private sphere. In Šadija's words, "we will not distance ourselves from our natural calling [*poziv*], we will not complete PhDs, we will not become lawyers, engineers and so forth; instead we will be good mothers, capable wives and hard-working housewives [*dobre majke, valjane supruge i vrijedne domaćice*]. Let these three aims be a rallying-point for the progress of female education."<sup>88</sup>

There is no doubt that Šadija was clearly expressing here conservative ideas on gender relations, and established a clear distance between appropriate Muslim femininity and a non-Muslim, Western one, ruling out fe-

87 Ibn Muslim, "Muslimanko žensko pitanje" *Vrijeme*, no. 1 (1919): 2, 12 (1919): 2–3, no. 14 (1919): 2–3.

88 Šadija, "Jedna nemila pojava u nezgodan čas," *Vrijeme*, no. 1 (1919): 4.

male higher education and access to extra-domestic employment. Interestingly enough, by expressing such a conservative view, Šadija's text was at the same time a subversive act; even though she refused to sign her article with her full surname, this woman was addressing Dževad Sulejmanpašić, a man, in an unusually straight-forward manner. Moreover, the author of the anti-veiling thesis was not just anyone; he was highly educated and came from one of the richest, and most respected, Muslim landowning families in the province. Contesting this intellectual's ideas required, for a woman, a certain dose of bravery.

We might of course ask ourselves who Šadija was. Without a family name, clear identification is impossible, and makes it difficult to say something of her social background, leaving the door open to speculation. Her mastery of the Serbo-Croatian language, accurate references to nature and Islam, and self-assurance, could lead us to imagine that she was a member of an important Muslim family, with a certain degree of education, and probably that she was older than Sulejmanpašić. Coming from the same class as her intellectual rival, and of a more advanced age, it seems more understandable that she had the assurance to address this prominent intellectual in such a direct manner.

In the following years, other women spoke out to distance themselves from the anti-veiling discourse of Muslim progressives. The medium that became a vector for expressing these ideas was *Dulistan*, a short-lived journal published in Sarajevo in 1926. Its promoters described their initiative as striving to "uplift Muslim women, culturally and socially."<sup>89</sup> Its members were well-known intellectuals such as Safvet *beg* Bašagić, Šemsudin Sarajlić and especially Salih Ljubunčić, who both had a personal and political proximity with the JMO. By claiming that their aim was to "solve our most important social question, the question of our women,"<sup>90</sup> this group of men clearly stated their position in the political arena, between what they considered to be two opposing fronts. According to them, one side aimed for "the unveiling of the Muslim woman in a revolutionary way, pushing her into life and society in order that she become emancipated, and be herself... [and] reach full cultural and social development." Needless to say,

89 Uredništvo, "Uvodna riječ," *Dulistan*, no. 1 (1926): 1.

90 Ahmed Ljubunčić, "Kulturno i socijalno podizanje naše žene," *Dulistan*, no. 1 (1926): 10.



this was clearly in reference to *Gajret* and its supporters, who promoted female emancipation mostly outside of an Islamic conceptual framework. The group saw itself as being trapped between this former, and “the second front, definitely more sizeable than the first, whose ideas are rooted in tradition and customs,”<sup>91</sup> meaning here the silent majority of conservatives that made up the Islamic institutions. For the *Đulistan* group, the need to transform the position of women in accordance with the needs of “modern times” (*suvremenost*) was not synonymous with “*bubikopf*,”<sup>92</sup> shimmy,<sup>93</sup> skirts, and other sins of European culture.”<sup>94</sup> As an alternative, they promoted the gradual emancipation of women, “within the boundaries of Islam.”<sup>95</sup> In order to achieve its goals, this group also tried to launch an association, which initially succeeded in establishing male and female branches in Sarajevo and Mostar, and through them gained some supporters from the ranks of elderly women from wealthy Muslim families. However, *Đulistan* as both a journal and an association was extremely short-lived; launched in March 1926, by May the group and its journal had already disappeared.<sup>96</sup>

During its short life, *Đulistan* marked itself out with its interest for women writers. As stated by Nusret Kujraković, the organizers “insisted on involving women in... resolving the woman question, and put texts written by women in every page of their journal.”<sup>97</sup> Several dozen women sent their texts to be published in the few issues brought out by this journal. Women, especially from the province, sent their contributions to the journal, more often in verse, and sometimes in prose, showing open enthusiasm for this new forum of discussion. Judging from this journal, it seems that the number of women willing to write in public was growing even among the Muslim population.

A good example of the women who, thanks to *Đulistan*, had access to public writing, is that of Nira Bećirbegović-Filipović, from the small town of Bugojno. In the journal’s second issue, this woman published an article entitled “Women’s Educational Role in Society.” Even though there is no information about this woman in the text, a link can be made between her family name and

91 Ljubunčić, “Kulturno i socijalno,” 9.

92 From the German, a hairstyle for women popular in the 1920s.

93 Popular dance in the 1920s, characterized by a rapid shaking of the body.

94 Ibrahim Džafi, “Naš ideal,” *Đulistan*, no. 1 (1926): 8.

95 Uredništvo, “Poziv žene,” *Đulistan*, no. 2 (1926): 1.

96 Kujraković, “Đulistan,” 273–96.

97 Kujraković, “Đulistan,” 277.

the Filipović landowning family, one of the richest in Bosnia.<sup>98</sup> Here again, the author begins her text by praising education as the only way to prevent the economic and cultural marginalization that Bosnian Muslims were considered to be victims of. Her reference to economic decadence is important, as in the mid-1920s the Muslim land-owning families were paying the consequences of the agrarian reforms. One interesting point in Bećirbegović-Filipović's text is her attack on conservative forces, and in particular the *ulema*, who for decades opposed female education. According to this woman, "we live in a phase of economic and cultural decadence. The only solution is education. Mothers need to know how to educate and have moral strength."<sup>99</sup> The conservative attitudes that were extremely widespread in Muslim society were deemed to be principally responsible for this state of affairs. However, the author was no less dismissive of pro-Western progressives:

I disagree with the over-liberal aims of our Youth, who—surely *bona fide*—ask for the revolutionary unveiling of Muslim women. We, Muslim women, we do not look for extreme European emancipation. We are aware that this kind of emancipation would put us into an even worse condition of slavery. We cannot agree that revolution is the path to bringing us the desired goal. Today pushing Muslim women into the vortex of life means condemning her to inevitably fall... Evolution and progress! That is the right way, and education—its tool.<sup>100</sup>

Thanks to her social status, this woman from the province was able not only to write against the traditional Muslim leadership for their historic opposition to female schooling, but also against intellectuals based in Sarajevo who, in the name of progress and evolution, were ready to open to women an emancipation deemed to be "extreme" and "European." She continues:

Let me say just a few words. Many in our movement have started to look to things that are not in any way compatible with the rules of perfect Islam. They think that our ideal is those [women] to which Western European Culture gave full liberty, those who can all alone, without protection, visit different clubs, balls, take walks, and so on. But all who think in this way are wrong.

98 Kamberović, *Begovski zemljišni posjedi*, 332–6.

99 Nira Bećirbegović-Filipović, "Odgojna uloga žene u društvu," *Dulistan*, no. 2 (1926): 24.

100 Bećirbegović-Filipović, "Odgojna uloga žene u društvu," 24.

We, in such “liberty,” see an even greater slavery than the one in which we are today. We do not want that kind of liberty. On the contrary! We fear it.<sup>101</sup>

Though very rare in number, these texts suggest that ideas about appropriate gender relations were extremely diverse among the Muslim female population.

### THE 1928 VEIL CONTROVERSY

Throughout the 1920s, the progressives’ vocal demands for the reform of gender relations went substantially unchallenged in the public sphere. Ideas like those of Sulejmanpasić and Bušatlić, ostensibly capable of seducing just a small minority of Muslim notables, were only episodically openly contested in journals and newspapers. The conservative forces, overwhelmingly dominant in Islamic religious institutions, displayed little interest in the press, and even less in public writing in general, which thus remained for a long time the exclusive playground of the progressives. Of course, this does not mean that conservative *ulema* gave in to the progressive agenda; on the contrary, they fully mobilized their social reputations in defense of the need for the Muslims of Bosnia to remain loyal to the gender regime inherited from Ottoman times. In order to achieve this goal, it is likely that they preferred to use traditional tools, such as *hutbas* (sermons given at the mosque), or lessons in religious schools, leaving the written public sphere to the progressive forces. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to state that while progressives were masters of the written word, the conservatives’ stronghold was orality.

The conservative religious officials’ attitude of indifference to the written word suddenly changed in 1928, when they decided to outspokenly defend their position against reformist challenges in the public debate. This turning-point, which would irretrievably transform the makeup of the Muslim public sphere, deserves here to be analyzed in detail. The story begins at the end of the previous year. On December 6, 1927, the *Gajret* central branch enthusiastically announced to the press its intention to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation. According to the association’s leaders, the principal goal of the anniversary was to celebrate *Gajret*’s leading civilizational role among Bos-

101 Bećirbegović-Filipović, “Odgojna uloga žene u društvu,” 24.

nian Muslims, and it would therefore be a large-scale event. The celebrations were meant to involve both the central and local branches of the association throughout the country, with a vast array of events all throughout the coming year; rallies, public speeches, parades, parties, etc. Following a well-established tradition among Muslims in many parts of the world in the early twentieth century,<sup>102</sup> *Gajret's* leaders also chose to organize a Congress of Muslim Intellectuals. The Congress, which represented the culminating point of the celebrations, was opened formally to all educated and socially active Muslims in the country and had ambitious aims to publicly debate the different cultural, economic and social problems affecting the lives of Muslims in Yugoslavia.<sup>103</sup> To be held in Sarajevo in September 1928, the congress would be open to a vast array of individuals and organizations. First of all, delegates of the principal Muslim associations of Bosnia were invited, and representatives from Muslim philanthropic organizations like *Merhamet*, *Osvitanje* and *Hurijet* agreed to participate. *Narodna Uzdanica*, the rival cultural association close to the JMO, was also invited but understandably did not take part in the celebration. In keeping with *Gajret's* gender and national agenda, Serbian cultural associations like *Prosvjeta*, and feminist organizations like *Ženski Pokret*, were also invited to take part in the event. Even if there were some notable absences, the Congress nevertheless provides us with a kind of Estate Generals of the different associational networks operating in the region at that time. In addition to these organizations, which we might say represented the secular notables, the central branch extended invitations to members of the Islamic religious hierarchy, in particular to the *kadija* and to the members of the *Ulema-medžlis*. All of these different actors were invited to take part in what was announced as an important occasion for taking stock of the association's first quarter-century of life, but also of the first 40 years of life after the Ottoman Empire, and of the first 10 years in the new Yugoslav state.

In order to lend the highest degree of legitimacy to the Congress, the *Gajret* central branch decided to ask the head of the Islamic religious hierarchy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the *Reis-ul-ulema* Mehmed Džemaluddin

102 Martin S. Kramer, *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congresses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 10–25.

103 "Pripreme za proslavu Gajretove 25-godišnjice," *Gajret*, no. 2 (1927): 161–2. Ibrahim Kemura, "Kongres muslimanskih intelektualaca u Sarajevu 1928. godine," *Prilozi Instituta za istoriju*, 17 (1980): 175–90, Adnan Jahić, *Islamska zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini za vrijeme monarhističke republike Jugoslavije (1918–1941)* (Zagreb: Islamska zajednica u Hrvatskoj and Medžlis islamske zajednice u Zagrebu, 2010), 290–9.

Čaušević, to chair the entire conference. By this time, Čaušević—as it has been mentioned in Chapter Two—had already established a well-grounded reputation as a reformer. Xavier Bougarel has pointed out that in the Bosnian Muslim educated landscape, Čaušević occupied a very specific position, as “someone hovering between the *ilmija* [the class of the Islamic religious officials] and the intelligentsia.”<sup>104</sup> Born in 1870 in a remote village near Bòsanska Krupa in Western Bosnia, he had attended the *medresa* in Bihać, and after 1887 continued his studies at the prestigious Faculty of Law (*Mekteb-i Hukuk*) in Istanbul. In the following years, he had travelled a great deal throughout the Ottoman, and even Muslim world, spending time in Cairo in particular. In Istanbul and in Cairo, Čaušević discovered the ideas of Muhammad Abduh, an Egyptian Islamic jurist, religious scholar and liberal reformer, regarded as one of the key founding figures of Islamic Modernism. In his writings, Čaušević often referred to Abduh as “my beloved master.” Once he returned to Bosnia, his career blossomed rapidly within the religious institutions; by 1905, he had already become a member of the *Ulema-medžlis*, where he mostly dealt with educational issues. Since this period, Čaušević had publicly supported avant-garde ideas that were at that time circulating in the Muslim world. He advocated the adoption of schoolbooks in Bosnian for the religious schools, asserted the legitimacy of credit according to Islamic law, and called for the Muslim railway workers to wear caps instead of the fez. His career within the religious institution did not prevent him from working closely with a rising group of Muslim secular intellectuals. In 1903, he had participated in founding *Gajret*, and in 1906–07 was also chief editor of the most important Muslim literary journal, *Behar*. Even after his appointment to the charge of *Reis-ulema* in 1913, Čaušević had not lost contact with Muslim secular intellectuals, both publicly and privately, showing himself capable of bridging the gap between secular progressives and religious notables.<sup>105</sup>

Čaušević did not fail to highlight his progressive orientation at the press conference held in December 1927, which formally launched preparations

104 Xavier Bougarel, “Le Reis et le voile: Une polémique religieuse dans la Bosnie-Herzégovine de l’entre-deux-guerres,” in *L’Autorité Religieuse et ses limites en terres d’islam. Approches historiques et anthropologiques*, eds. Nathalie Clayer, Alexandre Papas, Benoit Fliche (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 109–58.

105 Enes Karić and Mujo Demirović, eds., *Reis Džemaludin Čaušević: Prosvjetitelj i reformator*, 2 vols. (Sarajevo: NIPP, Ljiljan, 2002).

for the celebrations. He indulged in praising the main Muslim cultural association, asserting among other things that *Gajret* was “capable of taking an interest in all issues affecting Muslims’ lives.”<sup>106</sup> As an even clearer sign of his recognition of the Muslim secular notables’ legitimacy, he invited “the Muslims wearing the hat”<sup>107</sup>—a garment that was usually associated with pro-Western progressive intellectuals—to go to the mosques and to give sermons “from the *ćur*,”<sup>108</sup> the high-backed chair from which the *imam* speaks. These words implied that secular and religious notables were equally legitimate guides of the Muslim community. In the same speech, he also brought up the topic of *vakuf* administration, which in that same period was under discussion within religious institutions. Čaušević mentioned the reforms implemented by the Republic of Turkey and its centralization of *vakuf* administration—a measure that had been met with a great deal of disapproval by religious scholars in many parts of the Muslim world, seen as contrary to Islamic principles. Čaušević, on the contrary, considered the decision to be a positive one, and saw it as an opportunity to best put this property, too often misused, to the service of the changing needs of the Turks.<sup>109</sup>

This open endorsement of secular reformists, Bosnian and Turkish alike, set off rumors in town. Pressed by journalists, two days later Čaušević confirmed what he had said and, again, publicly sang praise of Turkey, which he had recently visited, saying that he had come back with “the best impressions.”<sup>110</sup> In this second meeting with the journalists, he also expressed his sympathy for the Kemalist campaign against the fez and the veil. Indeed, in Turkey in 1925, measures had been adopted banning the male fez, and discouraging the female veil throughout the entire country. Needless to say, this measure had also provoked strong opposition, not only in Turkey but also in other Muslim countries, where several scholars condemned these measures as anti-Islamic.<sup>111</sup> With regard to the veil question, Čaušević was even more explicit, stating that “female veiling is a deep-rooted custom,

106 “Konferencija muslimanske inteligencije u Gajretu,” *Gajret*, no. 24 (1927): 383–4.

107 “Konferencija muslimanske inteligencije u Gajretu,” 383–4.

108 “Konferencija muslimanske inteligencije u Gajretu,” 383–4.

109 “Konferencija muslimanske inteligencije u Gajretu,” 383–4.

110 “Važne izjave Reis-ul-uleme,” *Jugoslavenski list*, December 10 (1927):3.

111 Sevgi Adak, “Anti-veiling campaigns and local elites in Turkey of the 1930s: a view from the periphery,” in Cronin, ed., *Anti-Veiling Campaigns*, 59–85.

but uncovering the face does not go against religious precepts.”<sup>112</sup> Openly displaying his Islamic modernist ideas, the *Reis-ul-ulema* did not hesitate to add that he “would be much more favorable toward a Muslim woman who, with her face uncovered, honestly earns her living in a shop or in a workshop, than toward a Muslim woman who, with her face covered, strolls in the streets and frequent cafés at night.”<sup>113</sup> It is important to recall that in his declarations, Čaušević—like most Islamic progressives—only mentioned the possibility of abandoning specific garments that covered the face, the afore-mentioned *peča*, *jašmak* or *vala*, and not those that covered the hair. Even if nothing that he said seems to point to more radical transformations in female dress, the press immediately presented his statement as standing against any kind of veiling.

Declarations of this sort did not take long to trigger astonished and opposing reactions, especially from other religious officials. In early 1928 many important religious figures, particularly two *ulema* from Mostar and Tuzla, Ali Riza Karabeg (1868–1942) and Ibrahim Hakki Čokić (1871–1948), as well as the Banja Luka *muftija* and former president of the JMO Ibrahim Maglajlić, publicly expressed their sharp disapproval of Čaušević’s words. *Džematski medžlis* (local religious assemblies) from Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla and Banja Luka publicly declared their opposition to the *Reis-ul-ulema*’s statement, asking other Islamic institutions to take a clear stand on this point. The JMO central branch refused to take an official position, stressing that this kind of debate went outside of a political party’s legitimate area of interest. The choice made by Spaho’s party was far from surprising; the JMO, which aimed to remain the sole political representative of Muslims in the province, carefully avoided any position that risked firing up disputes within the population, and thus a potential loss of votes. However, in late January the local JMO branch in Sarajevo publicly attacked Čaušević’s statement, arguing in the press that “Our faith is in danger!” and even “Down with the Reis!”<sup>114</sup> Without a doubt, Čaušević’s declarations about the female veiling practice provoked one of the most serious crises of the entire interwar period in the Muslim community. In early July, the Sarajevo *Džematski medžlis* also renewed its attack against Čaušević in the

112 “Važne izjave Reis-ul-uleme,” *Jugoslavenski list*, December 10 (1927): 3.

113 “Važne izjave Reis-ul-uleme,” 3.

114 “Istup JMO protiv Reis-ul-uleme,” *Jugoslavenski list*, January 27 (1928): 4.

press, openly accusing the *Reis-ul-ulema* of having “allowed, praised and recommended the emancipation of Muslim women in a European sense, that Muslim women be unveiled, in order to mix and come into contact with all men, a thing that is forbidden by the Quran itself.”<sup>115</sup>

The arguments from religious figures who in early 1928 opposed Čaušević’s statements deserve to be analyzed more closely. In his “Treaty on the *Hidžab*,” Ali Riza Karabeg cited the Quranic verses stating that, according to the Hanafi law school, women are obliged to cover their faces before strangers. However, this was not all; in his text, the author also pressed home that any potential transformation of Islamic precepts had to be adopted according to the *idžma*, the principle of “consensus” among Muslim thinkers. According to this Muslim scholar, reverting to *idžtihad*—“free exegesis” of Islamic sources, which Islamic modernism is based on—was not the remit of Bosnian scholars, and ought to be rejected. Exegesis “needs certain minimal material conditions, such as a perfect mastery of the Arabic language, and an exhaustive knowledge of the Quran and the *hadiths*, and it is evident that these circumstances do not exist in our country.”<sup>116</sup> Karabeg’s critique thus addressed not only the content of the *Reis ul-ulema*’s statements, but also the intellectual process that had brought him to this conclusion. Particularly offensive for the conservatives was the fact that he had expressed such significant legal opinions alone, without consulting other members of the *Ulema-medžlis*. Here again, the debate on the Muslim woman question was also a debate about who had the legitimacy to speak. With some irony, Karabeg accused the *Reis-ul-ulema* of trying to establish “a fifth Kemalist *mezheb*,” a new Islamic law school inspired by the promoter of secularism in Turkey, and beyond the four traditional currents already in existence.<sup>117</sup>

Accusations of a similar gravity came as well from Ibrahim Hakki Čokić. In his short treatise “About *Tesettur*—The Veiling of Muslim Women,” the scholar also insisted that the *Reis-ul-ulema* planned to “Kemalise”<sup>118</sup> (*kemalizirati*) the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and thus to follow in the footsteps of a political regime that had turned its back on Islam. Once again, it is worth highlighting the fact that Kemalist Turkey remained a fundamen-

115 *Apel na hodžinsku kuriju*, quoted in Bougarel, “Le Reis et le voile”, 114.

116 H. Ali Riza Karabeg, *Rasprava o hidžabu: Krivenju muslimanki* (Mostar: Hrvatska tiskara F.P., 1928), 13.

117 Karabeg, *Rasprava o hidžabu*, 17.

118 Ibrahim Hakki Čokić, *O teset-turu: Pokrivanju muslimanki* (Tuzla: Štamparija Petrović, 1928), 43.



tal pole for these Muslim social actors, who used it to position themselves in the debate, and in the interwar public discussion more in general. Voicing the fears of other conservative *ulema*, Čokić seems to have been more concerned about the risks of Muslims becoming assimilated into a broader national community than about the backwardness of Muslim society; as he highlighted in his text, “a people that wants to exist has to have its own symbols and signs. If it does not have them, it more or less dissolves... We do not want to dissolve as Muslims, we do not want to be absorbed into others. We want to exist first as Muslims.”<sup>119</sup> In other words, for this conservative *ulema* learned man the idea of integrating a broader, interconfessional national community was equated with “assimilation,” and with a renouncement of Muslimness, and thus with the loss of authenticity—a perspective to be avoided at all costs.

In these months of public controversy, however, Čaušević was not alone in his thinking. Several members of the Islamic religious hierarchy, including the Mostar *muftija*, openly expressed their support for Čaušević’s ideas in the press. *Kadija* Bušatlić in particular went to great lengths to defend the *Reis-ul-ulema* from conservative attacks by publishing a brochure on “The Question of Muslim Progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” in which he spoke out in support of Čaušević and proposed deep reforms for the Islamic institutions.<sup>120</sup> This text was followed in May by a series of articles in *Novi Behar* entitled “On the *Tesettur* or *Hidžab*, the Veiling Practice Among Muslim Women.” This article series served as a counter-attack to Karabeg and Čokić, and gave an interpretation of Islamic sources compatible with what had been stated by Čaušević.<sup>121</sup> In doing so, these men drew on the example of other Muslim societies of their time, such as Egypt, Yemen, Afghanistan, or Iran where certain groups of women did not wear the face-veil.

*Gajret* activists, and secular intellectuals more in general, also made a great deal of noise on the subject, and in these months, their enthusiasm reached its zenith. The impression of having the *Reis-ul-ulema* on their side nourished unprecedented hopes in the ranks of the progressives, who strove to show support for their new champion. Public meetings were held in Sarajevo, Mostar,

119 Čokić, *O treset-turu*, 31.

120 Hafiz A. Bušatlić, *Pitanje muslimanskog napredka u Bosni i Hercegovini: Povodom poznatih izjava g. Reisu Uleme i drugih* (Sarajevo: Vlastita naklada, 1928).

121 Hafiz A. Bušatlić, “O ‘treseturu’ i ‘hidžabu’ (pokrivanju) kod muslimanki,” *Novi Behar*, no. 1–2 (1928): 15–6; no. 3 (1928): 37–8; no. 4 (1928): 57–8; no. 5 (1928): 69–70; no. 6 (1928): 88–9; no. 7 (1928): 104–5.

Banja Luka and Tešanj as a sign of their support and gratitude, and Čaušević's thesis calling for reforms of the *vakuf*, the veil and the hat, was publicly endorsed. In Sarajevo, the atmosphere was so tense that in early 1928 a group of progressive intellectuals led by Dževad Sulejmanpašić established *Reforma*, a short-lived "organization of progressive Muslims," who hoped to unify all progressive Muslim intellectuals in the country, in particular to reconcile *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica* against their common foe: the conservative forces represented by the JMO and the majority of religious officials. For the resolution of the Muslim woman question as for many other issues, the organization openly drew inspiration from Kemalist Turkey, described as a Muslim success story on the road to progress.<sup>122</sup> In the meantime, other Muslim intellectuals close to *Gajret*, like Osman Nuri Hadžić, cited the pre-Islamic origins of the veiling practice, while Edhem Bulbulović had no reservations in condemning it as a "regional custom that has nothing to do with Islam."<sup>123</sup>

Intended to rally Muslim notables around *Gajret*, Čaušević's statements provoked on the contrary an intense polarization around the two fronts; on one side the progressives, who were in favor of the partial or total de-veiling of Muslim women, and on the other conservatives, who on the contrary considered this to be a dangerous, assimilationist, anti-Islamic move.

If we consider the people who took part in this debate, the controversy seems to have remained mostly within the bounds of the Muslim elite. State actors, as well as non-Muslim associations conspicuously kept themselves out of the debate, and even the country's feminist organizations observed it from the periphery, leaving the arena open to Muslim male notables. It is true that on December 15 of the same year, the *Ženski Pokret* local branch met the *Reis-ul-ulema*, and obtained declarations from him in favor of improving women's schooling.<sup>124</sup> The feminist journal from Belgrade *Žena i Svet* also headlined, with unjustified enthusiasm, that following the statement of the *Reis-ul-ulema* in Bosnia "The Veil Falls".<sup>125</sup> However, aside from this article, feminist organizations did not much enter into the debate, implicitly considering the debate to be something internal to Muslim society.

122 Fabio Giomi, "Reforma – the organization of progressive Muslims and its role in interwar Bosnia," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 29, no. 4 (2009): 495–510.

123 "Reforme među muslimanima," *Večernja Pošta*, January 7 (1928): 1.

124 "Ženski pokret kod Reis-ul-uleme," *Jugoslavenski list*, December 15 (1927): 3.

125 "Feredža pada," *Žena i Svet*, no. 2 (1928): 12.

## SPEAKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Almost without exception, the story of the 1928 debate was presented as a men's affair. It is true that, in the first half of the year, when the controversy had reached its zenith, few Muslim women tried to speak out in the press, and to take up a position in the debate between conservatives and progressives, and thus kept themselves on the outskirts. The rare voices that did were all published in the non-Muslim press, in particular the newspaper *Politika* (Politics), which closely followed the evolution of the debate. Though this information is interesting, it is difficult to interpret. One hypothesis for explaining this lack of female involvement is linked to the nature of the debate in itself. The 1928 polemic, apart from being a discussion about the legitimacy of the veiling practice, was first and foremost a settling of accounts between two segments of the Muslim (male) elite around a specific point: who should be deemed the most fit to speak on behalf of Bosnian Muslims, and who was the best equipped to lead them through the agitated waters of the post-Ottoman era. In this muscular confrontation for leadership, room for the direct engagement of women appears to have been extremely limited. In a sense, one could say that in 1928 the debate on the Muslim woman question was deemed too important to allow Muslim women to have a say in it. Moreover, the harshness with which it polarized, not even sparing the most important and respected figures of the community, such as the *Reis-ul-ulema*, surely discouraged at least some women, whose reputations were far more highly policed than those of men, from being potentially interested in participating in the debate. Notwithstanding these circumstances, a few Muslim women did dare to enter the debate, and it is their voices that we will turn to next.

The women who entered the 1928 debate had fairly differing profiles, so it would be an error to reduce them to a single voice. However, one trait that seemed to unite them all was their rejection of the dichotomy of veiled vs unveiled by which Muslim male notables had characterized the debate. Women in general tended to relativize the importance of this garment, focusing more on social questions, such as female access to education and to a decent job. A group of five anonymous women from Banja Luka, interviewed by the daily newspaper *Politika*, spoke favorably of the "noble declarations of our blessed *Reis-ul-ulema*." These women stated however that "in

the midst of this economic crisis, when we are literally dying of hunger, it does not even cross our minds to discuss hats, modern items of clothing or other luxurious and dissolute clothes, which go by the name of fashion.” In this short text, the Muslim women reminded the interviewer of their own priorities: “we need bread, air and sunlight, to which, like any other living creature, we have the right.”<sup>126</sup> Interestingly, in these lines the veil (though not mentioned directly) is implicitly reduced to its material dimension—a garment, a piece of clothing, comparable to many others. At the same time, the reference to air and sunlight, formulated as a right, suggest that these anonymous women were in favor of ending sexual segregation, the gradual abandonment of the veiling practice, and in general granting Muslim women, at least to some extent, greater access to the public space.

If these Muslim women from Banja Luka remained anonymous in the press, others used their own name. Unsurprisingly, the two who did were elementary school teachers from Sarajevo. The first was Hasnija Berberović, former president of *Osvitanje* and volunteer of the association *Gajret*. It is particularly interesting to see the way in which *Politika* presented this Muslim woman to its readers; she is qualified as a “Muslim woman-intellectual” (*muslimanka-intelektualka*) and a “diligent and tireless pedagogue,” a marker of the respect she enjoyed in Sarajevo at the time. Meaningfully, Berberović—who also went unveiled—like the women from Banja Luka, never mentions the disputed item of clothing at all. In a rather unexpected way, instead of positioning herself in the debate relative to her male peers, she points to a different issue altogether: she criticizes instead the treatment that the press typically reserved for Muslim women, often describing them as ignorant and socially inactive individuals, unfit mothers only capable of bringing shame to their family and to the entire community. This statement sounds just as critical of the Muslim progressive (and at least to some extent, feminist) press, and their unquestioning reproduction of the European Orientalist discourse. In her conversation with the journalist, Berberović highlights the fact that, far from the cliché reproduced by journals, real Muslim women “might not know algebra and physics, but they are educated in other ways,”<sup>127</sup> such as in religion and embroidery, and are thus bearers of an in-

126 “Protiv feredže i za feredžu,” *Politika*, January 12 (1928): 3.

127 “O otkrivanju muslimanki,” *Jugoslavenski list*, 14 (1928): 3.

tellectual and practical knowledge transmitted informally and orally that should not be ignored or negated.

In the interview, Berberović goes on to point out what she considers to be other erroneous and hypocritical traits in the Muslim progressive notables; in particular the fact that on paper they called for the creation of modern, educated couples in the Bosnian Muslim community, but that in practice tended to choose non-Muslims, and often non-Bosnians, as their spouses. And indeed, a rapid overview of the biographies of some of the principal promoters of the emancipation of Muslim women seems to confirm her statement: Dževad Sulejmanpašić married a Slovenian physician, Hildi; Avdo Hasanbegović a Serbian physician, Halka; Hasan Rebac married the Serbian writer and philosopher Anica Savić, and so on. Hasnija Berberović stressed how this choice by Muslim educated men had had harmful effects on the first wave of educated Muslim women; regarded with suspicion by the vast majority of the Muslim population because of their education, educated Muslim women were thus condemned to a lonely life of celibacy. The pain and resentment expressed in these lines was not purely hypothetical, but was probably also closely tied to Berberović's personal trajectory. As we shall see in the following chapter, she never married, and dedicated her entire life to pedagogical and associational work.

Of course, not every Muslim woman who entered the 1928 debate avoided expressing clear-cut ideas about the main issue at hand, the veil. Another Muslim teacher from Sarajevo, Nafija Baljak, also spoke out. The information on this author is extremely scarce. She was born in 1906, so she belonged to a younger generation than that of Hasnija Berberović. She spent her life working as a primary-school teacher in Sarajevo, did not marry and did not wear the veil. Nafija Baljak was one of the rare Muslim women to be an activist of the *Ženski Pokret* Sarajevo branch—in which she regularly organized literacy courses for women in her spare time—and to define herself as a feminist in the press.<sup>128</sup> Also interviewed by *Politika*, Baljak spoke out in favor of banning the veil and gave the *Reis-ul-ulema* Čaušević as her main political reference, saying of him: “we should kiss the ground on which he walks for his interest in our survival and progress.”<sup>129</sup> Here again, her point

128 ABiH, PDS II, Nafija Baljak.

129 “O otkrivanju muslimanki,” *Jugoslavenski list*, 14 (1928): 3.

of view differed significantly from that of her male counterparts. She did not support abandoning the veil for collective reasons—that is, in order to improve the position of the Muslim community as a whole—but mostly for individual reasons. According to Nafija Baljak, the veil ought to be abandoned when the woman herself perceived it to be in contrast with her own desires, and when it was perceived to be an obstacle to her professional life.

#### AN EMPTY-HANDED RESULT

The controversy that had been set off approximately seven months earlier around Čaušević's speech saw a turning-point in early July. At the request of the *Džematski medžlis* of Sarajevo, a statement was issued by the collective body in charge of the election of the *Reis-ul-ulema*. The discussion took place between the July 7 and 10, 1928 and, according to a local newspaper, the collective body was substantially divided across three equal fronts: those who supported Čaušević's statement, those who openly opposed it, and those who had not expressed any clear opinion.<sup>130</sup> The Statement (*Takrir*) officially made at the end of the long discussion was, however, largely hostile to the ideas of the *Reis-ul-ulema*. Clearly rejecting Islamic reformist assumptions, it denied the right to resort to *idžtihad* and stressed the importance of the principle of consensus among scholars for introducing any change to the domain of religious rules. On the veil question in particular, the Statement stresses that:

Sharia law ordered [women] to cover all body parts with the exception of their faces and hands, unless in the presence of their husband or specific members of their family. Women may only show their faces and hands, and men may only look at them, if they are absolutely certain that it will not stir any feelings or passion. If there is any doubt of their moral strength, men will not look and women will cover their faces and hands, unless some necessity, recognized by the sharia (medical examination, etc.) arises.

With this document, the Islamic religious authority reaffirmed that the Muslims of Bosnia should remain loyal to the Hanafi Sunni interpretation

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<sup>130</sup> "Zaključci vijećanja hodžinske kurije," *Jugoslavenski list*, July 10 (1928): 2.

of sharia law, overtly considering the veiling practice to be a religious duty. However, a few lines further the statement seems to allow some room for indulgence concerning female work, stating that “a Muslim woman who is strong [enough] from a moral standpoint can work in handcraft, commerce, can study and do any respectable activity, under the restriction underlined above, which does not present any obstacle to leading a fully satisfactory social and family life.”<sup>131</sup> This ambiguous wording generated some misunderstanding, pushing some Bosnian journals to consider the entire declaration to be in favor of Čaušević’s thesis.

Nevertheless, there is one point on which the statement is undeniably clear: that “popular customs opposing the sharia, fashion and seduction, and the aspiration to draw closer to (unite with) our brothers of different blood and faith”<sup>132</sup> could never be a good reason for introducing a change in religious rules. This point is of primary importance, insofar as it establishes a clear hierarchy between the different political projects expressed at that time by Muslim notables. Opposing the advocates of nationalization—that is, the integration of Muslims into a broader national community—the authors of the statement stressed that the brotherhood between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens had to be subordinated to, and could not contradict with religious belonging. As had already been expressed by Ibrahim Hakki Čokić a few months earlier, the Muslims of Bosnia had to consider themselves first of all as Muslims; any eventual integration of the Muslim population into broader national communities should not weaken this primary religious belonging. Here again, different attitudes toward appropriate gender relations reflected conflicting views on which community Muslims should primarily give their allegiance to.

With the promulgation of the *Takrir*, the 1928 controversy slowed its pace. In the following months few intellectuals put pen to paper on the topic, and both fronts seemed to be tired of discussion for a while. It was the Congress of Muslim Intellectuals, held on September 6 and 7 of the same year, that brought the Muslim woman question back to the stage. Opened at the Cinema Apollo, one of the most elegant venues in town, the Congress received significant coverage from the Bosnian press. Alongside other topics—communal schools and the *vakuf*, alcoholism and illiteracy, the mod-

<sup>131</sup> *Takrir* (Sarajevo: Bosanska pošta, 1928), 5.

<sup>132</sup> *Takrir*, 5.

ernization of farming techniques and so on—the Congress held a panel on the “Muslim woman question.” The panel, chaired by Čaušević himself, gave the participants the opportunity to repeat the same ideas they had expressed a few months before, with no substantial change. This time, however, in order to find common ground, the participants agreed to downgrade the veil question in favor of other more consensual questions, like the educational issue. In the discussion, two women even took the floor to express their opinions, in particular the *Ženski Pokret* activist Jovanka Šiljak, who vehemently expressed her support for rapid access to education and salaried work for Muslim women, claimed the veil to be incompatible with modernity and launched into a passionate speech in favor of the vote for women. Significantly, no Muslim woman intervened in the debate.

At the end of the panel, a small group of activists, including Hasnija Berberović, wrote a resolution, to be adopted by the plenary assembly that would close the Congress. This text turned out to be a text of compromise. It reaffirmed the principles on which there was a clear consensus among Bosnian Muslim notables. First of all, that the economic and cultural backwardness of the Muslim community was closely linked to the status of Muslim women. Secondly, that this situation was due to an erroneous interpretation of sharia law. The text continued by stating that “according to the most competent Islamic scholars, schooling and economic activities are not forbidden to Muslim women.”<sup>133</sup> Recalling the numerous articles published by Busatlić in the 1920s, the resolution also denounced the abuses and misinterpretations of Islamic law in Bosnia regarding family matters, which were contrary to the rights of women. Not one word was devoted to the veil. After ten months of controversy, the question of the veil, which had been at the origin of the debate itself, was sacrificed on the altar of a temporary pacification.

#### MAKING SENSE OF SILENCE

At the end of this exploration of the debate on Muslim post-Ottoman gender relations, it is worth addressing a point that has been mentioned only incidentally until now: why, in a period in which Muslim women were

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<sup>133</sup> “Žensko pitanje,” *Gajret*, no. 20 (1928): 350–1.



slowly but steadily gaining access to secondary and even higher education, to volunteering and to work, did they not become more visible in the public debate? In other words, how do we explain the enduring silence of Muslim women in Bosnia without falling into the essentialist assumption that Muslim women were naturally indifferent to the public eye? Nafija Baljak, the aforementioned unveiled teacher close to *Ženski Pokret* and *Gajret* who in 1928 had no hesitations about standing up in support of Mehmed Džemaluddin Čaušević and his statements, is one example that can help us to debunk this theory. In 1935, Baljak decided to transmit a 9-page handwritten text to the *Gajret* central branch, probably a public lesson she had given that year in Gornji Vakuf, in central Bosnia, entitled “The Role of our Muslim Female Intellectuals,” and likely with the intention of submitting it for publication in the association’s journal. Whatever her goal was, this note represents one of the extremely rare personal analyses of the constraints and consequences for Muslim women who chose the path to public life. In doing this, Baljak provides us with several invaluable elements to explain the difficulties Muslim women could encounter when they decided to play a more active role in the public space as teachers, activists and writers.

In this text, Baljak positioned herself as a pro-Western woman, and made explicit her highly positive view of Western technological and material advances in the twentieth century, and of their effect on individual lives. Under the pressure of progress, according to the Bosnian teacher “our minds have started to wake up—I’m referring to women—thanks to the education given to them.”<sup>134</sup> The condition of Muslim women, inherited from Ottoman times, is described by Baljak in very negative terms, “as a sick person at the end of a long illness. In this way,” she continued “even our women woke up from a condition dating from the eleventh century or even before, and bravely we crossed the thresholds of our fathers, who until then protected us with the warmth of paternal love.”<sup>135</sup> Education, abandoning domesticity, and access to the public space go hand in hand here. In this text, Baljak considers herself to have become a Muslim female intellectual (*muslimanka intelektualka*), as a result of this awakening process.

134 ABiH, FG, 27, 202, Nafija Baljak, “Položaj naše prve intelektualke” (February 28, 1935).

135 ABiH, FG, 27, 202, Baljak.

Nevertheless, in Baljak's view, this enthusiasm for the effects of such a change was short-lived. For Muslim women, adopting a modern way of life came at an especially high price. Women who chose to play an active role in the public space, especially teachers and activists, regularly came face-to-face with the heavy consequences of their choice, due to resistance in Muslim society. Her criticisms were not only directed at religious leaders and the uneducated masses, but also at the educated bourgeois elite. According to the author "the uncontestable truth is that nowadays there are two groups, a higher and lower social stratum, and that neither of them welcome the teacher with trust." The educated upper classes looked upon them "with irony," as "the lesser evil," and were averse to granting them any social respect. Things were not any easier among the working classes:

The eyes of the people are on the teacher more than any other person. For her, laughing, having fun, using make-up like her non-Muslim colleagues—means she is immediately considered immoral [*nemoralna*]. Our people are not used to seeing women—be she single or married—well-dressed, with make-up every day... if she is seen in the company of men, of a colleague or of someone else at least twice, she is irremediably condemned as immoral. If she socializes with someone who has political enemies—immediately she is immoral. If she listens to the gramophone alone at home in order to counter boredom in the evening, in that case she is immoral. If she is a *Gajret* scholarship-holder, and she finds herself in a place where the supporters of the association are a minority, she is deemed immoral, be she purer than the sun. If she is a member of *Sokol*, if she does physical exercise with them, she will be considered to have sunk so far into the mud of immorality that she can never again be considered to be of the honest people.<sup>136</sup>

These bitter words, pronounced by a teacher about her life, highlight several very interesting points. Baljak strongly stressed the vulnerability of female teachers. There was apparently a high price to pay for choosing to adopt a Westernized lifestyle. For Muslim women, not only leisure activities and consumption practices, but also regular professional activities, like interacting with male colleagues, had high consequences. What is so inter-

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<sup>136</sup> ABiH, FG, 27, 202, Baljak.

esting here is that a Muslim woman who had spent her life working and volunteering openly talked about the cost of this choice. The political enemies of the associations could attack a woman at any time, and destroy her social position, using morality as a lethal arm. The consequences of this state of affairs directly affected the public role of Muslim women.

Even if you have a strong will, it is hard to live in such an environment without losing hope. It is difficult to stay indifferent, it is difficult... to work with someone who regularly attacks you with the most sacred value of honest people—Morality. Yes, it is difficult. And it is exactly for this kind of difficulty that teachers lose the will to work, both in the field of education and culture, as well as in writing. Of course, in her spare time she would love to dedicate herself to these activities, but in these circumstances...! The feeling of injustice is painful to her, at every single step. How thorny is the path of the female teacher...<sup>137</sup>

This bitter tone is nevertheless only momentary. At the end of her text, Baljak stressed again the need to act, to engage in social work, to counter this state of affairs. Several countries gave her hope. One was Soviet Russia, where “for the first time a woman has reached the post of General of the Army,” thus penetrating into one the most masculine professional activities. But for her too, as was the case for her male counterparts, the model par excellence was the Republic of Turkey: “We all know very well that, today, there is a woman sitting alongside the men in Parliament, and that she also decides the fate of the young and great Turkey. This shift in the East did not happen immediately, but step by step; thanks to a gradual evolution, she obtained not only education but also equality.”<sup>138</sup> Interestingly, Baljak stressed here the importance of political rights and equality. The last lines are full of hope and admiration for the achievements of Turkish women: “let us take inspiration from these progressive women and let us follow in their steps, because what is impossible to one woman, becomes possible together.”<sup>139</sup>

<sup>137</sup> ABiH, FG, 27, 202, Baljak.

<sup>138</sup> ABiH, FG, 27, 202, Baljak.

<sup>139</sup> ABiH, FG, 27, 202, Baljak.

Baljak's words, criticizing both the higher and lower classes of Muslim society, expressing in very blunt terms the life and experiences of Muslim women living in the public space, also resolutely encompass the conquest of political rights in the process of female emancipation. It is not surprising that this text remained lost in the archives of the association in Sarajevo, and never reached the pages of the *Gajret* journal.

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Although different from each other in their goals and dominant intellectual references, the post-war secular progressive, Islamic progressive and feminist discourses radically reshaped the terms of the Muslim woman question. With Sulejmanpašić's crucial publication, new arguments were openly advanced in order to produce a change in gender relations: that the contemporary needs of society should take precedence over tradition; that Muslim women had to be educated to become economically active, and that the imperatives of modern society were stronger than Islamic injunctions for female domesticity; and that Muslim women needed to discover and foster a sense of sisterhood with their non-Muslim fellow nationals. As a result, after 1918 it was no longer possible to reduce the Muslim woman question to a debate about education.

Like in other areas of the world inhabited by Muslims, in Yugoslavia, too, a new issue was gaining prominence in the debate on Muslim gender relations: the veiling practice. Considered to be the epitomal symbol of Muslim women's sexual and religious segregation, this garment was for the first time openly attacked, despised in the public eye, and even accused of being immoral and un-Islamic. Completely neglected in the pre-war years, after 1918 the veil became the hotly-debated target of the different progressive discourses, in their aim to favor the sexual and confessional desegregation of Muslim women and, at least to some extent, their integration and visibility in the public space. As several episodes in that period can demonstrate—in particular the 1919 burning of Sulejmanpašić's book, and the 1928 polemic around Čaušević's pro-Kemalist statements—the Muslim woman question was becoming an exceedingly politicized debate.

In the interwar years, the Muslim woman question remained mostly a Muslim men's concern. Nevertheless, women's voices also made themselves heard and enriched the debate, both from inside and outside of the Muslim

community. Muslim women close to the associations seem to have adopted the hegemonic discourse in the progressive field. The convergence between Muslim educated women and their male counterparts can be considered to be a consequence of the asymmetrical power relationship between them—as journalists, men were the gatekeepers of Muslim journals. Nevertheless, different elements should be taken into account when assessing this convergence: the very limited space for maneuver between a Muslim community firmly led by Muslim traditional notables, and the presence outside the communal space of cultural entrepreneurs using gender relations to “prove” the civilizational inferiority of the Muslim community as a whole. Nevertheless, Muslim women themselves found ways, within these limits, to have their say in this debate, often using words that differed from those of their male Muslim and female non-Muslim counterparts.

## CHAPTER 5

### PUTTING CHANGE INTO PRACTICE



Beyond elaborating and circulating discourses on appropriate Muslim gender relations, interwar associations also invested a huge amount of energy into trying to change the current state of affairs on the ground. Associational archives and press articles show the extent to which these organizations tirelessly elaborated, tested and refined a vast array of activities that aimed to transform the position of Muslim women in practice. This chapter will concentrate on the associational initiatives that aimed to forge the New Muslim Woman through education and work, and how these initiatives varied depending on social class. Of course, insofar as associations did not act in a vacuum, special attention will be dedicated to the relationships—shifting between cooperation, complementarity and opposition—that they developed with other institutions; most importantly, the Yugoslav State, the Islamic religious institutions, and to a more limited extent, the main Muslim political party.

#### ADJUSTING TO THE NEW SCHOOL SYSTEM

Fata Hadžikarić was one of the Muslim girls who graduated from the Sarajevo Muslim Girl's School and sat the State board exams for their diploma immediately following the end of the First World War. As recounted in an interview several decades later, on that occasion the State board set a dissertation for the schoolgirls on "The Role of Geography and History in the Service of National Unity." Hadžikarić recalled that:

My text was so good that it was selected as the best and deposited in the school archive... When the exam was over, and after the board members had complimented us for our work, the Math professor... came up to me and said “it is a pity you will not be carrying on, it would be worth it for you to continue your schooling.” What he said was a real surprise to me. I thought I had already reached the most advanced education allowed for a Muslim woman.<sup>1</sup>

Fata Hadžikarić’s astonishment regarding her prospects for continuing her education beyond a secondary level is telling of the deep changes that had accompanied the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy and the integration of Bosnia into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Between 1918 and 1919, a series of regulations adopted by the Provincial Government gradually allowed Bosnian girls to gain access to high schools, including the prestigious gymnasiums.<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath of the Great War, a first blow was dealt to the legal barrier that had been causing girls’ education to lag significantly behind that of boys, and the distinction between boys’ and girls’ schooling experiences became far less obvious. In the years that followed, Yugoslav governments, in line with the educational policies adopted by the other European states, strove to organize a school system open to both sexes on their territory, from primary school to university. The economic needs of a post-war society on her knees, the spread of pro-female schooling ideas beyond feminist circles, as well as a general desire to “catch up with Europe,” pushed the Yugoslav political elite to adopt this kind of model. Nevertheless, the effects of these educational policies were very different depending on local conditions. Paradoxically enough, co-education, i.e. the sharing of the same classroom or schoolhouse by boys and girls, became more common in small towns, where pupil enrolment was low and financial circumstances did not allow for the establishment of two separate structures. In contrast, in larger cities like Sarajevo, a growing number of students prompted the creation of single-sex secondary schools, where boys and girls studied in different spaces.<sup>3</sup> In such changing circumstances, the number of Bosnian Muslim boys and girls attending elementary school slightly increased in respect to the pre-war years (See table 4).

1 Fata Košarić [née Hadžikarić], “Moje školovanje,” *Preporod*, no. 18 (1976): 145.

2 Pejanović, *Srednje i stručne škole*, 221.

3 Mitar Papić, *Školstvo u Bosni i Hercegovini: 1918–1941* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1984), 7–16.

DISTRICT	MUSLIMS		ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS		CATHOLICS		TOTAL
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Sarajevo city	528	122	673	445	981	900	3649
Greater Sarajevo	1547	79	1399	658	1203	652	5538
Tuzla	2693	169	5140	1846	2046	948	12842
Travnik	1034	79	1603	474	1896	718	5804
Mostar	1678	172	2462	888	2403	1703	9306
Banja Luka	1478	167	2402	972	2689	976	8684
Bihać	1004	139	1615	414	400	325	3897

Table 4. Number of students at elementary school in Bosnia and Herzegovina (school year 1918/19).

Source: Učitelj, "Šta govore brojke o našem prosvjećivanju," *Pravda*, August 14 (1920): 2.

In this moving pedagogical landscape, an institute like the Sarajevo Muslim Girls' School, built on the principle of sexual and confessional segregation, rapidly became outdated. In the first half of the 1920s the school accepted a growing number of non-Muslim pupils, before being transformed into a business-oriented school for girls, open to students of all faiths.<sup>4</sup>

In general, historians do not consider the educational policies of the first Yugoslav state to have been a success. According to available figures, by the early 1930s not more than 55% of the general population, and not more than 40% of women, was literate.<sup>5</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina the situation was far worse, where only 30% of men and 20% of women were literate—approximately 20% less than the average for the entire country.<sup>6</sup> Ljubodrag Dimić, who wrote a monograph on interwar Yugoslav cultural policies, considers the limited success in the implementation of state schooling to have been chiefly due to political instability. Between 1919 and 1929, the country was led by a total of twenty-four very different governments. During this time there were ten Ministers of Education, "ten different people who often had diametrically opposed political opinions, affinities, interests and ideas

4 Pejanović, *Srednje i stručne škole*, 260.

5 Papić, *Školstvo u Bosni (1918-1941)*, 21.

6 Papić, *Školstvo u Bosni (1918-1941)*, 21.



about culture.”<sup>7</sup> With the exception of Svetozar Pribičević, who kept his seat in nine governments for two and a half years, and Miloš Trifunović, a member of five governments for three years, ministers remained in office for no more than a few months at a time. This rapid turnover has been associated with the alternating and opposing political visions for education in Yugoslavia. Antun Korošec and Stijepan Radić, who kept their seats as ministers for three and two times respectively, were in favor of allowing for a certain degree of autonomy in the education system, while Pribičević advocated a more rigid vision of national unitarianism.<sup>8</sup> This unstable situation stood as an impediment to any successful planning with regard to school infrastructure, and left the field vulnerable to clientelism. Especially in the 1920s, the building of a school in a given area depended more on a local politician’s skills in siphoning funds from the Ministry of Education than on any rational plan for development emanating from the Ministry itself.<sup>9</sup> More recently, however, Pieter Troch has offered a more nuanced picture of Yugoslav educational policies, giving equal weight to the efforts, and sometimes successes, of the Yugoslav governments. Even if it is true that the reorganization of school infrastructures, staff and curricula “remained fragmentary and chaotic,”<sup>10</sup> Troch demonstrates that entirely ruling out the relevance of the state’s efforts in reforming the existing school system is too simplistic a reading. This statement is particularly true for the early 1930s, when King Aleksandar promulgated several laws and regulations meant to bring about a unified Yugoslav educational system. Central to the dictatorship’s educational policy was “the building of a modern Yugoslav nation. The entire legal framework was imbued with the ideal of Yugoslav nation-building and the firm belief that a uniform and centrally controlled educational system would lay the solid foundations for a new generation of Yugoslavs.”<sup>11</sup> In a bid to reduce dramatic inequalities in elementary education, the government put strong emphasis on the less developed regions. For this reason, between 1922 and 1938 the number of elementary schools in Bosnia and Herzegov-

7 Ljubodrag Dimić, *Kulturna politika Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1918–1941*, vol. 1, *Društvo i država* (Belgrade: Stubovi kulture, 1996), 215.

8 Dimić, *Kulturna politika*, 216.

9 Dimić, *Kulturna politika*, 217. Adnan Velagić, “The Education System in Herzegovina during the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918–1929),” *Bosnian Studies* 1 (2007): 122–49.

10 Pieter Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia: Education, Yugoslavism and the Balkans before World War II* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 45.

11 Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia*, 47.

ina grew by 90%, and this despite the heavy effects of the Great Depression on state finances. Eradicating the legislative patchwork that had defined the country's education until that point, the new law on education mandated compulsory education for both sexes under the age of 14.<sup>12</sup> To ensure that individuals who had been excluded from the school system had at least basic literacy skills, the state arranged for a special department of the Ministry of Education, Popular Education (*narodno prosvjećivanje*), to organize literacy courses and public lectures for any Yugoslav citizen under the age of 25.<sup>13</sup>

The royal dictatorship brought with it a redrawing of internal administrative boundaries, and in 1929 the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided between four different governorates. Census data from the 1920s and 1930s are thus not easily comparable, and it is arduous to precisely measure the successes and limits of Yugoslav educational policies in the domain of schooling. Nevertheless, the available numbers do give the impression of an increasing involvement of Muslim pupils of both sexes in elementary schooling (see table 5).

GOVERNORATE	ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS			CATHOLICS			MUSLIMS		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Vrbanska	24.661	6760	31421	7612	3564	11158	8103	3134	11237
Drinska	52468	21696	74164	7212	3836	11048	10694	4088	14782
Primorska	7130	3710	10840	35589	25079	60668	2413	1050	3463
Zetska	28371	14497	42868	4177	3424	7601	10606	2850	13456
	112630	46663	159293	54590	35903	90493	31816	11122	42938

Table 5: Number of pupils attending elementary school for the school year 1931/32.

Source: Nafis Defterdarović, "Bosna u mraku," *Putokaz*, no. 1-2-3 (1939): 394-6.

Although Muslims remained the religious group the least likely to send their children to school, there was a marked growth in the number of Muslim pupils attending schools. In 1918-1919, 10,000 Muslim pupils were enrolled in schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and by 1931-1932 there were

<sup>12</sup> Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia*, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Dimić, *Kulturna politika*, 255.

almost 43,000 Muslim students across the four governorates. The gap between the number of boys and girls attending school was also being bridged; after the Great War the ratio of male to female pupils was 10:1—ten years later it was 3:1. More specifically, in Sarajevo the number of Muslim boys attending elementary school between 1928 and 1937 grew five-fold (from 683 to 3655) while the number of Muslim girls grew ten-fold (from 163 to 1605).<sup>14</sup> This data shows that in Sarajevo, and to a lesser extent in other regions across Bosnia, and despite hostility from a significant proportion of the general population, the idea that boys and girls should be sent to school was gaining ground.

#### BETWEEN DOMESTICITY AND THE PUBLIC SPACE

Voluntary associations often played a significant role in favoring access for young people of both sexes to this changing school landscape, often cooperating with the state authorities, and sometimes establishing formal partnerships, in order to spread literacy and education in Yugoslavia. If one takes Muslim populations into consideration, the most effective private organizations to invest their energy in support of higher education for both sexes were of course *Gajret* and, since its establishment in 1924, *Narodna Uzdаница*. Even in this domain of intervention, it turns out that the two Muslim cultural associations functioned in a very similar way; local branches on the ground put forward candidates, and the central branch of each association made the final selection for awarding its scholarships. According to archival sources, it seems that many factors affected the decision-making process of the two associations' central bodies: good grades at school, disciplined behavior, and of course a poor background. Both associations granted scholarships to students that came from families already close to the association, or that appeared to share the same ideas and national orientation as the association itself. In order to exercise close control over the students and their careers, each year *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdаница*'s central branches put those who had been assigned the scholarship under review, often interrupting support for a student if they deemed them undeserving, or not engaged enough in associational life at a local level. These scholarships proved thus

14 KM, "Osnovne škole u Sarajevu. Interesantna statistika o đacima muslimanima," *Pravda*, April 3 (1936): 6.

to be a means for cultivating and expanding the associational network, and a tool for disciplining the political behavior of the students they supported, as well as their families.

While the Serbian cultural association *Prosvjeta* had shown interest for female schooling since before the Great War, and had already granted scholarships to Orthodox girls,<sup>15</sup> the *Gajret* leadership decided to hand out its first five scholarships to Muslim girls only in 1920. This new, tangible interest for female schooling was a sign of the changing perception of gender issues that developed among Muslim progressives after the Great War. From this point on, *Gajret* granted at least 10 scholarships to female pupils, out of a possible 60–100 awarded each year. At its foundation in 1924, *Narodna Uzdanica* also took on the mission of supporting secondary education, even though the number of scholarships it awarded never reached the same levels as its rival association. Around the time when the government was singling the association out as a potential threat due its proximity with the JMO, the total number of study scholarships awarded each year remained low. Before the mid-1930s, the association was only able to grant a total of around sixty scholarships, two-thirds of them to male students and a third to female students. In 1936, when the JMO leader Mehmed Spaho returned to the coalition government, *Narodna Uzdanica's* position improved considerably. From that moment on, the association was more successful in attracting funds from the government and was thus able to award around a hundred scholarships a year until the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>16</sup> Looking through the association's yearbooks, it can be ascertained that in its twenty years of existence *Narodna Uzdanica* supported 113 female students, 21 in its first ten years of activity and 92 between 1936 and 1942, in addition to several dozen female students at the *medresa* for girls in Sarajevo between 1937 and 1940.<sup>17</sup>

During the interwar period, Muslim cultural associations did not only limit themselves to regularly allotting a part of their budget to scholarships for girls. In parallel, they used their journals and public interventions to campaign for female secondary education. Both *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica* used all

15 Before 1914, of a total of 1360 scholarships, at least 161 were reserved for schoolgirls, students of the secondary Sarajevo Girls' School. On this point, see *Dvadeset i pet godina rada Prosvjete 1902–1927* (Sarajevo: Štamparija prosvjeta, 1927), 22.

16 Kemura, *Značaj i uloga*, 134–8.

17 The data is based on figures from the yearbooks *Kalendar "Narodna Uzdanica"* between 1935 and 1942.

possible means to challenge the widespread view held by a considerable part of Muslim society that sending girls to school was still equivalent to destroying their faith and morality. Associations joined forces to refute this belief and, citing arguments already circulating among the Muslim educated elite in the pre-war period (see Chapter Two), stressed that it was most of all ignorance and economic inactivity that were responsible for women's physical and moral decadence. As stated in a journal close to *Gajret* in April 1920: "if Muslim girls were to complete at least four years of elementary school, there would be fewer prostitutes, fewer alcoholic women and fewer venereal diseases."<sup>18</sup> Female exclusion from education, as well as Muslim families' reluctance to send girls to school, were thus associated with the worst social flaws.

Nevertheless, looking closer at the texts produced in the interwar period by cultural associations, one can detect a certain degree of ambiguity and hesitation. On the one hand, male and female activists seem to have considered education to be essentially a means for improving, and taking a scientific approach to allegedly natural female roles like running the home and raising children. According to this first narrative, the administration of the private space, as well as parenthood, remained the first and most important goal for women. At the same time, a different, more innovative discourse had been gaining traction in the progressive press, according to which Muslim women could, and even needed, to have access to each and every stage of education, and as a consequence to be able to enter into the job market. Merit, rather than sex, confession, or family origins were advanced as the factors that should determine the pursuit of knowledge. The same article from 1920, for instance, clearly states that post-war Muslim progressives "want every science and every modern institution to be open to them [women], and... firmly reject the claim that sharia law prohibits women from attending school."<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Western European thinkers are not the only intellectual references mobilized in order to justify statements of this kind. The same article mentions with admiration Soviet educational policies launched in Muslim-populated areas like Azerbaijan, probably a reference to the policy of *likbez* (liquidation of illiteracy) launched in 1919.<sup>20</sup> In order to reinforce

18 Dr. Bećir Novo, "Naše žensko pitanje," *Budućnost*, no. 4–5 (1920): 53.

19 Dr. Bećir Novo, "Muslimansko žensko pitanje," *Budućnost*, no. 2–3 (1920): 22.

20 Farideh Heyat, *Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan* (London: Routledge, 2002), 89–94.

the idea that education was the first step toward a full integration of women into social and political life, the progressive press assigned a great deal of importance to the achievements of educated and professionally active Muslim women around the world. The journal *Novi Behar*, for instance, was quick to congratulate with open satisfaction, not only Bosnian Muslim women entering into elementary teaching careers, but also the first female engineer in Turkey, or the first female lawyer in Egypt, respectively in 1932 and 1933, singling them out as models for the Muslim youth in Yugoslavia.<sup>21</sup>

Was education a tool for modernizing the separate spheres ideology or rather, a way to challenge it? The uncertainty remained, and this unresolved tension was far from simply unique to Bosnian Muslims, or Yugoslav people. As shown by James C. Albisetti, Joyce Goodman and Rebecca Rogers, the question of girls' secondary education in the West, despite the specificities of individual countries, was constantly traversed by this "dialectic between education as a conservative force and as a force for change."<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, it is possible to state that the interwar activists of *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica* were no longer uniquely interested in promoting female education as a way to improve female domesticity. In their view, the new Muslim woman not only had to take care of the family, but also had to assume professional and social responsibilities outside of it. Charged with this double burden—in the home and outside of it—modern Muslim women were meant to contribute to the creation and reproduction of a Muslim youth of a new kind, capable of successfully integrating into the Yugoslav middle class.

### FORGING MODERN MUSLIM GIRLS

Scholarship awards were not the only tool for enhancing the education of Muslim children of both sexes. Given the chronic scarcity of an educational infrastructure in the countryside, enrolling in secondary and higher schooling very often meant moving to bigger towns, a fact that had a huge cost for families. Since the end of the Great War, associations from Yugosla-

21 Husejn Dubravić [pseud. for Đogo], "Nove učiteljice muslimanke," *Novi Behar*, no. 5 (1929–1930): 84; "Prva advokatica u Egiptu," *Novi Behar*, no. 15–16 (1933–1934): 233; "Prva inženjerka u Turskoj," *Novi Behar*, no. 10–11 (1932–1933): 143; "Prve muslimanke tehničarke," *Novi Behar*, no. 4–5 (1932–33): 67.

22 Albisetti, James C. (et al.), "Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World: A Historical Introduction", in *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World: From the 18th to the 20th Century*, eds., James C. Albisetti, Joyce Goodman & Rebecca Rogers (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 2.

via had also been working hard to build student dorms reserved for Muslim schoolgirls, or to facilitate their access to pre-existing structures. The Muslims of Bosnia had been familiar with this type of institution since the late-1800s, thanks to both the action of the state and religious institutions. The Habsburg government, in addition to founding student dorms linked to the teacher-training schools, had founded in 1899 in Vienna a special institute for students from Bosnia (*Inštitut [sic] za bosansko-hercegovačke visokoškolce*) tasked with encouraging, and at the same time monitoring, the education of the first Bosnian university students in the capital of the Empire.<sup>23</sup> Roughly in the same period, Bosnian Islamic institutions opened the first student dorms financed by the revenues of the pious endowments in the main cities of the province. After having been male-only for the first two decades of their activities, after the war these institutions opened their doors to the female Muslim population.<sup>24</sup>

The association that invested the most of its energies into opening and running this type of institution was, with no surprise, *Gajret*. In the aftermath of the war, when the Muslim population was facing a number of economic and organizational difficulties, the Islamic institutions entrusted the Muslim cultural association with the task of running these establishments. Thanks to some material assistance from the Serbian army, soon reinforced by financial support from the government in Belgrade, between 1919 and 1920 the association managed to reopen the five male student dorms, respectively in Sarajevo, Bihać, Tuzla, Mostar and Banja Luka. This network of institutions was further developed with the establishment of institutes respectively in Trebinje, opened in 1931, and in Foča, active between 1923 and 1928. These two last institutions were opened in close collaboration with the activists of the Serbian cultural association *Prosvjeta*, both for practical and political reasons. Finally, in the 1930s, during the association's closest years of partnership with the government, two other student dorms would be opened in Gacko (Herzegovina) and in Novi Pazar (Southern Serbia) respectively. All of these institutions were aimed at male secondary-school students.<sup>25</sup>

In 1920, when the Muslim woman question was gaining momentum in the Bosnian press, *Gajret's* central branch decided to establish in Sarajevo

23 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 106.

24 Jahić, *Islamska zajednica*, 30.

25 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 106; 291–2.

the first student dorm for Muslim girls. The following year, 30 pupils were hosted in a second female student dorm established in Mostar. This latter institution was nevertheless destined to be shortlived. Given the low number of female students in the city, and the cost of this type of establishment, in 1925 it was closed and its students transferred to Sarajevo.<sup>26</sup> These initiatives did not leave the leadership of *Narodna Uzdanica* and the JMO indifferent, as usual concerned by the openly pro-Serbian orientation promoted by those around Hasanbegović. Despite the economic difficulties and the hostility of the Yugoslav administration, in the interwar years *Narodna Uzdanica*'s leadership managed to open male student dorms in Mostar, Banja Luka and Tuzla, nevertheless neglecting to open a similar institution for girls; an implicitly telling sign that the association saw female schooling as less important than did *Gajret*.<sup>27</sup>

Because pursuing higher education meant leaving Bosnia, the two Muslim cultural associations strove, in addition to providing scholarships, to found student dorms in the main university centers of the country. The national orientation of the associations, as well as the personal networks of its activists, played an important role in determining the geopolitics of hospitality. While *Gajret*'s activists managed to open a female dorm inside a pre-existing student dorm in Belgrade in 1926, *Narodna Uzdanica* chose Zagreb as its principal destination. Lacking the financial and material resources to open a boarding school, the local leaders of the association took a different route: they arranged for accommodation for female students in private homes, or negotiated with other associations to obtain places in existing structures. *Narodna Uzdanica* eventually managed to open a dorm in the Croatian capital in 1940, where six female students were hosted before the war.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the institute that had the lion's share in fostering higher education was *Gajret*'s branch in Belgrade. If in 1930 there were only 7 women enrolled in the two main universities of the country, in 1938 their number increased to 36 at Belgrade University alone, out of 419 Muslim male pupils. Of this first cohort of Muslim female university students, 28 enjoyed the financial support of, or were housed by, the local *Gajret* branch.<sup>29</sup>

26 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 106; 291–2.

27 Kemura, *Značaj i uloga*, 139.

28 Hasanbegović, *Muslimani u Zagrebu*, 91.

29 SANU, 14411, *Kartoteka studenata Beogradskog Gajreta*.



According to some figures, in the interwar period the main Muslim cultural association supported the university careers of at least 300 Muslims, including thirty women.<sup>30</sup>

Among the many tools implemented by these associations to improve access to education for the younger generations, the student dorms occupy a special place. *Narodna Uzdanica*'s president Mulabdić proudly described these institutions as “the temple for the education of youth”<sup>31</sup> (*hram prosvjeta za omladinu*), where a new generation of Muslim men and women, capable of successfully integrating into Yugoslav society, might be forged. The importance of promoting and shaping the education of the Bosnian Muslim youth justified every effort on the part of the association's activists to keep these institutions open and operating. Every year, for example, *Gajret* dedicated 70% of its budget to maintaining its network of student dorms.<sup>32</sup> Given the importance attributed to this mission by the associations, it seems worth taking a closer look at these institutions, and in particular at the *Gajret* female student dorm in Sarajevo—the only institution of this kind for which internal documents have survived.

As we saw earlier, in 1920 a *Gajret* female student dorm was founded in Sarajevo, and it remained open until the Second World War. In an interesting spatial continuity, the institute was founded in a private house in Kečina Street, on the same site where the Habsburg authorities had opened the Sarajevo Muslim Girls' School at the beginning of the century (see Chapter One). The structure could accommodate 80 beds in all, divided into six dormitories. The Director of the Institute described it thus:

On the first floor are the dormitories; the rooms are warm and bright. On the ground floor there are the study rooms, office and refectory; there is little light, the rooms are dark in winter, you have to turn on the light in the study rooms as early as three o'clock in the afternoon.<sup>33</sup>

30 Esadbeg Alibegović, “Uloga Beogradskog Gajreta Osman Đikić na univerzitetskom obrazovanju muslimanske ženske omladine,” *Glasnik IVZ* 36, no. 7–8 (1973): 331–5.

31 Edhem Mulabdić, “Polaganje kamena temeljca Doma-internata Narodne Uzdanice u Sarajevu,” *Kalendar “Narodna Uzdanica”* (1937): 200–8.

32 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 290.

33 ABIH, FG, 3, *Gajret* female student dorm to GOG (July 2, 1932).

Heading the institute, which in 1921 already hosted 23 schoolgirls, mostly from smaller Bosnian towns, was a personality already well-known in town: the Muslim teacher and activist Hasnija Berberović.<sup>34</sup>

The mission of the female student dorm, as well as the other student dorms, was not simply limited to providing young women with the opportunity to receive a state school education: the institute was a pedagogical site in itself. As can be seen from the institute's regulations, the education proposed by the association was, so to speak, total: it aimed to give to students "a moral, intellectual, physical and national education,"<sup>35</sup> favoring "the full development of individual qualities,"<sup>36</sup> both from a physical and a psychological point of view. It is not surprising then that the institute was also supposed to give the new generations an "aesthetic education":<sup>37</sup> this meant that one of the director's duties was to ensure that the institute was kept clean and tidy, decorated with paintings and other elements appropriate to the urban middle class, "while the utmost care had to be assigned to the hygiene of the body and to the clothing of the students."<sup>38</sup> Through their training at the institute, new generations of Muslims were expected to develop "good taste... a characteristic that is the defining mark of the civilized and mature man."<sup>39</sup>

In order to accomplish such an ambitious project, the pupils' schedule was planned in detail, from morning to night: do their homework, help their comrades lagging behind, read texts assigned by the director (mainly taken from *Gajret* journal), prepare and give presentations for their companions (*deklamacije*), in order to train their rhetoric skills and self-confidence in public. Daily life in the residence was punctuated by mountain tours, gymnastics exercises, and in some cases music lessons, especially singing.<sup>40</sup> Relics of Ottoman familiar sociability, like eating with one's hands seated before a *sofra* (low table) were to be strictly discouraged, and the regulations of the female dorm specified that the personnel had to always eat with the students, "in such a way as to set an example of how they should behave at

34 ABiH, FG, 2, 1140, *Gajret* female student dorm to GOG (July 30, 1921).

35 ABiH, FG, 2, 1102, *Pravilnik za gajretovih konvikata u Jugoslaviji* (1921): 1.

36 ABiH, FG, unnumbered box, 183, *Pravilnik gajretovih srednjoškolskih internata i šegrtskih domova* (Sarajevo: Štamparija Bosanska Pošta, 1930).

37 ABiH, FG, 2, 1102, *Pravilnik za gajretovih konvikata u Jugoslaviji* (1921): 1.

38 ABiH, FG, 2, 1102.

39 ABiH, FG, 2, 1102.

40 ABiH, FG, 12, 3, *Gajret* female student dorm to GOG (July 2, 1932).



Figure 22: *Gajret's* female student dorm in Mostar, early 1920s.

Source: Hamza Humo, *Spomenica dvadesetipetogodišnjice Gajreta: 1903.-1928*. (Sarajevo: Glavni odbor Gajreta, 1928), 126.

table.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, the student dorms represented the very core of *Gajret's* self-civilizing mission: it was the forge in which new generations of the Bosnian Muslim elite could appropriate and internalize the social norms of the urban middle class. A picture from 1920 or 1921 of the pupils and staff at the association's female dorm is eloquent in its illustration of the first results of this experiment in social transformation: the girls are unveiled, presented in orderly lines with white clothes adorned with traditional embroidery, under the close surveillance of the director of the institute.

One important aspect of the education dispensed to the Muslim younger generation was the development of a national awareness. The significance of national education in the activities of the student dorm was already visible in the 1920s, but took on an even greater importance after the 1929 coup d'état, when the association became a para-governmental organization. From the director of the institute's report, for example, we learn that in 1932 the pupils of the female student dorm celebrated all the national feasts, often writing essays and giving presentations on patriotic

<sup>41</sup> ABiH, FG, 12, 3.

topics. In the name of national sisterhood, on December 1, 1932, the girls of the institute celebrated Yugoslavia's Unification Day with *Prosvjeta's* female students. Contacts with the largest Serbian cultural association in Bosnia were far from episodic, and *Gajret's* Muslim pupils regularly used the library run by *Prosvjeta*.<sup>42</sup>

Being a resident of a *Gajret* student dorm was not only an out-of-the-ordinary socialization experience. It was also, above all for the girls, an experience of mobility beyond the borders of their familiar space. Students of both sexes did indeed take trips or excursions to various places in Bosnia, participating in associational events, and in some cases—as we shall see in Chapter Six—attending parties. The secondary school pupils of the Sarajevo dorm were also given the opportunity to venture outside of Bosnia: in 1925, for example, students and pupils of the *Gajret* student dorms were taken to Belgrade. As reiterated in the association's journal and Belgrade's newspapers, which gave important coverage of the event, the purpose of the trip was to bring Muslims and Orthodox Serbs closer, and encourage them to get to know each other. At the same time, it also allowed them to show to the capital city of Yugoslavia the first budding ranks of modern Muslims produced by the association. Finally, the visit provided the leaders of the association with an opportunity to strengthen their position in Belgrade. Muslim and Serb Orthodox children were actually paraded before the powers upon which the association depended more and more—the government, and the Court.

Like every association, *Gajret* aimed for longevity, and for this reason one of its goals was self-reproduction. In other words, a constant preoccupation of the central branch was that pupils become involved in volunteering from a young age; in addition to producing educated, healthy and nationally-aware boys and girls, the student dorms also aimed to produce future generations of activists. During the 1920s the dorm pupils did not have their own associations, and for this reason took part instead in the literary associations of the schools they attended, and in the 1930s the student dorms developed their own associational branch. In 1932, the *Gajret* female student dorm was endowed with a literary association that, in its internal structure (president, vice-president, secretary, etc.), was a faithful reproduction of a

42 "Ženski internat Sarajevo", *Gajret*, no. 10 (1932): 186.

local branch's structure.<sup>43</sup> The activities of the association were concentrated in two directions: the director assigned readings to the students, mostly taken from the pages of the association's journal. Based on these readings, the students prepared a lecture (*predavanja*) which they then presented to their fellow-members. In the 1934 program of lectures held every fifteen days by the students, for example, we find titles that are very representative of the national and patriotic goals of the association. Not only did these exercises aim to instill a love for the country and the nation ("The Life and Works of the Beloved King Aleksandar in the Service of His People," "Reaction to the Death of King Aleksandar"), and expound on the science of motherhood ("The Mother as First Educator of Her Children"), but also and above all to familiarize the pupils with the association's history, and its instruments of action ("The Objectives of *Gajret*," "The Objectives of *Gajret* from its Foundation to Today," "The Theater as an Instrument of Education").<sup>44</sup> Forming future activists was thus also about forming new generations of modern Muslims.

Building a picture of modern Muslims was in any case a gendered project, and the female members of the student dorm were required to carry out a series of specific activities that differed from those of their male counterparts. In their free time, for example, the girls had to serve in the kitchen and in the dining room, "to take care of the flowers and fruit, to learn how to store them during the winter."<sup>45</sup> After completing their duties and other activities in the dorm, the regulations recommended that the girls practice sewing and embroidery, in particular taking inspiration from Bosnian traditional motifs. It was also important that the girls learn to iron, and that they devote a considerable amount of their time to helping out with the general running of the institution. Indeed, it was one of the explicit goals of the female dorm to prepare the students for domestic life: "in a word: [it had to] give them a start in all branches of the domestic economy [*kućanstvo*] and a rational management of the home [*racionalno gospodarstvo*]."<sup>46</sup> Access to the public space through school, work and associations, for which the students were trained, did not exempt them from carrying out the role the associa-

43 ABiH, FG, 13, 3262, *Gajret* female student dorm to GOG (October 10, 1932).

44 HAS, G4, Gajretov ženskog konvikt, *Gajret* female student dorm to GOG (1934).

45 HAS, G4, Gajretov ženskog konvikt.

46 HAS, G4, Gajretov ženskog konvikt.

tion deemed as the most natural for them: that of mothers, wives and administrators of the domestic space.

In the period between the two world wars, the associational student dorms—and in particular *Gajret* internees—rubbed various Muslim social actors up the wrong way. If it is true that the dorms often inspired the admiration of intellectuals—Muslim and non-Muslim—the JMO and a proportion of the *ulema* of the province proved to be much colder, sometimes openly hostile, to these institutions and the educational project underway there. The legal situation of the *Gajret* dorms was in itself a source of tension. Although the very buildings it used were entrusted to the association as assets of pious foundations, these sites were at least in theory subject to the administration of the *Vakuf* Commission—an institution that, at least until 1929, remained firmly under the control of the JMO. Since the JMO and *Gajret* were aligned along very divergent political positions, in periods of strong competition between the two groups, and in particular in the run-up to the general elections, student dorms became a battleground between the main Muslim religious, associational and political actors.

As early as October 1920, during the electoral campaign for the constituent assembly and the harsh competition between the JMO and the progressives, the female student dorm of Sarajevo found itself in the eye of the storm. A certain Nurka Osmanagić, a poor woman from Sarajevo who had obtained the privilege of eating at the student dorm's canteen, denounced the director of that institution, Hasnija Berberović, to the JMO for having harassed her for wearing the veil. According to the testimony given by the woman, the director came to Osmanagić “in the company of a *vlah* [i.e. a non-Muslim], and began to make fun of [her], claiming that the student dorm was not the right place for veiled women.”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Osmanagić claimed, the two would have taken her veil off by force, had she not resisted them. In the middle of an electoral campaign, the affair had the effect of a bombshell. The JMO openly attacked the director of the institute, a single teacher and one of the first Muslim women to abandon the veil, asking that an example be made of her. The central branch tried several times to remove Berberović from the post of director of the dorm, and only the intervention of Edhem Mulabdić, a well-known writer and former director of the

47 HAS, G4, Gajretov ženskog konvikta, *Muslimanska akcija za zaštitu morala* to GOG (October 10, 1920).

school where Berberović had been trained, managed to prevent her from being removed from the institution.<sup>48</sup> Although the controversy ended up amounting to nothing, the episode is demonstrative of the extent to which the student dorm, and especially the female one, could be used against the cultural association, with the usual accusations of immorality, thus weakening its prestige (and, during electoral periods, its electoral weight) in the eyes of the population.

During the interwar period, *Gajret*'s central branch increasingly focused its attention on the internal organization of its dorms, taking care to regulate the behavior of the students when they stepped outside its doors, and in particular religious practices. President Hasanbegović first began issuing circulars in 1923, reminding the students of the dress code, in particular the obligation to wear the fez for boys and the prohibition for girls to show themselves *gologlavi* (bareheaded) on the street; pupils of both sexes were also asked to observe the obligation to carry out the five ritual prayers inside the institute, as well as to fast in public during the month of Ramadan.<sup>49</sup> In 1925, the central branch was careful to reassure the parents of the students' behavior with an open letter published in the association's newspaper. In it, the families were invited not to believe the rumors being spread by the association's opponents about the absence of religion in the dorm and were assured, on the contrary, that the students, both male and female, received a religious education and observed the Islamic precepts.<sup>50</sup>

In 1927, a few months before the outbreak of the controversy around *Reis-ul-ulema* Čaušević's declarations regarding the veil (see Chapter Four), the *Gajret* central branch decided to increase its control over its pupils through a series of circulars, and in doing so decided to start with the girls, because "the behavior of the female students deserves even more attention than that of the male students."<sup>51</sup> Special attention was devoted to the presence of the *Gajret* female pupils in the public space:

Students should never be allowed to go out alone... They should never carry out the journey from the dorm to school alone, but always collectively [*kor-*

48 ABiH, FG, 2, 2560, Edhem Mulabdić to GOG (October 28, 1921).

49 ABiH, FG, 3, 1057, Avdo Hasanbegović to *Gajret* male student dorm (May 22, 1923).

50 "Gajretova pisma roditeljima (skrbnicima) njegovih pitomaca", *Gajret*, no. 7 (1925): 112.

51 HAS, G4,1634, GOG to *Gajret* female student dorm in Sarajevo (September 14, 1927).

porativno], two by two. Going to and returning from school, female students should not laugh out loud, or have any other behavior that might attract the attention of the public [*skrenuti pažnju publike*]. They must always remain chaste [*čedne*] and decent [*pristojne*], showing that they are from every point of view worthy [*vrijedne*] of *Gajret's* attention and benevolence. Their behavior outside the dorm must be exemplary [*uzorno*] from every point of view.<sup>52</sup>

The circular also introduced clothing restrictions for the pupils:

We must reiterate to the pupils that from now on they will no longer be allowed to go on the streets bare-headed [*gologlave*]. From now on they will have to wear a normal cap and a cape [*uobičajene kapice i pelerine*]. The girls who leave the boarding-house with their heads uncovered will be severely punished, and potentially even expelled. The female students cannot go in the street with low-cut dresses [*dekoltirane*], and we must remain vigilant about this... putting them above all possible blame.”<sup>53</sup>

The adoption of such a detailed set of bodily rules by the *Gajret* central branch seems to testify to the extent to which the life of the pupils of the female student dorm was the object of public concern. It is interesting to note that, for the leaders of the association, the abandonment of the veiling practice in the student dorm had to be firmly replaced with other practices that stressed female modesty, such as not laughing, and always covering their heads.

In addition to clothing, the circular of 1927 also shows the extent to which spatial rules were different for the occupants of the female dorm, in comparison with their male counterparts, in terms of both urban mobility and their visibility in general. The circular not only reiterated that the students “should not linger in front of the windows facing the road,” but also went on to describe the areas of the city where the students could and could not go. Among the explicitly forbidden areas were the *čaršija*, the commercial and artisanal heart of the Ottoman city, “the esplanade [*korzo*] and on

<sup>52</sup> HAS, G4, 1634.

<sup>53</sup> HAS, G4, 1634.



the roads running by the river,”<sup>54</sup>—that is, the urban spaces reserved for leisure and walking introduced in the Habsburg period. It is interesting to note that the regulations for the male student dorms, in comparison with those of the female pupils of the same association, make no mention of spatial restrictions: indeed, for male students the central mosque of Ferhadija was indicated as a place of prayer, while for the girls prayer was carried out inside the dorm—as was, and still is, the norm in many Muslim societies.<sup>55</sup> The construction of a “new Muslim woman” therefore had to come to terms with the gender spatial norms inherited from the Ottoman era, which provided for the existence of male and female spaces in the urban landscape.

Some documents go on to suggest that, in reality, the students did not always comply with the association’s directives, and were disposed to taking certain liberties. In late 1927, the *Gajret* central branch complained to the director of the institute, Berberović, about the girls’ behavior, stating that:

They do not respect the rules; on the contrary, they are often seen on the esplanade with their heads uncovered, and walking along the Miljacka. In addition to this, three members of the central branch saw with their own eyes female students making appointments with strangers in the streets along the river, in the evening while people walk, and walking hand in hand with them [*s njima se rukuju*]... Before returning, they walk the streets that are the most frequented and in which there are the most people. They move in groups, disorderly, attracting people’s attention.<sup>56</sup>

These lines are priceless for giving us a fuller picture of the experience that Muslim girls may have had of student dorm life. Far from their hometown and families, and from the obsessions of the association’s leaders, the stay at the student dorm could also represent an opportunity to break the rules, to enjoy the city autonomously, and also to live their first sentimental adventures.

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54 HAS, G4, 1634.

55 HAS, G4, 293, GOG to all MO (February 6, 1928)

56 HAS, G4, 1725/27, GOG to *Gajret* female student dorm in Sarajevo (September 28, 1927).

## THE PIONEERS

The 1927 complaints of *Gajret's* leaders about the illicit behavior of the pupils in their student dorm may have had heavy consequences for the director of the institute. Considered to be too soft, or too ineffective, as regards the pupils' escapades, not long after this reprimand Berberović was fired from her post.<sup>57</sup> For Hasnija Berberović, among the first Muslim women to engage in volunteering and teaching in state schools, the dismissal marked the beginning of her progressive withdrawal from public life. In the meantime, other pioneering Muslim female figures became increasingly visible in the Yugoslav public space, thanks to the broadening possibilities offered to women in the domain of education.

The combination of both public and private pedagogical initiatives made some transformation within the Muslim population possible, albeit to a very limited extent. As highlighted by Nusret Kujraković, throughout the entire interwar period very few Muslim girls attended the high schools that were being set up all across Bosnia. The only places where the statistics register a significant improvement were Sarajevo and Banja Luka. At the Female High School of Sarajevo, a mixed-religion school for girls, the number of Muslim female students increased markedly, from 3.5% (15) of the total number of students in 1924–25, to 15.5% (226) in 1939–40. Female teacher training schools in the city also saw similar increases.<sup>58</sup> In Banja Luka, which in 1929 became the regional capital of the Vrbanska Governorate, and thus saw significant urban development, the state-school network also grew significantly. Nevertheless, only 20 or so Muslim women were awarded a high school diploma before the outbreak of World War Two.<sup>59</sup> In Tuzla, the principal city of Eastern Bosnia, Muslim students remained a rare sight in high schools; before 1941 only two female students (or 0.4% of the total number of students, and less than 1% of the total number of Muslim students) were awarded a high school diploma. The city of Mostar has similarly discouraging figures for this period.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the state and the Muslim cultural

57 HAS, G4, 1793/27, GOG to *Gajret* female student dorm in Sarajevo (October 10, 1927).

58 Nusret Kujraković, "Žensko pitanje", 190–5.

59 Miludin Vuhić and Nikola Zeljković, *Sto godina Banjalučke gimnazije* (Banja Luka: Gimnazija, 1996).

60 Jasmin Imamović, ed., *100 godina gimnazije u Tuzli* (Tuzla: PrintCom, 1999), 37–8; *Gimnazija Aleksa Šantić Mostar 1893–1968* (Mostar: Kolektiv Gimnazije Aleksa Šantić, 1968), 16–7.

associations' efforts to improve female schooling came up against enduring resistance from important segments of Muslim society.

With such a limited presence in secondary schools, it was still an extremely rare occurrence for a Muslim girl to enroll in courses at a university level. The lack of research into students registered at the country's three universities makes it difficult to gain clear insight into exactly how many Muslim men and women were studying in them. Interwar cultural associations seem to have encountered difficulties in estimating with a reasonable level of precision the number of Muslim students at university, and then to evaluate their role in supporting it. In a bid to answer this question, in 1940 *Narodna Uzdanica* launched an inquiry to establish the extent of the phenomenon.<sup>61</sup> The results were published in the association's yearbook, and revealed that in 1940, 600 Yugoslav Muslims held a university degree (or its direct equivalent, such as a qualification from the Belgrade school of officers), in contrast with just 10 in 1900. The inquiry also pointed out that of this number, twenty were Muslim women.<sup>62</sup> From a quantitative point of view, this figure seems reliable; other Muslim authors from the interwar period present very similar estimates.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, *Narodna Uzdanica's* research shows an interesting trend; the rare Muslim women who went to Belgrade or Zagreb to study enrolled in the Faculty of Law or the Faculty of Philosophy. In other words, they chose to follow the same educational path as their male counterparts. The data in our possession also suggests something else; a significant number, maybe even the majority, of Muslim women who obtained a university education had received the support either of *Gajret* or *Narodna Uzdanica*, which confirms the leading role that these two associations had in the education of the Muslim youth.

With so few women possessing a higher education, the number of Muslim women in salaried work and in the liberal professions remained extremely limited. The process of finding work was plagued with legislative difficulties for Muslim women, as it was for Yugoslav women more in general. Although

61 Husejn Alić, "Muslimani s fakultetskom spremom," *Kalendar "Narodna Uzdanica"* (1940): 160–8. Husejn Alić, "Muslimani s fakultetskom spremom," *Kalendar "Narodna Uzdanica"* (1941): 154–6.

62 According to the article, in 1940 603 Muslims held a university degree, and of these: 224 in Law, 121 in Philosophy, 40 in Theology, 85 in Engineering, 69 in Medicine, 29 in Commerce, 19 in Veterinary Studies, and 18 in Pharmaceutical Studies. Alić, "Muslimani," (1940): 160–8.

63 Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu*, 21.

different Yugoslav constitutions asserted that the civil service was not restricted to either sex, in practice various regulations were introduced during the 1930s on an ad hoc basis to limit the number of women employed. This was particularly true in the field of education, where in the 1930s the state found itself with a surplus of teachers, mostly female, that it was unable—or unwilling—to employ. In order to prevent this situation from recurring, in 1933 and 1935 the Ministry of Education prohibited women from enrolling in teacher training schools throughout the country, thereby preventing them from having access to the profession at its very source. In a period in which the effects of the Great Depression were racking Southeastern Europe, the Yugoslav state was quick to adopt legislations and decisions that aimed to curb the presence of women in salaried work. Throughout the 1930s, similar restrictions were introduced in different domains of the state administration. In 1934, for instance, an internal regulation at the Yugoslav Post Office set the maximum number of women who could be employed at between 10 and 25%, depending on the post. Further limits were introduced for married women.<sup>64</sup>

Besides these formal restrictions, there were also of course informal restrictions, no less effective than the former. As Yugoslav feminists never tired of reporting in the press, women occupied the lowest echelons of the professional hierarchy and were on average paid less than men, even where no explicit restrictions applied.<sup>65</sup> A glass ceiling, invisible yet unbreakable, kept women from rising to the upper rungs of the professional ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements. Even the rare interwar success stories of women in liberal professions often ended in misfortune. The most striking case was probably that of Ksenija Atanasijević (1894–1981), the first female Doctor in Philosophy at the University of Belgrade, and a feminist activist in *Ženski Pokret*. After having held the post of Lecturer of Philosophy for twelve years at the University of Belgrade, in 1936 she was dismissed and demoted to the position of school inspector for a very dubious accusation of plagiarism.<sup>66</sup>

64 Papić, *Školstvo u Bosni (1918-1941)*, 80 and Kujraković, *Žensko pitanje*, 201-5.

65 Begić, "Antifašistički pokret žena", 140.

66 Iva Nenić, "Atanasijević, Ksenija", *Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms in Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe: 19th and 20th Centuries*, eds. Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, Anna Loutfi (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2006), 41-3.

Navigating their way through the economic crisis, legal obstacles and the weight of both Muslim and Yugoslav patriarchal cultures, several dozen Muslim women did manage to obtain their university diplomas, and even find work after university. The sources of the Muslim cultural associations allow us to identify some names and trajectories—more precisely some fragments of them—of Muslim women who, thanks to the support of their family, the state and of course cultural associations, managed to earn a diploma and enter into middle-class professions. For the most part these women became secondary-school teachers or civil servants in the legal administration. Their social background seems of course to have had an important role. Some of these women came from wealthy Bosnian families with a strong tradition in the liberal professions. This is the case, for instance, for the four daughters of the renowned writer Osman Nuri Hadžić, who all went to school and subsequently had remarkable careers. Besides Bahrija Nuri Hadžić, the first Yugoslav Muslim opera singer, who will be addressed in the next chapter, her three sisters studied and entered the administration. Nadžida Hadžić (born in 1904) worked as a lay magistrate for the provincial courts;<sup>67</sup> Zineta found employment in the state administration, while Rabija became a secondary-school teacher, alongside some half-dozen Muslim women. This job gave her the opportunity to work as a supply teacher in high schools for boys in various towns throughout the country, including Zemun, Bijeljina and Belgrade.<sup>68</sup> In addition to economic independence, these women's lives were characterized by a marked professional mobility, which would be difficult to imagine for other Muslim women. Needless to say, their university education was made possible as well by *Gajret* scholarships and the student dorm in Belgrade.<sup>69</sup>

In this period, two Muslim women also made their first steps into a domain that at that time was still largely masculine: that of medical doctors. Born in Sarajevo (1903) and Tuzla (1912), Ševala Iblizović (née Zildžić) and Hiba Ramadanović (née Šerbić) studied medicine at the University of Zagreb and Belgrade respectively. Both of them benefited, in different moments of their education, from the support of *Narodna Uzdanica* and *Gajret* for their

67 ABiH, SSOS, Nadžida Hadžić.

68 ABiH, PDSIL, Rabija Hadžić.

69 Jahić, *Muslimansko žensko pitanje*, 359.

education.<sup>70</sup> Ševala Iblizović was one the first Bosnian girls to be admitted in 1919 to the high school in Sarajevo. According to Adnan Jahić, “conservative Muslims in Sarajevo could not bear the boldness of this sixteen-year-old girl, and her father who brought and picked her up from school by carriage, in order to avoid the other children throwing stones at them.”<sup>71</sup> Iblizović graduated in 1931 and, in her second year, she married a student of philosophy. Interestingly, after she graduated and returned to Sarajevo, Iblizović became strongly involved in volunteering for *Gajret*, *Trezvenost* and *Merhamet* for many years. Her engagement also carried her beyond the borders of Muslim associational culture, when she became active in the local branch of *Ženski Pokret* as librarian and archivist.<sup>72</sup> Hiba Ramadanović, who graduated in 1939, was the daughter of Mehmed Šerbić (1847–1918), the first Muslim doctor to work in Bosnia in the mid-nineteenth century, when the region was still under Ottoman rule. Although we do not know much about Hiba, we know that her father had studied in Istanbul during the *Tanzimat* period, and subsequently began his career in Tuzla, at that time situated on one of the furthest western frontiers of the Ottoman Empire. Interestingly enough, during the Habsburg period Tuzla also became the first city of Bosnia, since the very end of the nineteenth century, to possess a female doctor, the Pole Teodora Krajewska (1854–1935).<sup>73</sup> We can only speculate about the influence that this female doctor’s presence in the town could have had on Hiba as a young girl, and on her and her family’s decision for her to study medicine.

### SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE

All of these initiatives devoted to the education and professionalization of Muslim women touched, it is necessary to stress, only a minority of the Muslim urban population. Activists of voluntary associations seem to have been well aware of these limits, and throughout the interwar period consistently denounced the perceived distance between the educated elite

70 HAS, NU14, k2, 365/27, *Blagajnički izvještaj mjesnog odbora “Narodne Uzdanice” u Zagrebu* (February 8th, 1927).

71 Jahić, *Muslimansko žensko pitanje*, 358–9.

72 Jahić, *Muslimansko žensko pitanje*, 358–9.

73 Dragiša Trifković, *Tuzlanski vremeplov*, vol. 1 (Belgrade: NIRO “Pres Kliping,” 1981), 56. On Mehmed, see Alija Karahasanović, “Tuzlanska bolnica i njeni prvi lekari,” *Srpski arhiv za celokupno lekarstvo*, no. 10 (1958): 4–5; Trifković, *Tuzlanski vremeplov*, vol. 3 (Tuzla: Univerzal, 1988), 35–7.

(often defined in their own discourse as intelligentsia) and the “Muslim masses” (*muslimanska masa*), and looked for new solutions to overcome it. Of the varied obstacles identified by the activists in their mission to enlighten the Muslim populace, most important were the frighteningly high illiteracy rates of this population, and especially among women. The fact of this illiteracy represented a barrier between progressive activists and their target population, and meant that the debates that inflamed the pages of the daily newspaper were effectively limited to an extremely reduced portion of the entire population. This unfamiliarity with the public written word also implicitly meant that the vast majority of Bosnian Muslims remained under the influence of the *ulema*, whose sermons, were on the contrary highly pervasive due to being entirely oral. Indeed, this need to put orality in service of the associations’ agendas was palpable throughout the 1920s. For example, a good proportion of the events programmed for the 1928 Congress of Muslim Intellectuals discussed and explored “new methods of work”<sup>74</sup> that might potentially help activists reach the Muslim illiterate population.<sup>75</sup> From late 1928, and particularly throughout the early 1930s, the pages of associational journals were filled with theoretical articles about the need for associations to include public lectures as an essential tool in their repertoire of actions.<sup>76</sup>

The lecture (*predavanja*) was a genre initiated by associations, and that stabilized gradually during the interwar period, until it reached a standardized form, lasting approximately forty minutes. This kind of public reading was also often integrated into different social events organized by associations, such as parties, picnics, or religious and civil celebrations. Elementary schools, town squares and hotels, and the associations’ headquarters began to be used as privileged spaces for associational lectures, although mosques still retained an important status. The oral intervention represented the most openly pedagogical element of a vast array of initiatives organized by the associations, the moment in which the message that the asso-

74 Fuad Slipičević, “Nove metode rada,” *Gajret*, no. 10 (1929): 156–7.

75 Kemura, “Kongresu muslimanskih intelektualaca”, 122–3.

76 Hasan Hodžić, “Gajretova popularna predavanja,” *Gajret*, no. 4 (1928): 60–2; V. Sadović, “Gajretova popularna predavanja,” *Gajret*, no. 2 (1931): 25–6; “U znaku ljepše budućnosti,” *Gajret*, no. 4 (1931): 82; Prof. M. Alikalfić, “Problem našeg prosvjećivanja,” *Gajret*, no. 4 (1931): 83–4; Hamdija Mulić, “Kako se najlakše i najbrže narod prosvjećuje,” *Gajret*, no. 7 (1931): 66–7; “Ramazan i gajretova predavanja,” *Gajret*, no. 1 (1932): 2–3.

ciation wanted to transmit to the population was most brazenly expounded. Lecture texts were also, in numerous cases, republished in the associational press or in local newspapers. The association that reached the most elaborate system of production and dissemination of lectures was, incidentally, *Gajret*. As early as January 1921, the central branch sent a decree to local branches recognizing the importance of this oral pedagogical form, and specifying that lectures were to be given in virtually every local branch of the association all over the country. Lectures were intended to spark a public debate in every locality where the association was present, “in which... our current state, what we are, and what we should be, ought to be discussed.”<sup>77</sup> In the early 1930s, the process of production and circulation of lectures underwent a marked centralization: it was the *Gajret* central branch that set the topic and the calendar of the lectures all over Yugoslavia, while the local branches were tasked with simply finding the most appropriate speaker from among its ranks, and a space to host the event.<sup>78</sup> In addition, starting in 1930 the association launched a specific collection of publications, *Gajret's Lectures (Gajretova predavanja)*. The essays were printed as pamphlets, on lightweight paper, and were just a few pages long: the idea being that the branches could easily receive, read out, and re-circulate the essays to each other using the postal service. In this way, too, the association's central body retained maximum control over the content spoken in its name, and the dissemination of this content.

How did women, and in particular Muslim women, take part in this associational practice? Their involvement was, in the interwar period, gradual, and manifested itself in different ways for different associations. Broadly speaking, it seems that Muslim philanthropic associations relegated women simply to the role of spectator, at lectures written and given by Muslim men, religious or secular alike. In 1920, Sarajevo-based philanthropic associations close to the JMO, in particular *Merhamet*, organized a series of public meetings with an express pedagogical ambition: to reach the Muslim population. On that occasion, a clear distinction was made between sermons on religious subjects (*vazs*) given by religious officials, and lectures on non-religious topics (*predavanja*) given by the activists of the association.<sup>79</sup>

77 “Ramazan i gajretova predavanja,” 2.

78 ABiH, FG, 10, 241, GOG to all local branches (January 18, 1931), 1–2.

79 “Akcija za zaštitu morala,” *Pravda*, April 17 (1920): 1.



Although men could attend both types of meetings, women were only allowed to attend sermons. This distinction between activities specifically aimed at men, and those for women, can also be seen in the spaces that were dedicated to these activities: while religious sermons for men were held in the city's central mosques, in particular at the Gazi-Husrevbeg mosque, "sermons for [Muslim] women" (*ženski vazovi*) were held in Muslim residential districts such as Vrbanuša, Vratnik, Bistrik and Čobanija, far from the city center.<sup>80</sup> In the 1920s, Muslim philanthropic associations also began to gradually reserve for women specific lectures held by non-religious activists (always men), with topics that mostly promoted conservative ideas on morality, motherhood, and femininity.

Women's active involvement in these public interventions was much more visible in the cultural associations, in particular *Gajret*. Of course, men remained the most active producers of lectures; the journalist and educator Hamdija Mulić, for example, was the most prolific writer of women's lectures for *Gajret*. During the 1930s in particular, he published a good number of texts in the association's journal and in the *Gajret's Lectures* series.<sup>81</sup> However, from time to time, associations did also grant women the right to speak. There are numerous traces of these lectures written and read by women, in both the internal records, and the journals published by the two main cultural associations. This phenomenon of women speaking in public was not, however, replicated throughout the province as a whole. An account by the secretary reveals that the majority of women writing and making their voices heard lived in Sarajevo or came from the capital of the province. The titles of these lessons, still in existence today, demonstrate that even when women did write lectures and read them in public, the topics they covered were predominantly female, for example: "Women and the Home" written by the activist Vida Čubrilović,<sup>82</sup> "Women and Health" by Maša Živanović,<sup>83</sup> "Gajret's role in Educating Muslim Women" by Suada Muftić,<sup>84</sup> and so on. These female writers were either women who had ben-

80 "Iz Akcije za zaštitu morala," *Pravda*, May 22 (1920): 1–2.

81 Hamdija Mulić, "Prosvjeđujte se i uzgajajte," *Gajret*, no. 12 (1927): 184–6; "Problemi zaštite djece u nas," *Gajret*, no. 13 (1927): 201–2; "O odgoju djece," in *Gajretova predavanja 1* (Sarajevo: Glavni Odbor Gajreta, 1931), 26–36; Sulejman Mursel, "Napomene za kućni odgoj djece," *Gajretova predavanja 3* (Sarajevo: Glavni Odbor Gajreta, 1931), 49.

82 ABiH, FG, 12, 1583, MŽPG Sarajevo to GOG (June 17, 1932).

83 ABiH, FG, 12, 1583.

84 Suada Muftić, učiteljica, "Gajret i prosvjeđivanje muslimanki," *Gajret*, no. 21 (1932): 344–5.

effitted from a study scholarship, and/or stayed in a boarding house, or were associational activists. Naturally, a large number of texts for the female public were once again aimed at reinforcing the boundaries of the presumedly separate “female sphere,” encompassing maternity, childcare and the home.<sup>85</sup>

### SEWING COMMUNITY

Beyond lectures, the deteriorating economic climate of the interwar years prompted associations to set up training courses in order to help Muslims to enter the crafts sector. Even before the outbreak of the War, Muslim craftsmen from Bosnia’s principal towns had set up associations to support training in craft work, to vie with the competitive Austro-Hungarian handicrafts market. The oldest such association is probably the aforementioned *Ittihad*; founded in Mostar in 1906, the association had immediately expanded into other Bosnian towns.<sup>86</sup> In 1908, even *Gajret* undertook the venture and started to fund craft training courses in Sarajevo. It was not until the interwar period, however, that associations turned their attention to poor urban women.

In contrast with the picture of total economic inactivity that the contemporary Muslim elite were painting of Muslim women at that time, Muslim women were actually making significant contributions toward the family income. As Ljiljana Beljkašić-Hadžidedić has demonstrated, in Sarajevo, women who did not belong to the wealthiest Muslim families regularly did some form of informal work. Women worked as maids and cooks in other households, and they embroidered, wove rugs and decorated textiles for well-to-do Muslim families and mosques.<sup>87</sup> During the interwar period, both philanthropic and cultural associations set up various initiatives in a bid to develop this kind of economic work for women, providing spaces for weaving, setting up sewing schools, workshops and cooperatives, and lending sewing machines.

Institutions set up by associations to help indigent Muslim girls into work were usually based on the “practical school for women” structure. Going by different names, but all on the same theme—*ženska radnička škola*, *zanatska ženska škola*, *domaćinska škola*, *stručna ženska škola*, etc.—these private in-

85 “Izvjestaj Glavnog odbora Gajreta za godinu 1936–7,” *Gajret*, no. 7–9 (1937): 147–8.

86 Vehbija Imamović, “Ittihad, naše najstarije zanatlijsko društvo,” *Kalendar “Gajret”* (1939): 286–9.

87 Beljkašić-Hadžidedić, “Učešće muslimanskih žena,” 58–69.

stitutes were tasked with training the female urban Muslim population in handicrafts—in particular sewing, embroidery and weaving—and in home economics. This type of institution had a long history in Bosnia. Before 1914 a network of similar schools had been founded throughout the province by both the Habsburg Provincial Government and early Orthodox-Serbian female associations. They aimed to teach handiwork and sewing to girls and women who, for a variety of reasons, were no longer able to attend school—having passed the schooling age, lacking financial means, being geographically distant from schools, or having come up against resistance from their family or neighbors. Halfway between a professional training school and a small-scale production line—*Osvitanje's* sewing school manufactured products directly for sale<sup>88</sup>—these institutions were clear about the class they targeted. As one activist from *Kolo Srpskih Sestara's* branch from Kotor Varoš stated in 1928, the schools were “for young women, where young people are taught everything they need to know to be a wife and a housewife.”<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, as highlighted by a fellow activist from Bijeljina “when establishing this institute, poor girls were at the forefront of our minds, as we wanted them to be prepared for their role as good housewives and good mothers.”<sup>90</sup>

A diverse range of associational networks launched this type of institution in Bosnia. The most widespread were female Serb associations, and in particular *Kolo Srpskih Sestara*. Prior to the Great War this organization had already started establishing practical schools for women beyond Serbia's borders. By 1928 the association already had more than twenty branches in Bosnia, of which the majority (mostly those based in small towns) between them ran about fifteen practical schools for women, open to female pupils “from all three faiths, to educate them in the spirit of our sisterhood [*sestrinstvo*].”<sup>91</sup> Though there are a few exceptions, the majority of girls attending the *Kolo Srpskih Sestara* network were Orthodox Christians; Muslim pupils remained a minority, making up between a sixth and a third of the total number of students.<sup>92</sup>

88 Kujraković, “Osvitanje,” 149.

89 *Vardar. Kalendar “Kolo Srpskih Sestara”* (1927): 57.

90 *Vardar*, 25.

91 *Vardar*, 35–6.

92 This data was obtained by adding together figures from the association's yearbooks from the interwar years.

After the First World War, even the Muslim associations (both philanthropic and cultural) developed a series of institutions to help Muslim women enter into work. The Muslim female association *Osvitanje* was the first to make the move in this direction. In 1919, immediately after its establishment, it opened a fashion workshop in Sarajevo financed by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Almost simultaneously, a similar institution was founded in Banja Luka by the Muslim association *Spas*. This practical school continued to exist into the 1930s thanks to *Fidaka*, the women's chapter of *Budućnost*, a Muslim philanthropic association based in that city.<sup>93</sup> *Gajret* was the first association to develop a network of practical schools that explicitly targeted Muslim women. A pilot was launched in February 1923 in Novi Pazar, and was managed by a local chapter. In a bid to foster enthusiasm for regional traditional crafts, the association decided to open a rug-weaving school. In addition to the institute's trademark rugs, sewing and embroidery were also taught.<sup>94</sup> The majority of the network was developed in Bosnia, and often in collaboration with pro-Serbian associations. Indeed, in 1926 the local women's chapter in Sarajevo opened a cooperative in collaboration with the local branch of *Kolo Srpskih Sestara*, charged with bringing together the pieces made by women from their homes, and ensuring that the craftswomen received a reasonable price for their work. In the 1930s, up to 100 Muslim women each year were put to work by the cooperative. Once again, in 1932 *Gajret* also founded a school-workshop in Trebinje,<sup>95</sup> which in 1936 was transformed into a veritable state-run practical school for women.<sup>96</sup> That same year, the association built a sister school in Stolac. Pupils from all faiths attended these schools; in its opening year (1936), at *Gajret's* practical school in Stolac for example, sixteen Muslim girls shared the room with five Orthodox-Serbs and one Catholic-Croat.<sup>97</sup>

93 Kujraković, "Osvitanje," footnote 77.

94 "Gajretova ćilimska škola," *Gajret*, no. 12–13 (1924): 209. "Gajretova ćilimska škola u Novom Pazaru," *Gajret*, no. 13–16 (1933): 221. Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 325–8.

95 "Gajretova radionica za izučavanje i izradu ručnih radova u Trebinju," *Gajret*, no. 13–16 (1933): 222–3; "Otvaranje odjela za ćilimarstvo u Gajretevoj radionici u Trebinju," *Gajret*, no. 19 (1933): 312 and "Gajretova radionica za izučavanje i izradu ručnih redova u Trebinju," *Gajret*, no. 7–8 (1934): 151–2.

96 "Gajretova ženska zadruga za unapređenje domaćeg zanatstva i radinosti u Trebinju," *Gajret*, no. 7–9 (1937): 139–40.

97 "Gajretova ženska stručno-zanatska škola u Stocu," *Gajret*, no. 7–9 (1937): 141; "Ženska zanatska radionica u Stocu," *Gajret*, no. 7–9 (1939): 138–40; Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 328–30.

The associations' main concern was ensuring that these institutes be established and, more importantly, remain durable over the long term. Without exception, every association faced these difficulties, be they organizations that could count on support from central state institutions, or local branches and associations removed from party politics. Even *Kolo Srpskih Sestara* and *Gajret*, which benefitted from generous grants from the Government and which (via their respective central branches) had direct contact with the Court, suffered from financial insecurity, a lack of suitable premises and sometimes legislative difficulties. *Narodna Uzdanica*, which was always rather fragile, continuously failed to get any kind of economic initiative off the ground; one exception was a credit union it founded in March 1939, but which had no relevance to the female population whatsoever.<sup>98</sup> Smaller associations and regional groups with few means worked particularly hard to ensure that lessons were maintained in their practical schools. They raised money through membership fees and school registration fees—which, however, did not count for the fact that as much as a third of their pupils did not have the means to pay them. However, of particular importance was their ability to involve external institutions, both public and private: the administration,<sup>99</sup> local banks, local Orthodox parishes (in the case of the *Kolo Srpskih Sestara* network), and sometimes their own central branches. At the government level, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry supported local branches;<sup>100</sup> however, any funding obtained for these schools was not automatically renewed, and had to be applied for afresh each year—the money often went directly to pay for the teachers' salary or accommodation. The fact that no explicit policy was in place to develop this network of practical schools meant that these institutions remained fragile, and sometimes ended up being forced to close or reduce their intake. The final option for ensuring economic viability was self-funding; associations held parties (*zabave*, see Chapter Six) and raised money during religious holidays, via the sale of handmade products (such as embroidery, and less often food), raffles and so on.<sup>101</sup> Although historians have

98 Kemura, *Značaj i uloga*, 221–3.

99 HAS, Gradsko Poglavarstvo, 12414/26, *Osvitanje* to *Gradsko Poglavarstvo* (April 1, 1926).

100 HAS, Gradsko Poglavarstvo, 2817/22, *Gradsko Poglavarstvo* to *Osvitanje* (January 27, 1922) and HAS, Gradsko Poglavarstvo, 10992/25, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, division for Bosnia and Herzegovina, to *Osvitanje* (April 10, 1925).

101 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 332.

tended to underestimate the impact of this type of school, during the inter-war period these institutions made it possible for several thousand Muslim women to gain access to a profession and receive a basic education. Moreover, the effects of this experience were most likely also felt by her family and her neighborhood.

As these schools' names suggest, so-called "women's handiwork" lay at the heart of the teaching program. Although there was a variety of programs, each one different according to the association running it and the year in question, and depending on the human and economic resources available, the core subjects always included classes on sewing, dressmaking, embroidery and sometimes rug-weaving.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, these institutions ended up fulfilling a much more general need, particularly in small towns where there were not enough elementary schools to cater for the local population. Female pupils were taught basic literacy and numeracy skills by local elementary school teachers, doctors, vets, and very often by their wives, who in general worked for free. When a doctor was willing to give lessons free of charge, courses on women and child health were also organized.<sup>103</sup>

The few teaching programs that have survived in the archives reveal that the pedagogical mission of these schools extended to more than simply practical subjects. The program for the *Spas* practical school in Banja Luka, for the school year 1919/1920, tells us that in addition to sewing and embroidery classes, the institute aimed to give Muslim women a much broader education. The application for funding that the school sent to the Provincial Government states that the institute was opened "in the interests of the cultural development of backward Muslim women [*muslimansko zaostalo ženskinje*]," in order that they be able to "take their place alongside their sisters of other faiths."<sup>104</sup> To be successful in this mission, in addition to ensuring pupils had basic literacy skills, the school had devised a much more general teaching program:

102 ABiH, FG, 2, 1102, *Pravilnik gajretovog ženskog tečaja za krojenje i šivanje* (1921).

103 *Vardar. Kalendar "Kolo Srpskih Sestara"* (1927): 35–6 and HAS, Gradsko Poglavarstvo, 5827/24, *Osvitanje* to Gradsko Poglavarstvo (February 28, 1924).

104 ABiH, ZV2, 218/4/6, *Spas* to ZV (January 1, 1919): 1.

A) Mankind

a) The body:

1. The functioning of the internal organs and external parts...

b) Health:

1. Air and water
2. Cleanliness
3. Contagious and bacillus diseases

c) The spirit

1. Perception
2. Reflection, understanding, intellect
3. Feeling, sensation, senses
4. Desire
5. Importance, character
6. Love, compassion
7. Justice, fairness
8. Work: workload, modern progress as the product of work
9. The rights of others, respect for others
10. A mother's upbringing
11. Children's upbringing
12. Society: What is good and what is bad
13. The nature of the educator
14. Behavior: the excess of fashion
15. Wickedness, pride, envy, selfishness
16. Love for the people, the motherland, the state and humanity  
(he who does good for humanity is best)

B) History

a) History of our people (Serbs, Croats and Slovenes)

...

b) General

The cultural development of men (and of course women), clothing, food, buildings, art, craftsmanship, knowledge, religion, state (forms and types), law, human and citizen rights, development of the concepts of civilization and civil awareness... An overview of the influences of Islamic culture.

- C) Geography
  - a) The centrality of Europe and in particular of the “Romans, Germans and Slavs”
  - b) The centrality of Yugoslavia
- D) Language
  - a) Writing, numeracy, and the basics of Yugoslav literature
- E) Natural sciences
  - a) Animals
    - The economic use of animals and medicinal uses for plants
  - b) Plants
    1. Storing fruit and vegetables
    2. Bacteria: uses and dangers
  - c) Minerals
  - d) Using the land more effectively
- F) Physics
  - a) Studying atmospheric phenomena and their scientific explanation: for example, changes in the state of water, magnetism, electrical currents.
  - b) Studying the natural laws, gravity, etc.
- G) Chemistry
  - a) Changes in the state of elements, digestion, etc.<sup>105</sup>

From this teaching program, it seems clear that the Muslim activists’ mission transcended simple professional training. *Spas* aimed to give Muslim girls the basic cultural tools necessary for having a social life outside of their families and the community, “with simple words, and without foreign words, since this is the only way [to make ourselves understood].”<sup>106</sup> In some cases practical schools managed to build a collection of several dozen books—perhaps exaggeratedly called a “library” in documents—which both pupils and the members of a local association could access.<sup>107</sup> In other cases, practical schools subscribed to newspapers, and thus became a space where one could come to read the female and patriotic Yugoslav press, in-

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<sup>105</sup> ABiH, ZV2, 218/4/6, 39.

<sup>106</sup> ABiH, ZV2, 218/4/6, 39.

<sup>107</sup> *Vardar. Kalendar “Kolo Srpskih Sestara”* (1927): 74–5. For more information about associational libraries, see Ljubinka Bašović, *Biblioteke u BiH 1918-1941* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1986), 145–236.



cluding magazines such as *Srpsko Kosovo* (The Serbian Kosovo) and *Žena i Svet* as well as associational gazettes.<sup>108</sup> Although fragile, both economically and in terms of their continued existence, these practical schools represented a sort of cultural garrison for small towns throughout the province, and thus took on an increasing importance, not only for the women directly involved, but also for the inhabitants of the towns in which they were implanted.

These expanding and increasingly appreciated institutes were accompanied by a discourse that many different associations shared—Muslim philanthropic and cultural, feminist, and nationalist. For them, *ženski ručni radovi*, or women’s handiwork, “belongs to the female sphere [*spadaju u delokrug žene*], and women are expected to perfect the skill to the best of their ability.”<sup>109</sup> In line with a teaching discourse dating back to at least the nineteenth century, “women’s handiwork” was considered to be an integral part of a developing idea of suitable middle-class femininity. As Suada Muftić, a teacher of handiwork and *Gajret* activist stated in 1932:

In practical schools we develop our young women’s practical sense [*praktičnost*] and industriousness [*marljivost*] so that they can one day become capable housewives and capable mothers. In these schools, women have the opportunity to show, through [the creation of] wonderful handmade works, their aesthetic taste and artistic side [*umjetničke strane*]. Tastefully combining different shapes and colors, they can show their imagination [*fantazija*] and intelligence [*inteligencija*], the expressions of their spirit. Through this work each woman develops her own designs and at the same time reproduces popular patterns. In this way tradition is reinforced and passed down from generation to generation.<sup>110</sup>

Though on the same page when it came to the narrative of separate spheres, different associations used women’s handiwork to very different ends. These same three activities (sewing, embroidery and weaving) and the same tool (the sewing machine) were applied to very different projects. Women’s handiwork, in fact, even had explicit political objectives; through its practice, mid-

108 *Vardar. Kalendar “Kolo Srpskih Sestara”* (1927): 31.

109 *Vardar. Kalendar “Kolo Srpskih Sestara”* (1926): 63–4.

110 Suada Muftić, učiteljica, “Gajret i prosvjeđivanje muslimanki,” *Gajret*, no. 21 (1932): 344–5.

dle-class activists of different associations hoped to spread their ideology among the urban poor, and involve them in the ongoing community and nation-building processes. An anonymous *Kolo Srpskih Sestara* activist from Kotor Varoš described an exhibition of women's handiwork—which showed work by women from across the Kingdom—held in her hometown in 1928:

We undertook the task of organizing an exhibition of handiwork in our branch, opening on June 12, to bring us together and to share everything that is ours. And although the task of coming together could not be fulfilled, as we were not to meet in person, we would meet spiritually through our sisters' work. So we sent lots of letters to women's associations throughout the country, regardless of nationality and religion, asking them to send us their handiwork. The work we displayed represents our art, the treasure of our people. In these works, thoughts, worries and happiness are intertwined; in sum they are the spirit of our people. They are like an open book.<sup>111</sup>

In these lines, sewing and exhibiting handicraft were thus considered much more than simply an activity good for improving female economic autonomy. Sewing and embroidery are here presented as a practice of gendered nation-building, allowing women from different regions and backgrounds to come together, and to weave their individual stories into one unique national narrative.

As Ibrahim Kemura has highlighted, *Gajret* encouraged Muslims and Serbs to come together and get to know each other. A photo dating from the late 1930s showing a *Gajret* sewing class held in Trebinje in Herzegovina neatly illustrates the association's intentions, in terms of the means available to women to gain access to work (see figure 23). The class is held in an extra-domestic space, which bears the association's emblem; '*Gajret*,' written in both Latin and Cyrillic script, stands out at the back of the room as a sign of national unity. In this self-portrait of the sewing class, women from different faiths sew together, and the first row sports popular regional costumes. The improvement of the autonomy of indigent Muslim women was thus made possible through their meeting with their non-Muslim fellow-citizens, outside of the domestic space.

<sup>111</sup> *Vardar. Kalendar "Kolo Srpskih Sestara" (1928): 64.*



Figure 23: A *Gajret* sewing class in Trebinje, late 1930s/early 1940s.

Source: courtesy of Jasmina Cvjetić.

The use made of sewing machines by Muslim philanthropic associations was very different from that chosen by *Gajret*. *Osvitanje* in the 1920s,<sup>112</sup> and *Merhamet* in the 1930s,<sup>113</sup> for instance, never organized female work in a dedicated associational space. On the contrary, the activists of these associations arranged to lend these tools directly to poor women in Sarajevo, thus favoring female work from home. In both cases, the improvement of the economic conditions of Muslim women was pursued without favoring any contact with non-Muslim people, nor any extra-domestic activity. In other words, for the leadership of the Muslim philanthropic associations the best kind of female economic empowerment was one that did not challenge sexual and confessional segregation. Moreover, by lending these sewing machines, these associations seem to have had a clearly disciplinary goal in mind. In the contracts signed between *Merhamed* and the needy women at the moment of the delivery of the sewing machines, the loan of these machines was explicitly linked to the woman's obligation to agree to "upholding morality"<sup>114</sup> (*zaštita morala*) according to Islamic precepts. In signing the contract—with a fingerprint, as they were mostly illiterate—the women

112 HAS, Gradsko Poglavarstvo, 2817, Bosnian Division of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to *Osvitanje* (January 27, 1922).

113 HAS, M9, 1, 155, *Merhamet* to Spahić, (March 26, 1931).

114 As an example, see HAS, M9, 8, *Obaveznice* (1936).

also agreed to be monitored in their behavior by the activists of the same association and by the religious officials of their neighborhood.

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Thanks to a varied and expanding array of actions, interwar voluntary associations engaged in the cultural and economic empowerment of Muslim women. The actions put into practice were different according to the associations that promoted them, and according to the population they hoped to target. Founding and permanently funding these kinds of initiatives was one of the principal preoccupations of the activists of these associations. Holding to the idea that strength lies in unity, associations with similar agendas often chose to hold activities together and thus to split the costs of organization, as did for example *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica* with their non-Muslim counterparts. In this constant search for stable financial support, the leaders of these associations also learned to maintain good relations with the institutions able to finance them, such as the different ministries, Governorates, municipalities, the Islamic institutions, and the Crown.

In order to support girls' secondary and higher schooling, cultural associations granted scholarships and ran student dorms. These actions often implied, for the girls involved in them, forms of mobility inside and outside of Bosnia, in particular toward the two main university cities of the country, Belgrade and Zagreb. Several sources show that these forms of mobility, often pushing students beyond the control of their families, meant that young Muslim women lived meaningful experiences that would have been unimaginable only a few years before. Thanks to these associations' commitment to supporting secondary and university education, on the eve of the Second World War a first cohort of Muslim female professionals—white collars, medical doctors—became visible in Yugoslavia, challenging the Orientalist stereotype of Muslim women as silent and oppressed.

If cultural associations mostly focused on reinforcing the Muslim middle classes, they also joined forces with philanthropic associations in assisting the urban poor, which as a consequence of the Great War and the Great Depression were increasingly being perceived as a social problem. The analysis of associational policies regarding the urban poor allow us to see an important distinction between the different kinds of Muslim urban elites: the progressives engaged in cultural associations, like *Gajret*, seem to have been

more inclined to favor female extra-domestic work, looking with sympathy on forms of sisterhood between Muslim and non-Muslim women in vocational schools and workshops—under the benevolent control of the association’s activists, of course. The elite running the city-based philanthropic associations, however, seemed to have been more inclined to preserve female domesticity for the urban poor, and to strengthen Islamic morality.

## CHAPTER 6

### A TASTE FOR CELEBRATION



As we have seen, supporting education, vocational training and caring for the poor were the fundamental markers by which activists measured the success of their organization; any increase in the number of beds in a student dorm, of women enrolled in handiwork courses, or in scholarships granted to students in need were meticulously reported in associational journals and were the primary symbol of pride for activists throughout Yugoslavia. However, these activities, though they were the most direct manifestations of the voluntary association's statutes, formed only a fraction of its undertakings. As a matter of fact, activists spent a great deal of energy organizing different leisure activities for recreation and sociability for their targeted population, including concerts, collective prayer, picnics and parties. Though researchers have generally played down the importance of voluntary associations' event-planning functions, generally considering these activities to be of secondary importance, the capacity to provide a rich array and a well-regarded set of socializing activities was an important criterion in sanctioning the success of an association and its effective role in the public space. As remarked by Mikhail Bakhtin, every celebration or party, be it public or private, is a political one.<sup>1</sup> This chapter proposes a gendered analysis of the festive culture that the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina were involved in in the interwar years, through the prism of the associational network.

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<sup>1</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) quoted in Noëlle Gérôme, "La tradition politique des fêtes: interprétation et appropriation," in *Les usages politiques des fêtes aux XIXe-XXe siècles*, eds. Alain Corbin, Noëlle Gérôme, Danielle Tartakowsky (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1994), 15–23.

## A FESTIVE ARRAY

The associations depended upon their activists' engagement in organizing events for many reasons, which throughout the first half of the twentieth century marked social life in the towns of Yugoslavia. First of all, because these activities generally involved an attendance fee, leisure activities were an additional source of income for the association's assets, a source that could turn out to be more than welcome in periods when state aid was weak—for example, when the ripples of the Great Depression reached Southeastern Europe. Secondly, socializing activities were an essential tool for improving the organisation's visibility outside of the tight-knit circle of its activists, in particular among those who were less receptive *per se* to the ethic of voluntary engagement. In other words—and though it may seem obvious—organizing a party or a picnic could often turn out to be more effective in drawing the sympathy of the population than organizing more pedagogical events such as public lectures or speeches. Last but not least, activists knew the extent to which social events were an important means for strengthening associational and, more broadly, social bonds; organizing leisure and recreational activities became thus a tool for reinforcing class, national and cultural boundaries, and stressing social distinctions. Of course, associations did not engineer their socialising practices in a vacuum. On the contrary, since their establishment in the early twentieth century they had been taking inspiration from a rich array of existing recreational activities from both the Ottoman and Habsburg period, as already been mentioned in Chapter One. Existing sources suggest that associations generally organized this kind of activity around the religious festive calendars in use in Yugoslavia. If we take just the Muslim associations, for example, socializing activities were clearly timed to coincide with the Islamic feasts, and thus were concentrated during Ramadan, and in particular on its final day (*ramazanski bajram*), or on the Festival of the Sacrifice (*kurban bajram*). Besides these dates, Muslim activists also scheduled their events according to other religious feast days that Muslims of the Yugoslav space shared with their non-Muslim fellows, in particular on July 20 (*alidun* for Muslims, and Saint Elijah's Day for Christians) or on May 5 (*hidirellez* for Muslims, and Saint George's Day for Christians). A glance through the journals of that time clearly shows that even in the late 1930s, associational events were reg-

ularly held “on the fourth day of *Bajram*,”<sup>2</sup> “the third day of *Kurban Bajram*,”<sup>3</sup> “the first Friday after *Aliđun*,”<sup>4</sup> and so on.

This adherence to a religious festive temporality was not simply due to some unmoving respect for habit, but also a conscious choice; in organizing events close to religious feasts, activists knew they could count on a greater philanthropic sensibility among the population, and often capitalize on the Islamic obligation of giving ritual alms (*zekijat*) to collect more funds. During the interwar years, some Muslim associations sometimes distanced themselves from the religious calendar when organizing socializing activities, and for the most part this was the case for cultural associations. Since its establishment, for example, the central and local branches of *Narodna Uzdanica* had organized their gatherings on feast days linked to Croatian national history. However, these cases remained rare, especially during the years of the royal dictatorship; for fear of having their association singled out as an anti-state organization by the Government, its leaders preferred to remain loyal to the Islamic, and thus less nationally-connoted, calendar. The association that did implement widespread use of the national patriotic calendar was above all *Gajret*, which especially since its re-establishment after the Great War used dates borrowed from the Serbian national calendar as a way to stress their national brotherhood with their Orthodox fellows. Indeed, in the 1920s the *Gajret* central branch was in the habit of organizing its biggest balls on December 16, the birthday of King Aleksandar, and in the 1930s on September 6, for the birthday of the heir Petar.<sup>5</sup> Of course, the motivation behind celebrating these dates was that it was an opportunity to demonstrate the loyalty of the main Muslim cultural association, and by extension of Muslim citizens, to the Yugoslav political project and symbolically their most important architects, the members of the Karađorđević dynasty.

This addition of a national-patriotic feast day to the Islamic festive calendar was not uniformly adopted across the *Gajret* network; space and gender variables influenced the introduction of these dates into the festive culture

2 “Velika gajretova zabava u Bijeljini,” *Gajret*, no. 8 (1928): 125; “Zabava Narodne Uzdanice u Doboju,” *Novi Behar*, no. 15–16 (1937–1938): 207.

3 “Gajretova zabava u Tešnju,” *Gajret*, no. 9 (1927): 143; “Velika godišnja zabava Narodne Uzdanice u Banjoj Luci,” *Novi Behar*, no. 17–19 (1938–1939): 288.

4 “Veliki teferič Narodne Uzdanice u Kiseljaku,” *Novi Behar*, no. 3–4 (1934–5): 66.

5 “Gajretova svečanost,” *Gajret*, no. 15 (1924): 237–41.



of the association. Even though, as we shall see in the following paragraphs, all throughout the interwar period Muslim women took part in social events in increasing numbers, *Gajret* female activists hardly ever took it upon themselves to organize their activities on national and patriotic feast days. Gatherings, tea-parties, and concerts organised by female branches continued to follow to a great extent the Islamic calendar, leaving to male activists, and in particular to the association's central branch, the responsibility of celebrating dynastic and national feast days.<sup>6</sup> Publicly celebrating the nation and the supreme political leader seems thus to have remained mostly a masculine prerogative. Moreover, besides the gender divide, there was also a geographical divide. In the case of both the principal Muslim cultural associations, national and patriotic dates—Yugoslav, Serbian, and Croatian alike—seem to have been appropriated only by activists in the main towns, especially in Sarajevo, Belgrade and Mostar. Associational branches in smaller towns continued to organize their social activities according to a religious calendar. This can be read as evidence of the limits, for the Muslim masses, to the nationalization process undertaken by cultural associations, and of the limited penetration into, and appropriation by Muslim society, of identification with Serbian, Croatian and Yugoslav national cause.

Besides having a temporal impact, voluntary associations also transformed the spatial nature of leisure practices, i.e., their place in the urban sphere. In the country's principal cities, associations used existing institutional buildings for their social activities, such as the aforementioned *Društveni dom* and Officers Club in Sarajevo, or the *Banski dvor* in Banja Luka, erected in the early 1930s to host the office of the Governor. Associational student dorms, as they often had a spacious dining hall, or associational headquarters often became spaces where parties and theater performances were held. As the landscape of Yugoslav towns began to gradually transform and assume the spatial markers of Western modernity, private buildings like hotels and cinemas also entered into the associations' list of most valued spaces for organizing fashionable social events.<sup>7</sup> In smaller

6 ABiH, FG, 10, 695, MŽPG Višegrad to GOG (February 18, 1931); ABiH, FG, 12, 208, GOG to MŽPG Sarajevo (January 15, 1932); HAS, NU14, 4, 461, MŽONU Sarajevo to GONU (December 11, 1929). On the same subject, see also "Zabava gajretova ženskog pododbora u Livnu," *Gajret*, no. 7 (1929): 107; "Uspješan rad ženskog odbora u Stocu," *Gajret*, no. 7 (1931): 197–8.

7 "Jedna vrlo uspjela gajretova zabava," *Gajret*, no. 4 (1925): 64.



Figure 24: Early twentieth century *teferič*.

Source: Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu*, 244.

towns, where a lack of spacious modern buildings was felt most strongly, activists had to invent new strategies and enhance the scarce spatial resources they had. A good relationship with a local teacher or *hodža* could ensure for a local association the use of the local state-run or Muslim communal school; political and personal proximity with the local political notables could also provide access to spaces in a local town hall.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, Muslim associations developed their festive culture using both “new” and “old,” as well as communal and extra-communal spaces, depending on their needs and the resources available.

If we look at festive practices, here too we can observe that activists always took existing social practices into account, opting for a fusion that lay somewhere between “tradition” and “innovation,” local routines and increasingly visible transnational habits. The result was an arsenal of festive practices capable of satisfying both the needs of each association, and the changing tastes of the population; the following examples can help us to better understand this important point. Though they did not all position themselves at the same point on the scale of pro-Western attitudes, no Muslim association completely abandoned traditional forms of sociability. The *teferič*,

8 “Velika gajretova zabava u Bijeljini,” *Gajret*, no. 8 (1928): 125.

for example, a kind of picnic organized in green spaces near urban centers, had been an extremely popular activity since at least the late Ottoman period, and for this reason it was regularly appropriated by associations as well. On these occasions, members of the same family, or sometimes neighbours, met together, most commonly near a river or a spring, laid out rugs and spent the sunny hours of the day sitting, smoking, eating, singing and playing instruments (see figure 24).

During the interwar period, associations proved themselves to be highly skilled in adapting this kind of traditional form of sociability. In the spring of 1921, for example, *Gajret* activists from Prnjavor organized an associational *teferič* near their hometown. During the day, besides sitting, eating and playing instruments according to traditional practice, they also organized group activities for fostering literacy, invited the nationalist gymnastic society *Soko* to demonstrate its exercises, and filled the afternoon with public lectures on educational topics.<sup>9</sup> This traditional form of sociability was thus brought closer to the association's primary goals in the (self-)civilizing mission—educating and nationalizing the people.

Activists also adapted their socializing practices over time, proving themselves to be particularly sensitive to the changing tastes of the urban middle class, which thanks to people's increasing mobility and the circulation of media—radio, journals, cinema—was more and more informed by new tastes from the capital and from abroad, in particular the United States. At a *teferič* organised by the local Sarajevo *Gajret* branch in 1939 for example, the picnic was organised in the courtyard of the recently inaugurated *Gajret* headquarters, and the event included a jazz band and modern dancing throughout the night.<sup>10</sup> Thus, what had originally been an Ottoman form of sociability became less and less distinguishable from the parties that in the same period characterized the nightlife of the country's more urban city centres, namely Belgrade and Zagreb.

Interestingly enough, in some cases voluntary associations were even able to transform religious sociability, in particular the *mevlud*. From the Arabic *mawlid*, this term traditionally referred to the celebration of the birth of the prophet Muhammad, and involved gatherings, recitations of the Quran, both

<sup>9</sup> "Gajretov teferič u Prnjavoru," *Domovina*, no. 66 (1921): 2.

<sup>10</sup> ABiH, FG, 27, 880, *Veliki proljetni teferič* (1939).



Figure 25: A *Narodna Uzdanica teferič* in Kiseljak, mid-1930s.

Source: *Kalendar "Narodna Uzdanica"* (1936): 154.

in the public and private space, and was generally celebrated on the twelfth day of it, the third month of the Islamic calendar. Though this kind of celebration was for the most part segregated according to sex, it was in reality performed on many other occasions throughout the year, such as moving into a new home, or marriages and circumcisions.

In this respect, the description of a female *mevlud*, organized in 1928 by the local *Gajret* branch in Prnjavor (Northern Bosnia) is an interesting example of how associations were capable of transforming and moulding religious activities to their own ends. Held in the late afternoon in the town's female *mekteb*, the celebration was open to Muslim and non-Muslim women alike. In the building's three rooms, "there were twenty or so women from *Kolo Srpskih Sestara* and *Hrvatska Žena*,"<sup>11</sup> the two female Serbian and Croatian national associations. After a brief introduction by the local imam, who was himself a *Gajret* activist, the floor was opened to his daughter, Hafiza Ćejtan, who "with a gracious voice [gave] a lecture on bringing up children, which was followed by a speech by the local handiwork teacher, Fata Korić."<sup>12</sup>

11 "Proslava 25-godišnice Gajreta u Prnjavoru," *Gajret*, no. 1 (1929): 26–31.

12 "Proslava 25-godišnice Gajreta u Prnjavoru," 27.

At the very end of the celebration, Mira Marković, the delegate of the Serbian female association, spoke on behalf of the two female national associations present at the meeting. After giving a speech on the importance of schooling, she addressed the Muslim women present and asked them to educate their daughters. She assured her Muslim listeners that the two associations would provide financial support for their daughters' enrolment at the local handiwork school and she pledged to organize a literacy class. She concluded urging the Muslim women present to form their own local female chapters. For *Gajret*, the conclusion of Marković's speech was highly significant: "what success we will have when the three sisters [Muslim, Catholic-Croat and Orthodox-Serb] smile at each other and walk together along the path of cultural and educative progress!"<sup>13</sup>

This case demonstrates the extent to which activists were particularly capable of adapting a traditional form of religious sociability and bringing it closer to the association's goals. First of all, despite the religious character of this ritual, it was not a *bula* (the women responsible for the recitation of the Quran, and who normally ran female religious meetings), but two female Muslim state school teachers who spoke in public. Secondly and most importantly, by extending their invitation to Orthodox and Catholic women, and in particular activists from the two largest female nationalist associations in the country, *Gajret* activists lent a clearly national objective to this religious celebration: fostering interfaith solidarity among the women of Yugoslavia.

#### A FESTIVE EMPOWERMENT

Of the changing repertoire of festive activities that were adapted and enlisted by voluntary associations, one in particular deserves special attention: the *zabava* (amusement, party). As we have seen in Chapter One, this practice had been introduced into Bosnia in the 1880s by Habsburg officials relocated to the province. During the interwar period, it gained increasing importance and visibility as an associational activity, especially for the cultural associations, and helped to shape the (night)life of city-dwellers throughout Yugoslavia. Since their appearance in Bosnia, these events had become

13 "Proslava 25-godišnjice Gajreta u Prnjavoru," 28.

far more than just fundraising events; associational parties became a veritable showcase for the activities of an association, and the most effective way to affirm an association's successful participation in the public space. Early on, activists seem to have been aware of the important role of the *zabava*. In the early 1930s, the *Gajret* journal was quick to remark that parties "allow the members and sympathizers of a certain association to show... their devotion to the association itself, and to its ideology,"<sup>14</sup> and that they should be considered to be "the crowning glory [*sjajna kruna*] of [the association's] successes among the masses, in every field of public life."<sup>15</sup> The big novelty of the interwar period was that Muslim women, who during the pre-war period had remained absent from these events, entered the scene and became important actors of this performance of associational modernity. Perceived an eminently European form of leisure, interwar associational *zabavas* became as an arena in which Muslim women could negotiate their role and visibility in the Yugoslav society.<sup>16</sup>

Before launching into a gendered analysis of the interwar *zabava*, it is worth taking a moment to look more closely at this specific festive practice. During the interwar period, parties organized by Muslim cultural associations, like those organized by other associations in Bosnia and Yugoslavia, went through a certain degree of standardization. When we compare the programs of these events, we can see that they were mostly built around three principal moments: an opening address, generally given by a member of the association, and an opportunity to present the party within the historic context and goals of the association; followed by a concert, an amateur theater performance, or more rarely a ballet; and finally the ball, where attendees could often dance the most fashionable styles from the US and European capitals, and which involved all participants, both male and female. In addition to these three characterizing elements, organizers could incorporate other moments into the *zabava*, according to their economic and organizational capacity; e.g., banquets, raffles, the sale of trinkets, exhibitions of female handiwork, women's beauty contests. This festive ritual, in which actions and words followed a prescribed form and order, was unique compared to the other socializing practices produced by voluntary associations, in

14 "Pobjeda gajretove ideologije - Manifestacija na svečanoj zabavi," *Gajret*, no. 6 (1931): 137–8.

15 "Zabava kao manifestacija," *Gajret*, no. 3 (1932): 34.

16 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 351–2; *Značaj i uloga*, 173–4; Hasanbegović, *Muslimani u Zagrebu*, 95–7.

terms of timing; starting around eight in the evening, they went on until very late, and often until dawn. *Zabavas* thus were an opportunity for participants to experience the night outside of the private sphere, and to enjoy forms of sociability—in particular dancing—that they considered themselves to share with other city-dwellers in Yugoslavia. In other words, associational parties became performances of modernity, establishing the foundations for an urban identity that its participants felt they shared with one another, as well as with the rest of the urban population of Europe and the West.

Incidentally, as has already been noted by historians, Muslim women played a crucial role in associational parties, swiftly making the transition from spectators to planners. However, their presence and role in these carefully planned parties was not homogenous. Certainly, Muslim women played a major role in the practical organization of *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica*'s parties; reports show, for instance, that the female activists of the two Muslim cultural associations generally established a temporary branch (*privremeni zabavni odbor*) in charge of organizing the party. Preparations began from a few weeks to a few months before the event, and annual parties in Sarajevo required two to three months' work from the temporary party committee. The female activists' involvement in party preparations was widely publicized in the associations' journals, and the women were publicly celebrated in the press for their skilfulness and self-sacrifice. The *Gajret* journal in particular used epic language to celebrate the party organizers, describing them as "troops [čete] of hard-working [vrijedni] activists and members"<sup>17</sup> who dedicated all of their energy to the success of the event. As an activist who organized the 1938 *Gajret* yearly party in Sarajevo put it, "we worked non-stop, day and night, as much as was required. Almost every day the committees responsible for the buffet, the raffle, program choices, etc. would meet. Everyone worked flat out and with one end in mind: the success of the party!"<sup>18</sup> Women who excelled in these tasks were sometimes celebrated individually in the associational press; in 1928 for example, *Gajret*'s journal reported that a certain Ševka *hanuma* Pašić from Bijeljina had "been able to collect a good quantity of embroideries and other valuable

17 "Velika Gajretova zabava u Sarajevu," *Gajret*, no. 4–5 (1938): 80–2.

18 "Velika Gajretova zabava u Sarajevu," 81.



Figure 26: *Gajret* temporary party branch from Mostar, 1928.

Source: *Gajret*, no. 15 (1928): 230.

objects for the raffle all by herself.”<sup>19</sup> Sometimes the work of these temporary party committees was also celebrated, and their portraits published, as was the case for the team working on *Gajret*’s party in Mostar in 1928. The members of this women-only group presented themselves dressed according to late-1920s fashion—short hair, dresses and skirts that showed their legs and arms, and long necklaces. Young, industrious, urban and unveiled, the activists of this temporary party committee are the portrait of what a *Gajret* Muslim female activist was meant to be (see figure 26).

Organizing an associational party meant that Muslim women had to take on a vast array of responsibilities. First of all, they had to organize meetings in order to agree upon the program, often in coordination with male activists and also non-Muslim female activists from other associations. Partnerships between one or more associations were frequent, especially in smaller towns. In addition, they had to contact the associations’ donors to arrange the buffet and beverages—which, both in the case of *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica*, regularly included alcohol, despite complaints from the Sarajevo Muslim anti-alcohol association *Trezvenost*, which regularly urged them “to give to the party an authentic Muslim and cultural character.”<sup>20</sup> Over the

19 “Velika gajretova zabava u Bijeljini,” *Gajret*, no. 8 (1928):125.

20 HAS, NU14, 5, *Trezvenost* to *Narodna Uzdanica* (January 16, 1930).





Figure 27: Displaying the prizes collected by *Gajret* Muslim women activists for a *zabava* raffle in Stolac, 1931.

Source: *Gajret*, no. 11 (1931): 278.

following weeks the women had to organize rehearsals for the musical and theater performances, and go door-to-door to sell tickets and collect embroidery and other handiwork to be used as prizes for the raffle. In the days leading up to the party, the loot was often put on display in a shop in the town centre—as can be seen in the photograph above taken in Stolac in 1931—in order to entice a broader public to the *zabava* with the richness of the raffle prizes.

In the feverish hours preceding the party, some of the members of the temporary committee also met to make trinkets (flower bouquets or brooches bearing national or associational symbols, for example) to be sold on the night of the party; others collected carpets and flowers to decorate the place where the event would be held. Organizing an associational party was thus an activity that required women to develop decision-making and coordination skills, urban mobility, and to make use of their social networks, expanding them beyond family and community boundaries.

However, gaining access to this new practice was not always without risk for the women involved. As testified by many sources, a good portion of interwar associational *zabavas* had the potential to turn sour, especially during the Yugoslav general elections. In many cases, notables used parties to reinforce their own prestige, to publicly humiliate their opponents, or even to highlight an opposing political faction's failure to take root in a local context. In other words, what at the outset was intended to showcase a certain association could rapidly turn into a theater for political conflict. This tendency to politicize the *zabavas* was already becoming visible in the aftermath of the Great War, when *Gajret* activists across the province denounced to the central branch and the press the disturbing actions of JMO sympathizers. The latter, regularly described by the activists as "slandorous reactionaries"<sup>21</sup> or even "backward elements,"<sup>22</sup> often went out of their way to turn the *Gajret* parties into failures, spreading rumors, highlighting their non-Muslim character, and inciting the Muslim population to boycott them. In some cases, the activists seem to have been able to save the party—and with it their own and the association's reputation. For example, at a party organized in the town of Brod by local activists, "some local notable, and two or three elements of the intelligentsia, not only did not contribute to the success of the party, but they acted against it, with no success."<sup>23</sup> In that instance, the party was saved by inter-associational solidarity. Activists from *Jedinstvo* (Unity), a Yugoslavist association from the nearby town of Derventa, arrived at the last moment in support of the Muslim cultural association, and by their presence ensured that the party was not completely deserted.<sup>24</sup>

21 "Gajretov Dan," *Glas Težaka*, no. 5 (1920): 3.

22 "Gajretova zabava u Čapljini," *Glas Težaka*, no. 4 (1920): 4.

23 "Gajret," *Glas Težaka*, no. 13 (1920): 3.

24 "Gajret," 3.

Though for the most part they were unsuccessful, in rare cases these attempted sabotages were effective. In one case, in 1928 *Gajret* activists from the small village of Teslić (100 km north of Sarajevo) sadly admitted that the local population had heeded anti-*Gajret* rumors and preferred not to come.<sup>25</sup> In the 1930s, it was *Narodna Uzdanica* in particular that encountered the most difficulties organizing successful parties. When they attempted to organize a party in Foča in September 1929, the local non-Muslim associations refused to help them, their justification being that they were pro-*Gajret* and could not cooperate with the rival Muslim cultural association.<sup>26</sup> They also had trouble with a party held in Mostar in early 1930, when local civil and military officials refused to attend, in order to visibly underline the association's political isolation.<sup>27</sup>

Muslim women who decided to invest their time and energy organizing parties thus risked getting caught in the middle of local conflicts between male notables, and their efforts being misappropriated to these ends. A conflict around a party held by *Gajret* in the town of Zenica is a good example of how Muslim women could become involved in such conflicts. In 1930, *Gajret* local male activists wrote to the association's central branch expressing sorrow and disappointment about a party that they had just organized. According to them, despite all their efforts the party turned out to be only a modest success, if not a complete failure. According to the activists, even in the early planning stages for their party, they met with the "hostility of certain persons who enjoy the trust of ignorant people, who are wealthy and who have a significant role in the public life of Zenica,"<sup>28</sup> as well as from "the people leading prayer at the mosque."<sup>29</sup> From these words, we can infer that *Gajret* activists probably came up against secular local notables close to the JMO and religious officials from time to time. According to the report, in order ensure the failure of the *zabava*, *Gajret*'s adversaries targeted in particular Muslim women, publicly disapproving of their presence at such parties, and accusing those who became involved in organizing the event as immoral. The informal pressure they put on local Muslim women seems to have been effective: "if a Muslim woman works with

25 "Gajretova zabava u Tesliću," *Gajret*, no. 13 (1928): 204.

26 HAS, NU14, 4, 380, MONU Foča to GONU (September 5, 1929).

27 HAS, NU14, 5, 29, GONU to the Governor of the Primorska Governorate (February 12, 1930).

28 ABiH, FG, 9, 4053, MPG Zenica to GOG (November 3, 1930).

29 ABiH, FG, 9, 4053.

us” the report’s author continued with some regret “she is immediately met with general disdain.”<sup>30</sup> As a partial justification for their failure, *Gajret’s* male activist tried to explain to the central branch the daily challenge that they faced in Zenica, where Muslim women still found it extremely difficult to be present in public; “if the central branch thinks that something can be done with [local] Muslim women, we bring to your attention the fact that in our town “cultural progress” is only evolving slowly and in a very limited manner.” To redress this situation, the Zenica activists proposed to the central branch an unusual solution; that the *Gajret* central branch parachute in from Sarajevo “the schoolgirls hosted in *Gajret’s* student dorm [in Sarajevo] to participate in our party.”<sup>31</sup> In this way, they would be able to say that women had been present at the association’s next party, even if local women did not attend.

There are several elements that make this wired exchange between *Gajret* (male) activists in Zenica and Sarajevo interesting. Firstly, it confirms, as already established for the Habsburg period, that in order for an associational party to be considered a successful one, it had to include women, and they had to be very visible. This was of course true for all voluntary associations, and for Muslim cultural associations in particular, insofar as female emancipation was one of their key explicit objectives. Having women visibly present at a party was so important that local male activists, unable to get women from Zenica involved, did not think twice about asking their association’s central branch to “parachute” Muslim women in from Sarajevo, in order to preserve the reputation of the association and its activists. This exchange between male progressives also tells us much about of the unspoken conflict in the town; the opposing group, composed both of religious and non-religious notables, was ready to informally threaten the reputation of local women in order to achieve their goal to sabotage *Gajret’s* activities and its reputation among local people. Thus it seems that both fronts were clear about the importance of the “no women, no party” principle, and used Muslim women in order to accomplish their goals. This passage strongly mirrors and appears to confirm the teacher Nafija Baljak’s own feelings on the subject, which she expressed around the same period (see Chapter Four): Mus-

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30 ABiH, FG, 9, 4053.

31 ABiH, FG, 9, 4053.

lim women who decided to become actively involved in associations, and in the public space more in general, risked being caught up in conflicts between Muslim notables.

### MUSLIM STARS: MODERN FEMININITY ON THE STAGE

Though considered essential in sanctioning a *zabava's* success, Muslim women were not uniformly present at associational parties. Of great importance during preparations, Muslim women appeared to be decisively marginalized when it came to the public address, i.e. the speech that was made at the party's opening. This speech, doubtless the most solemn part of the evening, was considerably different in content between the two Muslim cultural associations. The opening speech at *Gajret* parties was very often of an openly patriotic nature, stressing allegiance to the nation and a clear commitment to the Yugoslav State and its royal dynasty. The king's portrait, the Yugoslav flag, and flower compositions in blue, red and white, were invariably put on display during this first part of the ritual, while the Yugoslav national anthem was regularly played, followed by the association's anthem. By contrast, the address at *Narodna Uzdanica's* parties had a less political and national character. Given the association's precarious situation since its establishment, and especially during the years of the royal dictatorship, the executive of the association mostly maintained a low profile, avoiding explicitly national references, and focussing uniquely on the association's role in the enlightenment of the Muslim population. Despite these differences, the opening speech for the parties of these two Muslim cultural associations had one point in common: they remained exclusively a man's affair. Both associations chose the speaker from among the members of the association's male-only central branch, sometimes followed by a male representative of the state, i.e. a mayor, a military general or, during the 1930s, a provincial governor. Despite their key role in preparations, female activists remained thus at the margins of the *zabava's* most political moment; during the speech, they participated only through applause and by joining in the triple *živjeli* (Hurrah!) at the end of the speech. A striking example of this associational patriotism can be found in the choreographed dance performance that opened *Gajret's* yearly party in Sarajevo in March 1931 (see figure 28). As can be seen in this picture, Muslim women were on stage, dressed in traditional Muslim



Figure 28: Choreographed performance entitled “For the King and the Homeland,” held at a *Gajret* party on March 7, 1931 at the National Theater in Sarajevo.

Source: *Gajret*, no. 6 (1931): 139.

clothes, but their faces unveiled. Young and richly dressed, they offer flowers to a cut-out of King Aleksandar, glorified at centre-stage beneath a palm tree. The presence of young men and women in the Yugoslav *Sokol* movement, as well as the banner “For the King and the Homeland” fixed above the stage of the Sarajevo National Theater, testify to the patriotic spirit that *Gajret* parties assumed during the years of the dictatorship (see figure 28).

After the address, the *zabava* entered into the central moment of its program, given over to a theater, choir or orchestral performance. In this section dedicated to artistic expression, women certainly played an important role. In order to make their parties appear more polished, Muslim cultural associations sometimes invited well-known artists from the bigger city centres of Yugoslavia. *Narodna Uzdanica*’s activists, for instance, regularly invited to their yearly party in Sarajevo opera singers like Vika Čaleta or Vilma Nožić-Janković, from the Opera of Ljubljana and Zagreb respectively.<sup>32</sup> However, hosting professional performers from outside of Bosnia remained an option clearly outside of the budget of the majority of Bosnian associations. Instead,

32 *Novi Behar*, no. 19–20 (1929–1930): 320; 4–5 (1932–1933): 69 and 13–16 (1937–1938): 250. For an overview of this topic, see Kemura *Značaj i uloga*, 184.



Figure 29: *Gajret* women's choir from Banja Luka, late 1930s.

Source: MRS, photography collection, stanovnici, 346.

as an alternative solution they generally entrusted the task of providing artistic performances at the *zabava* to those among the association's members and sympathizers who had artistic skills e.g. conservatory students, amateur musicians, singers, and actors. Throughout the interwar period, choirs were the most frequently solicited to fulfil the associations' artistic requirements. As we saw in Chapter One, the Muslim population in the Habsburg period had substantially neglected this kind of activity, leaving it to non-Muslims. After 1919, Muslim choirs gradually flourished throughout the province, as well as the number of Muslims in interfaith choirs. In the late 1920s, vocal ensembles gradually opened to women as well. In 1928, at a *Gajret* party in the town of Livno, Muslim women performed in public for the first time as singers, opening the way in the 1930s to the blossoming of several mixed choirs established and run by the Muslim cultural associations.<sup>33</sup> As a matter of fact, the success of female voices at parties was a sudden phenomenon. In 1930, *Gajret* mixed choirs were established in Sarajevo and Mostar, each counting around sixty members, and in 1931 an entirely female *Gajret* choir with 26 members was founded in Banja Luka. This latter group, which usually performed wearing folk dress—as testified by the col-

33 "Zabava gajretova ženskog pododbora u Livnu," *Gajret*, no. 12 (1929): 180.

lective self-portrait above (figure 29)—often went on tour in other towns of the province, and its reputation extended well beyond the borders of the Bosnian Krajina.<sup>34</sup>

Needless to say, the efforts invested by Muslim activists into establishing choirs was not simply a matter of finding a cheap and practical solution for the needs of the *zabava*. As they often wrote in the press, activists were well aware of the choirs' function, which was "not only artistic, but also social."<sup>35</sup> Since their establishment, choirs had been seen as a way to implement the self-civilizing mission of the cultural association, familiarizing the Muslim youth with European, and in particular Slavic and south-Slavic composers. If we look at the repertoires of the Muslim choirs we can see, for example, that choirs drew from the music of Frédéric Chopin, Bedřich Smetana, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, and also from lesser-known Serbian composers such as Petar Krstić or Stevan Mokranjac. However, the genre that was the authentic trademark of Muslim cultural associations, and that played a major role in the musical programme of the choirs, was the *sevdalinka*.

The term implies compositions for voice, or a voice accompanied by an instrument, performed by both men and women. Being one of the rare genres considered to be specifically Bosnian, and associated with its Ottoman past, *sevdalinkas* had a special place in the musical repertoire of the Muslim choirs. As a *Gajret* activist wrote in 1931, "among our typically regional poems... the Bosnian *sevdalinka* has its own charm and beauty. The strong languid feeling contained in them clearly demonstrates that we have a deep sense of poetry and music, something that unfortunately is not always acknowledged by our brother fellow-nationals."<sup>36</sup> Bringing this genre of music to the fore was thus a way of refuting the assumption that Muslims were passive in the musical, and more broadly artistic domain, and to stress their capacity, and desire, to contribute to the construction of a Yugoslav musical canon. Finally, associations also acknowledged that choirs had an important socializing function. These organizations allowed young people of both sexes to get to know each other, and to travel the country thanks to the numerous tours. A *Gajret* activist explained in 1931 that the social ben-

34 1939 saw the creation of the first jazz band affiliated with the association; it was composed of twelve musicians who performed at associational parties: "Umjetnička sekcija mjesnog odbora Gajreta u Sarajevu," *Gajret*, no. 7–9 (1939): 145–6.

35 "Ostale gajretove kulturne akcije – Gajretova pjevačka i kulturna društva," *Gajret*, no. 10 (1932): 190.

36 Abduselam I. Belagija (sic), st. prava, "Značaj pjevačkih društava," *Gajret*, no. 21 (1931): 483.



efit of choir tours was mutual: “tours where choir members are hosted in different regions produce a multitude of positive effects, both for the choir members and for the inhabitants of the region they visit. Knowledge of the different places and beautiful regions improves and completes the education of each individual.”<sup>37</sup> Since 1928, Muslim women engaged in choirs had thus been able to travel, socialize, and—equally importantly—display their artistic skills in public, in different towns across the country.

Generally speaking, when Muslim women pursued the scene the general reaction seems to have been positive. The promotion of Bosnian folk heritage, matched with the philanthropic goal of the associational choirs, helped to counterbalance the negative reputation enjoyed by female singers in both Western and Ottoman society, where singing was left to socially marginal women, and to specific ethnic groups, like Roma women. Nevertheless, there are cases in which collective female choir performances provoked discontent and unrest. This was the case for a concert by the Sarajevo *Gajret* female choir scheduled to take place in Tuzla in May 1927. In a period in which public singing performances by Muslim women were still a novelty, the concert seems to have polarized the population of this Bosnian town. A local historian recalled that, even before their arrival in town, the news of Muslim women singing in public set off rumors in town, and provoked complaints from a part of the local population. A group of unspecified conservatives even sent a letter to the *Gajret* central branch in Sarajevo in an effort to convince the association to cancel the concert, saying that Muslim women singers were not welcome. Despite this unfriendly message, the tour was confirmed, and the choir was greeted upon arrival by an impressive crowd at the railway station, including many local notables, there to welcome the young women.<sup>38</sup> On that occasion, Džemila Zaimović, a young girl from the family of Muradbeg Zaimović, one of the most prestigious Muslim landowners in the region,<sup>39</sup> gave a solemn welcoming speech, directly addressing the young singers: “we, your companions from Tuzla, are cheerful because we see in you the first forerunners of the first Muslim activists for the enlightenment of Muslim women, that until now have lan-

37 Belagija, “Značaj pjevačkih društava,” 483.

38 Trifković, *Tuzlanski vremeplov*, vol. 1, 149.

39 On the Zaimović family from the region of Tuzla, see Kamberović, *Begovski zemljišni posjedi*, 472–6, and in particular Ismail Hadžiahmetović, *Muradbeg Zaimović: Legenda i istina* (Tuzla: Zmaj od Bosne, 1997).

guished in darkness and ignorance.”<sup>40</sup> After having provoked such tension between local progressives and conservatives, the girls were led to the Hotel Bristol, one of the most lavish places in town, accompanied by people from the three main faiths.

Choirs, needless to say, privileged collective over individual effort. Their reputation was mostly connected to the harmony between the different parts, and not to any one individual. However, throughout the interwar period Muslim women emerged as solo singers, and their names were individually celebrated in the press. The majority of them reached some popularity on an urban, sometimes regional scale. For example, Šemsa Tudaković, an elementary school teacher and singer from the *Gajret* choir of Tuzla, enjoyed some success in the thirties as a solo singer, and was also invited to Sarajevo.<sup>41</sup> However, the Muslim woman that reached by far the highest point of popularity in the interwar years as a singer was, without a doubt, Bahrija Nuri Hadžić (1904–1993). Born in Mostar in 1904, Bahrija was one of the four daughters of the aforementioned Osman Nuri Hadžić and of Bahija Vajzović, from a family of merchants of imported fine goods from the Posavina region.<sup>42</sup> She thus grew up in an educated, wealthy urban middle-class family, open to influences from “outside,” both in terms of culture and of consumer goods. In the early 1920s, with the help of a *Gajret* scholarship, Bahrija moved to Belgrade to pursue her studies. After studying the pianoforte in the Yugoslav capital, in 1923 Bahrija attended the Vienna Academy of Music where she specialized in opera singing. She worked for a time at the Opera of Bern in Switzerland, and in 1931 became a member of the Opera of Belgrade, where she would work until the late 1930s. Known in the German press as *Eine Grösse aus Belgrad*, “the Belgrade Great,” Bahrija Nuri Hadžić led a very successful career for a decade or so, performing in some of the most important theaters in central Europe, as well as in Switzerland and Turkey. As the first Yugoslav Muslim female opera singer to be famous throughout Europe, her name was often associated with the operas of the German composer Richard Strauss, who Bahrija met on several

40 Trifković, *Tuzlanski vremeplov*, vol. 1, 148.

41 In the school year 1926/27, Šemsa Tudaković worked as a teacher at the Šamac state elementary school, in the Posavina region. Nikša Nezirović, *Monografija Bosanskog Šamca: od najranijih vremena do 1945. godine* (Bosanski Šamac: Kula), 340. On this character, see Trifković, *Tuzlanski vremeplov*, vol. 1, 143.

42 Nezirović, *Monografija Bosanskog Šamca*, 219–21.

occasions. She reached the height of success, and controversy, playing the role of Salome in Strauss's opera of the same name in Belgrade. Due to the lethal sensuality of its protagonist, the opera was openly condemned by some supporters of the Serbian Orthodox church in 1931. Interestingly, even at the height of her career Bahrija kept in regular contact with *Gajret* and, when her international commitments made it possible, she often accepted to sing at the association's parties in Sarajevo and Mostar.<sup>43</sup> Regularly celebrated as "the queen of the evening," Bahrija Nuri Hadžić contributed to a great extent to the success of the *Gajret* parties, where she was always welcomed warmly and praised to no end.<sup>44</sup>

Given her extraordinary life and career, by the early 1930s Bahrija Nuri Hadžić was already receiving a great deal of attention from the press, and was not surprisingly greatly idealized, especially by progressive circles. The *Gajret* journal regularly celebrated her in enthusiastic terms, for thanks to her "our [Muslim] component has given to music its first recognized woman pioneer."<sup>45</sup> This was a recurrent idea in the Muslim press, that thanks to Bahrija Nuri Hadžić Muslims were finally able to contribute to Yugoslav and European music culture. The progressive Mustafa Mulalić, in his 1936 book *Orijent na Zapadu* further elaborated this idea, stating that the singer "brings glory throughout Europe to our Yugoslav music culture, and first of all brings honour to Yugoslav Muslims."<sup>46</sup> According to this author, the first Muslim woman singer was living proof that Yugoslav Muslims could shine in music as in every other Western artistic discipline. Because she had managed to build a solid international career, Bahrija Nuri Hadžić's story invalidated the theory of Muslim backwardness and passivity in the cultural domain, and showed that they too could make a fruitful contribution to national cultural life.

To further clarify his argument, Mulalić presents a collage of a series of portraits of Bahrija Nuri Hadžić, both private and public. The series of portraits are a sketch of the woman in three different ages. In the first she is a child, posing seated in a very conventional manner, wearing a traditional

43 Marija Milić, "Život kroz ružičaste naočale – razgovori sa Bahrijom Nuri-Hadžić," *Muzika* 2, no. 1 (1998): 13–24; Mirka Pavlović, "Bahrija Nuri-Hadžić, velika evropska primadona," *Most* 46, no. 140–1 (2001): 62–8.

44 "Svečana gajretova zabava u Sarajevu," *Gajret*, no. 2 (1934): 40–1.

45 "Gajretove zabave," *Gajret*, no. 11–3 (1932): 194–5.

46 Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu*, 379.

Bosnian Muslim costume; in the second half-length portrait she is a teenager, soberly dressed with a scarf on her head. The third is a stage picture from the opera *Salome*, where she poses as a diva; eyes wide open, caressing her neck, her smiling mouth shining with lipstick, her hair in finger waves. In this picture she adequately personifies the dangerous, lethally sensual, immoral leading character of Strauss's opera, capable of subjugating kings with her dance, and of having the men who dared to resist her beheaded. The diagonal alignment of the pictures suggest an evolution across time, confirmed by the caption accompanying the collage: "Bahrija Nuri-Hadžić going through a cultural metamorphosis: wearing *dimija* [traditional clothes], wearing *jemenija* [traditional headscarf] and as 'Salome.'"<sup>47</sup> In the pages dedicated to the singer, Mulalić aptly explains the exceptional nature of her lifestyle and professional path, which made her a unique success story among Muslim women in the country: "Bahrija... whose musical culture and personal degree of civilization is not in keeping with the society she grew up in, proudly represents this musically backward community in the greatest musical capitals of Europe, especially in Vienna and Prague."<sup>48</sup> Of course, the cultural metamorphosis described by Mulalić could have left room for misunderstanding, suggesting that the logical result of the civilizational process was a monster woman, like the *Salomé* character. The author thus felt the need to shed light on this point, eliminating any possible doubt on Bahrija Nuri Hadžić's morality: "besides her high degree of civilization, under her cultivated surface, it is nevertheless possible to see the little, patriarchal Bahrija wearing the *dimija*. Without her Quran, she does not dare to travel as Bahrija, nor to act on stage as *Salome*."<sup>49</sup> Mulalić's reader can thus rest assured: Bahrija-Salomè is only fiction, an expression of artistic skill, a duty paid to the highest forms of European culture. In her real life, Bahrija is still a pious Muslim girl, and her biographical trajectory testifies that being Muslim and civilized were not an unsolvable antithesis, but that they can co-exist in the same body. "Bahrija will not be the only one,"<sup>50</sup> Mulalić states optimistically, expressing his faith in the future development of other interpreters of Western culture among the Muslim youth.

47 Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu*, 331.

48 Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu*, 330.

49 Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu*, 330.

50 Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu*, 330.



Figure 30. Bahrija Nuri Hadžić's Cultural Metamorphosis, collage.

Source: Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu*, 331.

### WITH THE BLESSING OF THEIR FATHERS: MUSLIM WOMEN AND THE THEATER

Choir performances were not the only activity that made up the core of associational parties' programme of activities. Activists, sometimes helped by local supporters of the association, in many cases took the guise of actors and organised amateur theater performances. The degree of sophistication of these performances varied a great deal from one place to another throughout Bosnia; the theater performances organized by cultural associations in

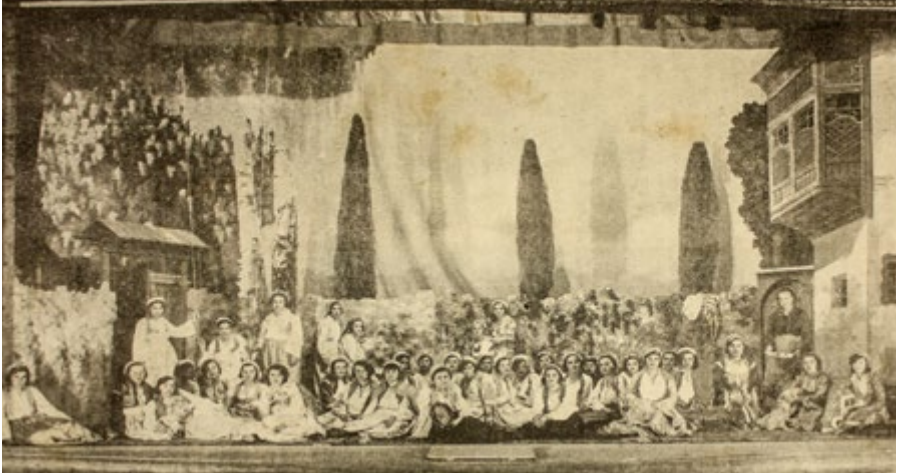


Figure 31: A scene from the play *On*, interpreted by *Gajret* pupils in Sarajevo.

Source: *Gajret*, no. 6 (1931): 153.

Sarajevo had lavish stage sets, a broad cast, and were held in luxurious spaces. Vladimir Ćorović's play *On* (Him) performed for the 1931 *Gajret* yearly assembly in Sarajevo, for example, took place at the National Theater and involved dozens of actors (including the pupils hosted at the association's female student dorm in town), as well as rich folk costumes, and an impressive stage set representing the courtyard of a Bosnian traditional house.

Activists from the smallest villages had to organize their performances with considerably less human and material means, and to set up the stage in spaces that were not necessarily designed for theater performances, like elementary schools, town halls and hotel courtyards, and more rarely cinemas. The success of theater performances, which for the entire interwar period regularly made up a part of the *zabava* programme, depended on their ability to satisfy both the activists and the public. Some of the local activists who enjoyed organizing rehearsals and performing in public gradually began to consider amateur acting as a valuable form of leisure and socialization. The Muslim urban population seems to have been increasingly interested in attending theater performances, especially when the story put on stage was, as we shall see later, related to Bosnian Muslim everyday life. Last but not least, the central branches of cultural associations considered theater performances to be an invaluable tool for educating the population. In a society that remained illiterate for the most part, and for whom the ideas

expressed in the associations' extensive written material remained inaccessible, theater provided a platform from which the association's discourse could reach a broader stratum of the population, including those who could neither read nor write.

Choosing an appropriate script was a constant source of worry for the associations. The chosen text had to be of course compatible with the associational cultural agenda, and be in keeping with the tastes of the Muslim public—which, with the exception of a small elite in the main urban centres, was unfamiliar with the world of theater. Moreover, screenplays had to satisfy criteria of practical feasibility—especially when it came to the number and sex of the actors—the local availability of stage costumes, and the complexity of set designs. During *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica*'s first forty years of activity, the scripts chosen for performances were predominantly written by Serbo-Croatian—such as Branislav Nušić, Marko Milinović and Milan Ogrizović—and in particular Bosnian-Muslim writers—especially Safvet *beg* Bašagić, Osman Đikić and Ahmet Muratbegović.<sup>51</sup> Bosnian Muslim activists only very rarely attempted to put plays written by foreign writers on stage. In 1928 *Gajret* activists from Bijeljina decided to put on a performance of *Homeland*, a play by the Ottoman poet and playwright Namık Kemal (1840–1888). The town's public reacted very coldly, one of the activists in charge of the performance stating that “a play like this turned out to be too lengthy and not at all suited to our [social] condition.” The activists seem to have learned their lesson and to have abandoned their ambitions of performing similar texts set outside of Bosnia and focused on the national question. “Next time” the activist continued “we will choose shorter texts that are about the people's lives.”<sup>52</sup> This episode seems to confirm a general feature of the expectations of the Muslim public during the interwar period; the scripts that were most appreciated were those that involved scenarios inspired by local daily life, with its characters, themes, and conflicts.

Organizing a decent set-up for an existing script could turn out to be an extremely difficult task for the activists. In many cases, the story was not considered to be morally appropriate for the audience, or the plot too complex to be easily followed. In other cases, the characters were too numerous for it to

51 Kemura, *Značaj i uloga*, 175. Sullo stesso tema si veda Josip Lešić, *Pozorišni život Sarajeva* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1973), 233–6.

52 “Velika gajretova zabava u Bijeljini,” *Gajret*, no. 1 (1928): 12.

be feasible to find enough suitable amateur actors. In the 1910s, to tackle this kind of problem, Muslim associations had already started inviting their own activists to write plays specifically for the association.<sup>53</sup> This practice became increasingly widespread in the period between the two World Wars. In 1928 *Narodna Uzdanica* launched a writing competition, open to all its activists, in order that the association have at its disposal a collection of plays ready to be performed at associational parties.<sup>54</sup> *Gajret* followed suit, and in the early 1930s published a collection of short texts, written by activists and selected by the central branch, to be performed by its local branches. The plays from this collection were designed to suit *Gajret's* needs: the number of actors was reduced to 4 or 5, sets and costumes were kept to the bare minimum, and texts were simple and therefore suited to amateur performers. Moreover, associational theater mostly introduced characters from Muslim society, i.e. the rich land-owner, the urban poor, the elementary school teacher, the *hodža*, pupils, activists and so on.<sup>55</sup> The texts were printed as unbound pamphlets, usually about 15 pages long, making it extremely easy to send them through the post from one local branch to another. In this way, the associations' central chapters, which adopted the texts, could also maintain a certain amount of control over the content of the plays that were put on by their activists, even in the remotest of towns.

Just as was the case for amateur choirs, Muslim amateur theater troupes became mixed during the interwar period, and Muslim women gradually gained access to them. It was similarly the case that Muslims seem to have gained access to this art form with some delay in respect to non-Muslims. Bosnian Jewish and Orthodox women, for instance, were already involved in amateur theater by around 1900. The delay in Muslims' familiarization with theater did not exclusively concern women; Muslims did not feel comfortable with plays written by non-Muslims in Serbo-Croatian, because often they found that the manner in which Islam and Muslims were presented in these texts was offensive. Furthermore, throughout the 1910s Muslim ama-

53 "Gajretova desetogodišnjica," *Gajret*, no. 4–5 (1913): 115; Nasif Resulović, "Siroče – Pozorišna igra u jednom činu iz dačkog života," *Gajret*, no. 6–7 (1913): 122–7.

54 *Novi Behar*, no. 16 (1928–29): 243–4 and no. 17 (1936–37): 246.

55 Dževad Sulejmanpašić, *Zelen čovjek: Komedija u jednom činu iz muslimanskog seoskog života* (Sarajevo: Vlasništvo i naklada Gajreta, 1932); D. Imamović, *Dekret: Komad u jednom činu*, (Sarajevo: Vlasništvo i naklada Gajreta, 1932); Ismet Bejgorić, *Spas u nevolji* (Sarajevo: Vlasništvo i naklada Gajreta, 1932); Dušan Stevović-Jazmin, *Gajret: Vodvilj u jednom činu* (Sarajevo: Vlasništvo i naklada Gajreta, 1932); Vasko Hamović, *Vukodlaci: Komedija u jednom činu* (Sarajevo: Vlasništvo i naklada Gajreta, 1932).



teur actors “did not want to play non-Muslims characters, or characters with flawed morals.” Given this reticence, as highlighted by Muhzin Rizvić, “it was therefore necessary to create local pieces, which were entirely suited to the spirit, mentality, literary tradition... of the Muslim population.”<sup>56</sup>

Men’s interest in theater slowly gained ground throughout the 1910s, but the battle for women was considerably longer. With the exception of a few attempts during the Habsburg period, Muslim women remained detached from the world of theater, both as spectators and as actresses, until the early 1920s. In 1921, following the example of the Skopje Theater, the Theater of Sarajevo began to organize shows reserved only for women.<sup>57</sup> These segregated shows, which, by no coincidence, were held on Friday afternoons, were explicitly introduced to “allow Muslim women to attend plays, free from embarrassment.”<sup>58</sup> Thanks to these measures, from November of that year, several dozen Muslim women living in Sarajevo were able to attend a performance of *The Imaginary Invalid*. This novelty was surely a cause for concern in Muslim society, because a Muslim progressive journal felt the need to reassure its public, stating that Molière’s comedy “could do no damage to anybody’s morals.”<sup>59</sup>

If, since the end of the Great War, the door to the theater was being timidly opened to Muslim women as spectators, the route to the stage as amateur actresses was not yet to be taken before almost another decade. In the 1920s, Muslim associational branches sought to find dramatic works which had either a minimal number of female characters, or none at all, and when there were female roles to be played, local non-Muslim elementary school teachers were often recruited to play the parts. Muslim women made their debut onstage in 1927, when *Gajret’s* production of Ćorović’s play *On* (Him) in Sarajevo featured, for the first time in Yugoslavia, an all-Muslim cast that included female actresses.<sup>60</sup> Though traditionally considered to lie on the threshold between art and prostitution, being an amateur actress became increasingly accepted in Muslim society.

56 Rizvić, *Behar*, 247–8.

57 “Naše narodno pozorište,” *Domovina*, no. 109 (1921): 4

58 “Predstava u Narodnom pozorištu za gospođe,” *Domovina*, no. 113 (1921): 4.

59 “Predstava u Narodnom pozorištu,” 4; *Le Malade Imaginaire* was not the only show to provide a separate session for ladies. Again, through *Domovina*, we learn that in March of the following year *Hasanaginica* was also performed at 3pm on Friday with the same provisions. See “Iz pozorišta – Pažnja našem ženskinju,” *Domovina*, no. 21 (1922): 4.

60 “Gajretov Glasnik,” *Gajret*, no. 2 (1927): 32.

The theater performances scheduled during the *zabava* were not only relevant as a new arena for the visibility of Muslim women, and as a tool for the public expression of their skills. Associational theater also provides an excellent prism through which we can consider the multitude of ways in which women were portrayed. It would be far too great a task to analyze every single play ever performed at these associational parties, with regards to gender. One play from *Gajret's* repertoire is nevertheless particularly interesting for the sake of analysis; eloquently entitled “The Emancipated Woman”, it was written by two *Gajret* activists. The work won the 1932 dramatic writing competition organized by the central branch, and was therefore printed and put on stage many times in interwar Bosnia.<sup>61</sup>

Set in a small and remote village in Eastern Bosnia, the script is populated with several characters who embody stereotypical figures, with easily identifiable markers of dress. Esad *beg*, the rich Muslim landowner, “dressed as a typical Bosnian *beg*, old, with grey hair and a mustache, but no beard,”<sup>62</sup> is accompanied by his son Ešref, a provincial doctor who represents the Muslim intelligentsia. Ešref is “28 years old, with a travel suit and glasses.”<sup>63</sup> Another notable character is Abid *efendi*, the local Islamic school teacher, an “old man, with a grey beard and hair, an *ahmedija* [the typical headgear of Islamic officers], dressed like a *hodža* [religious teacher] with a long black tunic.”<sup>64</sup> In Abid *efendi's* family there are two women—his daughter Suada, an unveiled teacher at the local state school, who is a “young educated woman, dressed in a work-dress with long and not short sleeves, with neither décolleté nor make-up”;<sup>65</sup> and Fadila, Suada's cousin, who lives in the city and is staying temporarily in the village. Fadila is described as a “supermodern city girl with a modern hairstyle [*hipermoderna gradska djevojka sa modernom frizurom*], dressed in a short dress with short sleeves, with a large décolleté. Heavily made-up.”<sup>66</sup> Surrounding these main characters are Abid *efendi's* servants, male and female peasants dressed in traditional Muslim garb.

61 Mustafa Alikalfić and Vehbija Imamović, *Emancipovana žena : Komad u jednom činu* (Sarajevo: Vlasništvo i naklada Gajreta, 1932).

62 Alikalfić and Imamović, *Emancipovana žena*, 3.

63 Alikalfić and Imamović, *Emancipovana žena*, 3.

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The plot is simple, structured around a classic misunderstanding; Ešref and Suada want to marry, but Ešref's father, Esad *beg*, opposes the marriage because Suada is a professional woman, a teacher in a state school, and is thus deemed immoral by the local population. When Esad *beg* visits the village to see the girl with his own eyes, he does not find Suada but instead meets Fadila. Sure that the visibly corrupted girl is his son's beloved, Esad *beg*'s prejudices about emancipated women seem to be confirmed. At the end of the play, the misunderstanding is resolved when Esad *beg* meets Suada and sees how sober, self-sacrificing and submissive to her father's will she is. Finally, the two fathers consent to the marriage.

The text was able to present the two cousins Suada and Fadila as opposite types of emancipated women. The teacher Suada represents without a doubt the appropriate kind of emancipation. In addition to her eloquent physical description, she is introduced by her servants in the following positive terms:

Oh God, what a strange world [*dunjaluk*]! Who would have guessed that Muslims among us today included women like that? If my late [*rahmetli*] grandfather returned from the grave, he would definitely think that this is the Day of Judgment [*kijamet*]! It's amazing: Muslim and a teacher! How could this happen? Dear friends, this is reality now. But what is most amazing is that she prays five times a day, every single day! Yes, this is a diligent [*vrijedna*] girl. She is busy every day that God gave her on earth.<sup>67</sup>

Education, self-sacrifice, piousness; these qualities define the proper modern girl. As Suada's father confirms, a solid family is not enough to produce this kind of woman. *Gajret* is also responsible for this proper modern education:

Throughout the time she attended school, Suada was at the *Gajret* female student dorm, and we parents know very well how the education given there is appropriate, from both a religious and social point of view. This is why we send our children there. In Sarajevo I have a brother to whom I could have sent her... but I preferred *Gajret*'s student dorm. That's the reason she is now a good teacher and a good Muslim, and a good housewife.<sup>68</sup>

67 Alikalfić and Imamović, *Emancipovana žena*, 4.

68 Alikalfić and Imamović, *Emancipovana žena*, 11.

But the best and most effective definition of the proper emancipatory path comes neither from the servant, nor from the father; it is Suada herself who, in a long monologue, explains her idea of female emancipation:

To me, [emancipation] is throwing away everything that has been rusty [hrđavo], breaking bad habits and prejudices that hinder our progress, and taking from the present only what is good and healthy, without taking everything just because it is modern [primiti samo ono što je zdravo i dobro, a nikako sve što je samo moderno]... We must recognize that in the past there were very beautiful costumes and things that we do not have to abandon. If we modernize completely [potpuno moderniziramo], and if we throw all our good habits away, the future for us will not be rosy at all.<sup>69</sup>

Of course, in staging the meaning and limits of appropriate female emancipation, the text also offers an anti-model—bad, deviated female emancipation. All this is embodied in the city girl Fadila, constructed as Suada’s flamboyant antithesis. Fadila sleeps too much, constantly reads French novels, dresses immodestly—“she is dressed like a circus performer [pehlivan]”<sup>70</sup>—and smokes, “and with [a] lit cigarette looks straight into [men’s] eyes.”<sup>71</sup> In every stage direction of the play, Fadila is sexual and seductive toward every male (“whistles and wriggles naughtily [koketno zviždukajući]”<sup>72</sup>). From the description offered by different characters, it is clear that she is also a bad Muslim and would make an even worse housewife: “she never prays, and she could consume in one night the entire treasure of the Sultan.”<sup>73</sup> The dramatic plot is finally resolved by the two older characters, Esad *beg* and Abid *efendi*, who, as their titles reveal, represent the two traditional powers of Muslim society, rich landowners and *ulemas*. The proclamation of the marriage between the two young, educated Muslims is also an opportunity for pronouncing a condemnation of the character excluded by the happy ending, Fadila. The anathema for this improper emancipation is pronounced by one of the fathers, Esad *beg*:

69 Alikalčić and Imamović, *Emancipovana žena*, 6–7.

70 Alikalčić and Imamović, *Emancipovana žena*, 12.

71 Alikalčić and Imamović, *Emancipovana žena*, 12.

72 Alikalčić and Imamović, *Emancipovana žena*, 11.

73 Alikalčić and Imamović, *Emancipovana žena*, 12.

Listen to her. She hisses like a snake [*palucati*]. It seems that you have nothing but your tongue. Do what you want, be free, modern and what you like. Just let me tell you something: it will be hard to find a man to marry you. There are no more men like that today. Today, even educated men no longer want such a woman. They too now seek a modest woman [*skromna*], well-educated and a good housewife. Get it out of your mind that you will find a husband!<sup>74</sup>

In its ingenuity, the principal value of this associational play was its capacity to embody the frontier between good and bad emancipation, and to dramatize them before the Muslim public. Namely, that Muslim women's socio-economic integration should not fall into the domain of what were considered to be the excesses of European society; rather it should unite social purpose, economic initiative, morality, marriage and modesty. Even more interesting is that the two young protagonists' relationship (Ešref, a doctor and Suada, an elementary school teacher, two typical profiles of the male and female Muslim intelligentsia) develops under the watchful eye of their respective fathers, who are members of the two ruling classes in traditional Muslim society: a landowner and a religious leader. Therefore, for the emancipation of women to be a positive thing, it had to occur through the safeguards of age, gender and class hierarchies. Last but not least, the explicit exclusion of Fadila from "proper emancipation" and marriage to an educated man is accompanied by the silent exclusion of Suada's peasant servant. The latter, whose monologues are simply there for comic effect, remains uneducated and covered by her traditional headscarf throughout the play. Significantly, the train of emancipation does not seem to stop for her: the "proper emancipation," then, had clear class boundaries and de facto left behind the majority of the rural population.

#### MUSLIM FLAPPERS

We do not know how the guests at the party reacted to the staging of this "emancipated woman." Did the Muslim women who attended these parties adopt Suada—modest, soberly-dressed, make-up-free Suada—as a model

<sup>74</sup> Alikalfić and Imamović, *Emancipovana žena*, 16.

for their own femininity? Evidence from both journals and archives make us doubtful on this point. Of course, some Bosnian activists—from religious, feminist and temperance associations alike—regularly made their voices heard, asking that the party have a more moral tone, and more precisely that its guests' outfits be soberer. In 1921, when the consequences of the Great War were still visible in the streets of Bosnian towns, progressive circles publicly condemned any inclination toward ostentation with regards to clothing or lifestyle in their fellow citizens, deeming luxury to be one of the least desirable outcomes of the post-war period.<sup>75</sup> A new wave of moralizing attitudes among Yugoslav activists grew up in the early 1930s, a time when the Great Depression had also reached Yugoslavia. In 1932, awareness of the harsh conditions of the economic crisis convinced Sarajevo's *Gajret* female activists, in partnership with other women's and feminist organizations in the city, to manufacture brooches bearing the word *skromnost* (modesty), to be sold at the entrance of associational parties for 8 dinars.<sup>76</sup> However, such calls for temperance remained mere lone voices. In the interwar period, associational parties were an opportunity for the Muslim urban middle class to live its own *années folles*; for both men and women, dressing according to international urban fashion was thus an important way of performing their own class, gender and urban identity, and a way of promoting the image of Muslims as a civilized component of a civilized nation.

If we look at their socializing activities as a whole, voluntary associations did not formally impose a strict dress code on their members and supporters. As can be seen from the abundance of photographs reproduced by the press, or preserved in the archives, men and women attended these parties dressed in a variety of different types of clothing. A significant number of the women who attended *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica teferičs* wore traditional Muslim female garments, such as the *feredža* and the *peča*, and this did not appear to be an issue, either for the organizers or the public. Similar tolerance for traditional female dress can be observed in other afternoon or evening events, such as the *čajankas* and *mevluds*. However, it was a different story for the *zabave*: held at night, these associational parties had become since the 1920s a place where both men and women were

75 "Luksus," *Domovina*, no. 95 (1921): 4

76 ABiH, FG, 12, 1583, MŽPG Sarajevo to GOG (June 17, 1932).

supposed to dress according to Western fashions, especially fashions from Paris in the 1920s, and then from Berlin in the 1930s. New interwar communication technologies made it possible for the urban Muslim middle class in Bosnia to follow clothing trends; as has already been noted for the case of Belgrade, even when people could not afford a travel to Paris, Berlin and New York, “the telegraph and telephone enabled up-to-date reporting, fashions from metropolitan streets were reproduced in illustrated magazines within a season’s time.”<sup>77</sup>

Muslim women’s visible consumption of Western fashions at parties was of course put in the spotlight both by the organizers and the participants. Reports by the press about these parties always highlighted the presence of Muslim women in modern dress, expressing open satisfaction when Muslim women conformed to Western middle-class standards, and conversely when they abandoned Islamic markers. In 1928 for instance, a *Gajret* activist from Mostar described thus a party organized by the association in his city: “though the hall was extravagantly decorated, what attracted the most attention from the guests was the women who went unveiled, and dressed in the European style [*potpuno evropski obučene*]. They were admired for their impeccable behavior by all those present.”<sup>78</sup> Of course, these examples of consumption of modernity could be found at varying degrees in the cities and in the country; while “unveiled women,” as they were described in the press reports, became a permanent fixture in the urban landscapes of Sarajevo and Mostar around 1920, things were very different in the smallest towns. In an association’s report about a party held in the small town of Brčko in 1929, the presence of women “entirely unveiled”<sup>79</sup> was described as “something completely unprecedented for us here [*neprimljena novotarija*].”<sup>80</sup> In one internal report (though other examples exist) for the local *Gajret* branch in Bijeljina in 1929, the secretary expressed his satisfaction that “fifty or so Muslim women arrived wearing beautiful clothes [*toalete*], greatly impressing those present with their elegance, which would not have looked out of place on the elegant city women [*dame*].”<sup>81</sup>

77 Jovana Babović, “National Capital, Transnational Culture: Foreign Entertainment in Interwar Belgrade,” *East Central Europe* 42, no. 1 (2015): 108.

78 “Svečana gajretova zabava u Mostaru,” *Gajret*, no. 8 (1928): 124.

79 “Gajretova zabava u Brčkom,” *Gajret*, no. 8 (1929): 122.

80 “Gajretova zabava u Brčkom,” 122.

81 ABIH, FG, 7, 616, MPG Bijeljina to GOG (March 22, 1929).

Can we really state that at associational parties all Muslim identifying markers were erased from the public space? As we have seen up until this point, Islamic markers had of course been marginalized. However, this process of marginalization was accompanied by, and intersected with another process—the rediscovery of Muslim urban traditional garments. Especially in the early 1930s, Muslim men and women began to wear Muslim traditional clothes at parties. In particular, some members of Muslim landowning families wore to these associational parties extremely rich and elaborate clothing that had been passed down through the family, to the astonishment of the other participants. Descriptions and photographs of this phenomenon, which were published in social gazettes, are revealing (see figure 32); one example in particular is the photograph of young Mirza Hasiba Ruždija, published in an article about a 1936 *Narodna Uzdanica* party at which participants wore “popular dress”<sup>82</sup> (see figure 33). The fact that she is wearing traditional clothing does not serve to signal continuity with the past; rather, it has the opposite effect, that is, to highlight her distance from it. Indeed, the girl has been photographed next to a radio, a luxury item at the time, which has been given a prominent position, as if to counterbalance her small stature. The Muslim intelligentsia saw the process of social transformation that had taken hold of Muslim society from the end of the nineteenth century to be so advanced and irreversible, that wearing old family clothing was considered to be nothing but folklore. The radio therefore serves to reassure the viewer that progress has arrived in this household, and that Mirza’s clothing is nothing but a temporary performance. An anonymous commentator’s thoughts about a *Gajret* party held in 1938, at which some guests wore splendid traditional clothing, provide food for thought: “The lounge and the rooms next to it [in the National Theater] looked impressive. The marvelous Persian rugs used as decoration were simply perfect. The lighting transformed the night into the brightest of days.” The guests, with their dresses, contributed to the show: “The public wore a wide range of different cuts and colors, where traditional Muslim clothes mixed and blurred together with elegant ball gowns. Boys and girls had however broken with traditional customs and were entertaining each other in a very intimate manner [*djelovati vrlo intimno*].”<sup>83</sup>

82 *Novi Behar*, no. 14 (1936–37): 175.

83 “Velika gajretova zabava u Sarajevu,” *Gajret*, no. 4–5 (1938): 81.





Figure 32: Performing the past.  
Source: *Gajret*, no. 18 (1928): 269.



Figure 33: Performing the past.  
Source: *Novi Behar*, no. 12–14 (1936–1937): 175.

A unique moment for displaying new standards of Muslim physical femininity within the party ritual, and which deserves special attention, was a practice that spread in Muslim cultural associations, and in Yugoslav society more in general, during the interwar period: the female beauty contest. The story of this practice has been widely studied in the United States, where it is commonly accepted to have been established in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>84</sup> It spread in particular during the 1920s to Europe, and also beyond to Turkey and Japan.<sup>85</sup> This practice, almost entirely conceived by men, has been severely criticized by second wave feminism as a tool for objectifying women—and this criticism is certainly true. However, as stressed by Hol-

84 For its beginnings in the United States, and on the social context in which it developed, see among others Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty: A Social History. Through Two Centuries of the American Idea, Ideal, and Image of the Beautiful Woman* (New York: Knopf, 1983).

85 For a concise analysis of beauty contests in interwar Turkey and Japan, and their socio-political implications, see Holland Shissler, “Beauty is Nothing to be Ashamed of: Beauty Contests as Tools of Women’s Liberation in Early Republican Turkey,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 1 (2004): 107–22 and Jennifer Robertson, “Japan First’s Cyborg? Miss Nippon, Eugenics and Wartime Technologies of Beauty, Body, Blood,” *Body and Society* 7, no. 1 (2001): 1–34.

land Shissler, especially in societies structured along lines of sexual segregation, the beauty contest can also be an instrument for subverting existing gender roles: “in a society where women historically had been segregated from men not of their immediate family and carefully preserved from the gaze of outsiders, where family honor was understood to reside in the family’s women, and where ‘fallen’ women were sometimes killed to regain that lost honor, the ability to show one’s physical self in a public forum without fear of harm or dishonor was deeply radical.”<sup>86</sup> Thus, in the case of Bosnian Muslim women, beauty contests can also be read as part of a radical repositioning of women in society.

The first reference to a beauty contest in the press dates back to 1920 in Sarajevo, when a *Gajret* party in the Officers Club held its first beauty contest for women. Information about this event is extremely fragmentary; we only know that a beauty queen was elected at a time when—as we have already seen—there was still a marked sexual segregation of the festive space, with the men sitting in the stalls and the women on the balcony. Incidentally, the golden age of beauty contests in Muslim associations was certainly the 1930s. Changes in the international arena probably affected the normalization of this kind of practice; since 1929 the Republic of Turkey had also started to have its own Miss Turkey competition. In 1932, a young Turkish woman, Keriman Halis Ece (1913–2012), after having won the Miss Turkey title, was also crowned Miss Universe 1932 in Spa, Belgium and thus became probably the first Muslim Miss Universe.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps also for this reason, both *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica* added this kind of show to their party programs more and more often. From available sources it is not possible to discern who selected the winner—whether it was the public or members of the central branch, whether they were men or also women, etc.—or how the winner was selected to be the next beauty queen—by cheering or through another means of voting. It is likely that, in addition to the visibility that this kind of event could assure for the participants and the winner, prizes were used as an incentive to join the contest—in Mostar in 1929, for example, the winner received a watch.<sup>88</sup>

86 Shissler, “Beauty,” 107.

87 Shissler, “Beauty,” 107.

88 “Svečana gajretova zabava u Mostaru,” *Gajret*, no. 7 (1929): 107.

Information concerning the Muslim participants of these beauty contests is extremely limited. We know that they came from “good families,” that were usually educated, sometimes working as teachers. *Gajret* press reports sporadically revealed that other traits, such as a talent for art, singing and music, as well as commitment to the association, increased a woman’s chances of winning these contests.<sup>89</sup> According to the progressive intellectual Mulalić, who dedicated a few pages of his 1936 book to this phenomenon, the winners of the associational beauty contest were considered to be quintessentially progressive women: beautiful, unveiled, educated, socially active. In illustration of these reflections, the author assembled a collage of a series of pictures taken by the *Gajret* journal, accompanied with his own caption: “Miss *Gajret*, Modern Muslim Women” (*Moderne muslimanke*).<sup>90</sup> The pictures collected on this page are extremely interesting; head shots of young women, some of whom gaze into the camera front-on, while others are in three-quarter profile. Their clothes vary significantly, from the more soberly covered Miss Tuzla in a dark cape entirely covering her body (top right), to the more fancy flapper-like women such as Miss Mostar and Stolac, with bare shoulders, lipstick and bobbed hair (to the left of the picture). Miss Bijeljina, in the very middle of the composition, adopts a pose somewhat reminiscent of the silent movies. Despite their differences, all of these titleholders seem to have adopted the Western standards of female beauty of that time. Even without words, they embody modernity just by existing and deciding to be exposed to anyone’s gaze. In doing this, beauty contests also produced an ideal of Muslim femininity that made all religious markers invisible. If we take the pictures from Mulalić’s collage and compare them to those published in the fashion journals of the interwar years, one thing is particularly striking; it is impossible to know who is Muslim and who is not. Only the women’s names—Zahida, Ifeta, Šefika, etc.—testify to their Muslim identity, an identity that is privatized, made invisible. The veil, just like every other marker of Islam, is finally removed (see figure 34).

It is not possible say anything about how these women perceived their role as beauty queen; if they faced resistance in their families, if taking part in this practice added to or detracted from their social position, and potentially in the marriage market. What on the contrary is fairly clear in this

89 “Svečana gajretova zabava u Mostaru,” 107.

90 Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu*, 258.



Figure 34: Disseminating modern beauty: Miss *Gajret* winners from different Bosnian towns.

Source: Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu*, 258.

story, is the goal of the associations that organized these events. Whereas in other contexts, in particular in the United States where beauty contests originated, the practice was first invented for economic reasons (to advertise garments, to promote tourism, etc.), the same cannot be said of Bosnian Muslim cultural associations. Here beauty contests were, as in the Turkish case, “intended for effecting a social revolution at home, and for projecting a revolution to audiences abroad”;<sup>91</sup> among the Muslim population, beauty

91 Shissler, “Beauty,” 108.

contests were a way to redefine the concepts of respectability and honor that traditionally were linked to the segregation and invisibility of the female body. Electing Muslim beauty queens and broadcasting their image was a way to affirm that being an honorable woman was compatible with being visible in society—in other words, it was a way to reconfigure the notion of respectability. At the same time, beauty contests were also a way to show to non-Muslims, both in Bosnia and elsewhere in Yugoslavia, that the Muslim component of the population was no less modern than the rest of the population, and that they were capable of contributing to the creation of an urban Yugoslav society.

### ONE-STEPPING TO DESEGREGATION

All of the prominent moments of the associational party described until this point, mostly performed on more or less improvised stages, represented a radical subversion of Muslim urban society's existing gender norms. However, what can we say of the general public, of the activists and sympathizers that, on the other side of the stage, attended the party as simple guests? According to existing sources, it seems possible to state that they were also important agents of transformation in the domain of gender relations. Before, during and after the political addresses, the raffle, buffet and exhibitions, people chatted, socialized, smiled, and danced—in other words, men and women enacted a desegregation of the festive space.

This process occurred gradually, with different timings, in particular differing according to where a place lay on the town-city divide. If we begin this analysis in post-war Sarajevo, we can see that, though Muslim women were present at the associational parties, it does not follow from there that these parties were authentically mixed. As revealed, for example, in a 1920 report on a *Gajret* party in Sarajevo, activists maintained the principle of sexual segregation within the festive space. Taking advantage of the layout of the fancy Officers Club, the activists put male participants in the stalls, that is the majority of the hall; a specific part of the room, the balcony over the main entrance, was “reserved only for women.”<sup>92</sup> This formula seems to have enjoyed a certain success; two years later, the activists resorted to the

92 “Velika zabava,” *Domovina*, no. 24 (1920): 3.

same strategy and further developed the sexually segregated organization of the Officers Club. As written by an anonymous activist in the press, “near the balcony three completely separate rooms have been prepared for our women; they will be used for the organization of a separate buffet for our ladies and as a place for conversation.”<sup>93</sup> The imperative of having women participate in the party was thus reconciled with a respect for norms of sexual segregation. Even in the most progressive towns of the province, after the war Muslim women and men shared the same space; they could see each other, but they could not directly approach each other.

However, precisely at a moment in which it seemed to be fixed, this rule began to be challenged by women themselves. In 1921, an anonymous commentator stated in the press about the *Gajret* party in Sarajevo, that “it is our pleasure to remark that this party was popular especially among Muslim women [*muslimanski ženski svijet*], who completely filled all the places in the balcony.” With even greater pleasure, the author went on to add: “We also had the opportunity to see several elegant Muslim ladies [*dame*] descend into the stalls among the public, without provoking any scandal or disappointment.”<sup>94</sup> According to this testimony, it seems that not only did some Muslim women seem to decide to go down and mix with their male counterparts, but furthermore, the other participants did not appear to find any difficulty in accepting this new behavior, suggesting that rules of sexual segregation were weakening among the urban middle class in Sarajevo. For years afterward, the extraordinary success of *Gajret*’s party in Sarajevo seems to have provided an additional reason for challenging sexual segregation in the festive space. As the associational press meticulously reported in 1925, “the balcony of the Officers’ Club was rapidly filled by [female] guests; therefore, Muslim women too had to look for places in the stalls.”<sup>95</sup> By the mid-1920s, thanks to both women’s individual initiatives and organizational constraints, in Sarajevo the gender borders of the festive space were gradually beginning to fade away.

If we look at the cities of Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka in particular, we can see that the enforcement of sexual segregation at parties was al-

93 “Iduće subote je velika gajretova zabava,” *Domovina*, no. 13 (1922): 3. The same gendered division of the festive space is also visible in other *Gajret* party reports, i.e. “Gajretova zabava,” *Budućnost*, no. 2–3 (1920): 39 and “Gajretova zabava u Sarajevu,” *Domovina*, no. 19 (1920): 3.

94 “Sa Gajretove zabave,” *Domovina*, no. 17 (1921): 2–3.

95 “Velika gajretova godišnja zabava,” *Gajret*, no. 4 (1925): 63–4.

ready falling away in the late 1920s, a moment marked by festive mixing. In 1928, at a series of parties and festivities celebrating *Gajret's* 25-year anniversary, the process seems to have arrived at completion. In the 1930s, the descriptions of parties are more and more audacious, where “young men and women... engaged in lot of intimacy”;<sup>96</sup> that is, chatting, dancing, and seducing each other. Of course, this chronology can be applied to the other major towns of Bosnia. The reports concerning the smaller and more isolated towns of the country offer a sensibly different picture, with activists even in the 1930s still having to cope with local expectations in terms of sexual segregation. For instance, in 1928 *Gajret's* local branch in Ključ organized a two-day-long *zabava*: “The first party was held on March 24, the first day of Ramadan, while the entire program was repeated on March 25 for the female population.”<sup>97</sup> In the mid-1930s, *Narodna Uzdanica's* activists from Gračanica and Cazin adopted the same strategy, splitting their party across two days, in order to respect norms of sexual segregation.<sup>98</sup> If some activists played creatively with timing, others played with space. In the early 1920s *Gajret* activists from Livno, for example, chose to do so with the different floors of the same building, an elementary school—the ground floor was reserved for men, and the first floor for women, creating a simultaneous but separated party.<sup>99</sup> Despite these different temporalities, the festive space seems to have become increasingly desegregated throughout the towns of Bosnia, especially thanks to the growing popularity of a social practice that had until the 1910s been relatively unpopular for the Muslim population: social dances. The interwar decades are a period in which even the Muslim population caught a veritable dancing fever, and showed a strong predisposition for consuming different kinds of music, both from local tradition and from a transnational landscape of leisure. Whenever possible, the balls were assigned to amateur, associational or (rarely) professional orchestras; whenever this was difficult to organize, such as in the smallest associational branches, a borrowed gramophone substituted the real musicians and had people dancing for hours.

96 “Velika gajretova zabava u Sarajevu,” *Gajret*, no. 4–5 (1938): 81.

97 “Gajretova zabava u Ključu,” *Gajret*, no. 9 (1928): 141.

98 “Zabava u Gračanici,” *Novi Behar*, no. 18 (1935–1936): 258. One year later, in Cazin a party was organized segregated along gender lines: “Zabava Narodne Uzdanice u Czinu,” *Novi Behar*, no. 23 (1932–1933): 330.

99 “Zabava muslimanske čitaonice,” *Domovina*, no. 125 (1921): 4.

Requiring physical, and often openly sensual contact between a man and a woman in public, social dances represented *par excellence* an attack on the very core of segregation norms. Despite this, balls spread and became a regular fixture in Muslim urban life, even in the smallest towns. The musical programs organized by the Muslim cultural associations, which represented the most widespread opportunity for Muslims of both sexes to dance in interwar Yugoslavia, seem to have responded to a double necessity. It allowed the growing Muslim urban middle class to dance the most modern and popular dances that were fashionable in Belgrade and Zagreb, and in Western cities more in general, without abandoning local musical genres that still enjoyed widespread popularity among the local population. A musical program planned for a *Narodna Uzdanica* annual party in Sarajevo in 1930 is a good example of the musical variety that the Muslim cultural associations put on offer for its members and sympathizers. According to this program, the orchestra was requested to perform respectively the waltz, the *kolo*, the tango, the one-step, then another *kolo*, the waltz, the foxtrot, the tango, followed by yet another *kolo*, as well as the association's anthem and a military march.<sup>100</sup> This musical program, like other similar musical programs at associational parties, was extremely varied. First of all, this testifies to the enduring favor that the *kolo*—a folk dance common throughout the Yugoslav space and performed by a group of people arranged in a circle, with the soloists in the center—still enjoyed among the Muslim population. Folk dance was alternated with a very different musical genre, which entered the Bosnian space after 1878 and was closely associated with the Habsburg *belle époque*, and with its sophisticated middle class: the waltz. With its ordered appearance, this ballroom dance required physical, though codified, contact between the men and women, privileging harmony and grace in the movement of both partners. Similarly, the military march was also a musical genre already present during the pre-war period.

All of these genres that had seen their moment of glory before the war were mingled with contemporary musical genres, ones that had become extremely popular in interwar Yugoslavia, in particular in Belgrade and Zagreb. As has been highlighted by recent research, Yugoslavia was well connected to the “the landscape of foreign entertainment”;<sup>101</sup> that is, to influ-

100 HAS, NU14, 5, 67 GONU to the commander of the military division in Sarajevo (February 28, 1930).

101 Babović, “National Capital,” 105.



ences that arrived in the main cities from beyond state borders, and that connected them with other European cities. In a few rare but important cases, world-famous stars came directly to Yugoslavia. This was the case in 1929, when Josephine Baker, the American-born French singer and dancer, performed throughout that year in Belgrade. This event, widely covered by the Yugoslav press, meant that the inhabitants of Belgrade, and at least to a certain extent those who read the numerous press reports on this event, could familiarize themselves somewhat with Baker's style of Charleston, *danse sauvage*, or banana dance.<sup>102</sup> Beside these means, cheaply-printed sheet music enabled Bosnian musicians to rapidly learn to play the most recent dances, and thus allowed participants at these parties "to dance in step with their European contemporaries."<sup>103</sup> In order to satisfy these expectations, Muslim cultural associations thus ensured that musical genres such as the tango, the one-step and the foxtrot were played at their parties. These dance genres broke the ordered movement of the waltz and its extremely codified interactions between partners, and introduced body movements that were perceived to be disordered and openly sensual. Moreover, this second group of dances demanded more physical contact between partners, rather than simply holding hands. Associational parties, at which social dancing went on *do zora*, "until dawn," became thus a privileged opportunity for transgression, breaking taboos on what were considered to be appropriate forms of socialization.

\* \* \*

The festive events analyzed in this chapter, as standardized activities performed at specific times and places, can tell us a great deal about the politically significant aspects of Muslim urban society and its transformations in the interwar years. Combining words and actions, festive events have been interpreted as collective performances of existing class, national, gender and religious hierarchies, and as tools for establishing, or reinforcing, collective loyalties. The *zabave* in particular, the modern festive event addressed at length in this chapter, was an arena in which different actors—e.g., its organizers, participants, and those who were excluded—could as-

102 Babović, "National Capital," 105.

103 Babović, "National Capital," 108.

sert their conflicting interests and put their strategies into practice. Crucial to financing an association's various activities, parties were a domain considered both practical and non-political, and for this reason well-adapted to women.

A closer look at associational parties shows us that the exposed female body was considered to be the principal marker of civilizational advancement. The invention of the New Muslim Woman was not only a reaction against the Orientalist discourse that depicted Muslims as unfit to survive in the post-Ottoman era. Through their consumption of "modern" and "European" material goods, these "Modern Muslim women" also reinforced and made visible the class boundaries of a rising urban middle class in search of political legitimacy and integration into the broader Yugoslav bourgeoisie, while also distinguishing themselves from both the majority of the Bosnian rural masses, perceived as deeply backward, and the urban poor. The "invisibilization" of confessional markers on women's bodies served *Gajret's* broader strategy of adapting to post-Ottoman circumstances: the Muslim minority could ensure its "survival" through rapid integration into the Serbian/Yugoslav national body, which required it to reduce the visibility of religion in the public space.

The domestication of a modern, European femininity among Bosnian Muslims was also troubling for *Gajret's* (male) leadership. A pro-emancipation discourse was always accompanied by a stigmatization of the "wrong" kind of emancipation, revealing the anxieties connected to the transformation of the role of women: an improperly emancipated woman tempted men and renounced motherhood and self-sacrifice. Through the *zabava* ritual, the cultural associations traced their own path to a proper emancipation, one that was conducted by the "enlightened" (male) members of Muslim society, but that confined Muslim women far from decision-making processes. This paternalist emancipation, which conceived of Muslim women as objects of liberation rather than as subjects of self-liberation, is also indirectly visible in the absence of contact with suffragist associations. True emancipation did not include access to politics for women, and neither did it challenge the ideology of the separate spheres for men and women.

Nevertheless, it would be reductive to claim that festive events were simply a way to reinforce the inferior position of Muslim women. Preparing, experiencing and assisting in these parties meant a gradual but constant

conquest of the public space and, with the progressive erosion of sexual segregation, an increase in female mobility in the festive/urban space. The domestication of a modern festive culture meant that women became familiar with new practices of self-expression, such as acting, dancing, singing, exchanging, and conquering the night (“till dawn”) outside the familial space, which had previously been forbidden to women.

## CHAPTER 7

### UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES



In the second half of the 1930s, the network of voluntary associations that had developed throughout Yugoslavia saw a series of new phenomena, shaped by changes at an international, national, and Muslim community level. After almost fifteen years of being marginalized from the political arena, communist militants, despite the ban that still weighed on their party, found the resources to come out of the shadows and elaborate new strategies for gaining ground in Yugoslav society. In order to face the steady authoritarian course that both the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the whole of Europe was on, militants of the Yugoslav Communist Party began to see middle-class voluntary associations with new eyes: instead of dismissing them as an expression of the bourgeoisie, these organizations were now seen as a space that was relatively protected from the state's control, and that could be used to spread their ideas and recruit fresh forces to the revolutionary cause. The effort of influencing, and sometimes taking control of, voluntary associations—a process usually described by scholarship as “infiltration”—had tangible outcomes, such as transformations in the agenda, discourse and practices of certain existing associations, including those in which Muslim women were usually enrolled. In the same years in which the Communist Party was lifting its head, however, a different phenomenon was also emerging from within the Muslim community. Inspired by different contemporary social movements both in the Middle East and Yugoslavia, Muslim revivalist forces decided to play a different, more active role in the public space, and to organize. To this purpose, in the second half of the 1930s they established a Muslim associational network that extended to the main towns of Bosnia and Herzegovina, from which they could disseminate

their own message. Clearly modeled on existing Muslim cultural associations, but led by the *ulema*, this organization rapidly refined its goal: in a Yugoslav society that was becoming more and more secularized, and in which the communal boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims were fading away, revivalists wanted to put Islam back at the core of the public space. In promoting this re-Islamisation of Muslim society in Yugoslavia, they did not hesitate to use and appropriate the vast array of tools and practices elaborated by progressive associations in the previous decades, and to put them to the service of a sensibly different project.

### HIJACKING BOURGEOIS ORGANIZATIONS

As we saw in Chapter Two, after the Great War the Yugoslav Communist Party had good results at the election for the Constituent Assembly of the Kingdom SHS. However, the enthusiasm sparked by this victory was short-lived. As early as December 1920, the Yugoslav government issued a decree outlawing the party, as well as the press and the trade union close to it, rapidly dismantling the fragile network that the communists had been starting to build across the county. The decree's enforcement, rapidly followed by other measures aiming to repress the communist presence in the country, was the prelude for more than a decade of communist marginalization. Moreover, the royal dictatorship, which aimed in general to curtail all political forces perceived to be anti-state, even worsened their position; the state's control over factories, legal trade unions, schools, and the press became even stronger than before, making the communists' clandestine activities more and more difficult, and drastically reducing the number of communist activists and supporters.<sup>1</sup> In the early 1930s, this organizational weakness was particularly evident where women were at stake: according to Jovanka Kecman, women represented no more than 1% of activists supporting the party's clandestine activities in Yugoslavia, while the number of women enrolled in the trade union reached no more than 2000, out of a total of 28,500 members, or less than 10%.<sup>2</sup> These figures, which were discussed in clandestine meetings throughout the country, brought the party activists before

1 Miroljub Vasić, *Revolucionarni omladinski pokret u Jugoslaviji 1929.-1941. godine* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga and Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1977).

2 Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 204–19.

a regretful reality: despite stressing the need for more women party-members, the spread of communist ideas among women, and their enrollment in the party had only extremely limited progress.

In the mid-1930s, several major political events both outside and inside the country created the conditions for an improvement of the Communist Party's position. The aforementioned deadly attack against King Aleksandar in Marseille on October 9, 1934, carried out by Macedonian independentists, and backed by Croatian independentists and Fascist Italy, meant an at least partial thawing of the dictatorship in Yugoslavia. The re-establishment of political parties, and consequently of parliamentary life, favoured the re-opening of some spaces for public discussion, though often only after close and sometimes paranoid surveillance by the Yugoslav state.<sup>3</sup> In the same months, a significant shift also happened inside the communist movement on a global scale. Hitler's rise to power in 1933, immediately accompanied by an unprecedented rise in brutality against political opponents in the country and by an aggressive attitude on the international arena, convinced the communist leadership that a radical change in strategy was called for. The moment that formalized this change of direction was the seventh Congress of the Comintern, held in Moscow between July 25 and August 20, 1935. Breaking with what had been done until that time, the representatives of the sixty-odd parties making up the Communist International launched the policy of the so-called "Popular Fronts." According to this new strategy, communist parties were instructed to form broad alliances with other anti-fascist political forces in their own country in order to create a cordon sanitaire against pro-fascist forces, secure some kind of social advance at home, and a military alliance with the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup>

In Yugoslavia, insofar as the Communist Party was still banned from political life, this strategic shift did not bring about the creation of true political alliances, as happened for instance in France and Spain. In this specific context, the Popular Front policy rather led to a change in communist strategy toward voluntary organizations. Still then considered, and openly denigrated, as bourgeois organizations par excellence, and for this reason unable and unwilling to bring about progress beyond the restricted cir-

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3 Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, 207–38.

4 Helen Graham and Paul Preston, *The Popular Front in Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1987), 1–19.

cle of the urban middle class, voluntary associations began to be looked at with new eyes. As organizations that were essentially independent from an authoritarian State, in the 1930s associations began to be seen as a potential “free zone,” from which the communist ideal might be spread and activists recruited, a sort of surrogate organization in a period in which the party was still banned from public life. Cultural, musical and sporting associations, which brought together an urban educated elite mostly composed of teachers and students, began to be seen as a privileged way to reach out to the country’s intelligentsia and to radicalize their quest for social change. Philanthropic associations, whose very *raison d’être* was to help and discipline the urban poor, were excellent sites from which the most unprivileged sections of urban society might be reached and politicised. Last but not least, feminine and feminist associations had the potential to be able to address half of the Yugoslav population; still excluded from full civil and political rights, women thus were seen as having good reason to call for a radical social transformation. For these reasons, associational branches and all the institutions established in their perimeter in the previous decades—student dorms, journals, libraries, workshops, etc.—became for the communist activists a battleground for resisting fascism and preparing the revolution.

The communist effort to gain the minds and hearts of the Yugoslav youth had of course to be pursued with the greatest care and circumspection. The state, and more precisely the Ministry of the Interior, but also the Ministry of Education—which, during the interwar period, was responsible for monitoring all cultural institutions in the country, and schools in particular—put a great deal of energy into rooting out and suppressing alleged anti-state activity. As has been thoroughly demonstrated in Yugoslav historiography, police officials often participated in associations’ sessions, and monitored activists’ activities—including apparently less political initiatives, such as picnics and parties. In several cases, when the local authorities felt that they had gathered enough evidence of communist allegiance in an association, they did not hesitate to close it and arrest the activists.<sup>5</sup> Repression was of course not the only way to prevent the youth from joining the ranks of communist activists and sympathizers. The state also invested its energies into

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5 Šarac, “Šestojanuarska diktatura,” 365–88.

reinforcing the existence of competing associational networks, and in particular the Yugoslav *Sokol* Union, the gymnastic association that under King Aleksandar's dictatorship became an organ for strengthening Yugoslavist and royalist loyalties among the youth. However, this last strategy appears to have come up against one sizeable shortcoming: the association was unable to recruit members beyond the Orthodox Serbian population.<sup>6</sup>

Muslim activists of both sexes involved in voluntary associations were also touched by this wave of sympathy for communist ideas. The two main cultural associations, *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica*, as one of the principal sites where the educated Muslim elite gathered, showed a clear degree of permeability to Communist activists. According to existing scholarship—which nevertheless admits the difficulty of measuring the actual extent of communist support—in 1936, *Gajret* reading rooms in Poračić and Koraj were already substantially controlled by activists with communist sympathies. Approximately in the same period, even *Gajret's* different associational offshoots in Mostar followed the same path.<sup>7</sup> Attraction for communist ideas also spilled into other kinds of Muslim associations: by the mid-1930s philanthropic associations like *Muslimanska Zajednica* (Muslim Community) in Zenica, *Merhamet* (Compassion) in Livno, or Muslim reading rooms such as *Brazda* (Furrow) in Teslić, as well as *Bratstvo* (Brotherhood) in the Vratnik district of Sarajevo, were already under the control of communist sympathizers.<sup>8</sup> Far from becoming hegemonic, the spread of communist sympathies was nevertheless a significant phenomenon that touched important segments of the Muslim associational network.

The Muslim branches where communist sympathies appear to have been the most visible were of course those in Zagreb and Belgrade, largely animated by university students. The local Zagreb branch of *Narodna Uzdanica*, chiefly composed of university students from Bosnia, underwent

6 On the *Sokol* gymnastics movement, see Nikola Žutić, *Sokol: Ideologija u fizičkoj kulturi Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1929–1941* (Belgrade: Angrotrade, 1998) and, more recently, Pieter Troch, "Interwar Yugoslav State-building and the Changing Social Position of the Sokol Gymnastics Movement," *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 26, no. 1 (2019): 60–83.

7 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 215–31.

8 Atif Purivatra, *Nacionalni i politički razvitak muslimana* (Sarajevo, Svjetlost, 1970), 100–1; Nebojša Radmanović, "Napredna banjalučka društva kao oblik legalnog djelovanja Komunističke partije Jugoslavije u drugoj polovini tridesetih godina," in *Četvrta i peta konferencija za Bosnu i Hercegovinu u istorijskom razvitku revolucionarnog pokreta 1938–1941: Zbornik radova sa naučnog savjetovanja održanog u Mostaru 5. i 6. oktobra 1978. godine* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 1980), 437–48.



significant changes in 1935.<sup>9</sup> That year, the JMO made the decision to leave the opposition and join the government: this situation resulted in new poles forming within the local branch. Muslim students in Zagreb, who had traditionally been openly pro-Croat, made no attempt to hide their growing support for the Croat Peasant Party, thereby distancing themselves from the main Muslim party and its decision to form a government with Serb centrists. Meanwhile, another active group of *Narodna Uzdanica* scholarship-winners became acquainted with the communist ideas that were already being widely circulated among academic circles in Zagreb.<sup>10</sup> Seizing the moment, in 1935 two leftist students of this group managed to get themselves elected as secretaries, and in 1936 they represented the branch at the association's annual assembly.<sup>11</sup> Though representatives from the central branch in Sarajevo were sent to Zagreb on several occasions, including president Mulabdić himself in order to reconcile the parties, the conflict between leftist and peasant party supporters continued to shake the local Zagreb branch of *Narodna Uzdanica* until the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>12</sup>

The tangible increase in communist sympathizers among the Muslim youth involved in associational life was received by *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica*'s leadership with a great deal of concern. This was particularly evident in 1936, when the first large-scale strike was successfully organized by secondary-school students in Sarajevo. Strikes of this kind, mixing very practical requests for better living-conditions in schools and student dorms with anti-authoritarian political demands both in Yugoslavia and in Europe, became more and more common in the second half of the 1930s. Members of *Gajret*'s central branch increased their vigilance against this form of politicisation among secondary-school and university students. In 1937, at the Annual Meeting in Sarajevo, *Gajret*'s secretary felt the need to warn the activists to protect the Muslim youth from dangerous exposure to the "con-

9 Hasanbegović, *Muslimani u Zagrebu*, 104–6.

10 Ivan Jelić, "O nekim pitanja razvoja revolucionarnog omladinskog pokreta u Hrvatskoj 1937. – 1941.," in *Komunisti i Revolucija*, ed. Ivan Jelić (Zagreb: Centar za aktualni politički studij narodnog sveučilišta Zagreba, 1977), 56–74.

11 Hasanbegović, *Muslimani u Zagrebu*, 104; 108.

12 Hasanbegović, 116–38 and 148. On the political radicalization of Bosnian students at Zagreb University, see also Vojo Rajčević "Revolucionarna bosanskohercegovačka omladina na zagrebačkom sveučilištu (1919. – 1941.)," in *Revolucionarni omladinski pokret u Bosni i Hercegovini*, vol. 1, ed. Zdravko Antonić (Sarajevo: Republička konferencija SSO BIH, 1984): 228–49.

temporary ideas of the world,”<sup>13</sup> and to call for each associational branch to carefully monitor the circulation of communist ideas among the pupils. That same year, the central branch felt obliged to issue a special regulation for its student dorms across the country, explicitly asking the directors to quell the spread of communist ideas.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the participation of a *Gajret* pupil in street protests was invariably punished with expulsion from the student dorm or the suspension of their scholarship.<sup>15</sup>

The Muslim cultural associations’ offensive against the spread of communist sympathies did not stop at internal repression. They also developed an ideological offensive that aimed to curb the success of Marxism among the educated youth. In the late 1930s, texts that directly or indirectly attacked the theoretical basis of communism abounded in the press. Interestingly, in doing so the cultural associations did not hesitate to enlist conservative *ulema*, showcasing their publications in the associational press. One example is a text by Mustafa Busuladžić (1914–1945), educated at the Gazi-Husrevbeg *medresa* in Sarajevo, and published in the 1937 *Gajret* Yearbook. The text, which is eloquently entitled “Islamic Socialism,” had a broad goal: to defend the primacy of religion, and of Islam in particular, over philosophy, and address the materialist system of thought that structures Marxism. Interestingly, this *medresa* graduate opened his dissertation by referring to Russian thinkers, in particular to the anti-Boshevik existentialist philosopher Nikolai Alexandrovich Berdyaev and the writer Leo Tolstoy; a clear sign that Busuladžić knew he was speaking to a audience with a secular education, nourished by cultural references that were not necessarily Islamic. The core of the author’s argument is that Muslims, the people who received the revelation through the Quran, do not need socialism. By quoting a series of *hadiths* and *suras*, as well as texts by classical Islamic thinkers such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun, the author aimed to demonstrate that equality lay at the very core of Islam, thus implying that young Muslims who felt the need for greater equality in society should look not to socialism, but to Islam. “Islam is in its essence socialism,” Busuladžić went on to say, and “Muhamed a.s. had a deep social sensibility.”<sup>16</sup> Busuladžić argued that the best proof that equal-

13 “Izvještaj Glavnog odbora Gajreta za godinu 1936–7,” *Gajret*, no. 7–9 (1937): 116.

14 HAS, G4, Gajretov ženskog konvikta, GOG to *Gajret* student dorms (1937).

15 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 219–20.

16 Mustafa Busuladžić, “Islamski socijalizam,” *Kalendar “Gajret”* (1937): 189.

ity is intrinsic to Islam is the importance assigned to the institution of *zek-jat*, ritual alms for the poor and one of the five pillars of Islam, or the prohibition against taking out interest on loans; the combination of these precepts were, to his mind, sufficient antidote against the concentration of money in the hands of a single person or family, and thus against the basis of capitalism. In this respect, for Muslims Marxism was thus an unnecessary emancipatory ideology.

### SIGNING FOR CHANGE

How exactly did this competition between communists, the associational leadership and the state, to win over the Yugoslav youth play out? Were Muslim women, in Bosnian towns or in the university cities, somehow involved in this process of “infiltration”? Searching for answers to these questions is not easy. First of all, there are the objective difficulties of measuring a phenomenon that was carried out informally and in secrecy as one of its preconditions for existence. Secondly, Yugoslav historiography of the socialist period generally tends to exaggerate the influence of communist militants over interwar voluntary associations, often stating for ideological reasons that entire segments of Yugoslav civil society were firmly under the control of the Communist Party. Nevertheless, if we abandon the idea of finding a quantitative answer to this question, and decide to focus instead on the more qualitative aspects, several remarks can be made.

One of the possible starting points for this enquiry are the universities, and in particular the two higher-education institutions that the vast majority of Muslim students attended in the late 1930s: the universities of Zagreb and Belgrade. Even if, as will be demonstrated in the following paragraph, the former had its own very active leftist groups, it was in the latter that the stronghold of a radical student movement close to the Communist Youth (*Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije*) could be found. The radicalization that this university’s population underwent was deeply linked to the social transformations occurring in the interwar period. Between 1921 and 1931, Belgrade saw striking demographic and urban developments, jumping from a population of 112,000 in 1921 to almost 240,000 in 1931. This rapid increase in the city’s population also made class differences in the urban space increasingly visible: the downtown district, where institutional

buildings and bourgeois residences were showcased, was rapidly flanked by poor neighbourhoods. In this changing urban landscape, university students became an important component of the urban social structure. Student dorms, including that of the association *Gajret Osman Đikić*, where the majority of Bosnian Muslim students of both sexes were housed at that time, were also situated in the pulsing heart of the Yugoslav capital. As has been demonstrated by scholarship, student dorms were extremely important institutions for the socialization and politicization of young women: in them, free from the tutelage of their families and communities, they joined and participated in an extremely intellectually fertile and socially diverse milieu.<sup>17</sup> For many students, coming from the smallest and/or remotest towns, setting foot in these universities represented an opportunity to be exposed to a world beyond Serbia and Yugoslavia for the first time.

An openly leftist student movement was already visible in the University of Belgrade in the 1920s. Students had first mobilized to protect the administrative autonomy of the university, while at the same time asking for better living conditions for the students, especially the poorer ones or those who came from the countryside. With the proclamation of the royal dictatorship in 1929, the movement acquired more marked political leanings, and had been organizing strikes since 1931 against the authoritarian turn taken by the state, and also—as a consequence of the Great Depression—expressing frustration about the difficulty of finding employment comparable to the education they had received. The expression of this dissatisfaction increasingly assumed Marxist tones: by the early 1930s, in the universities of the Yugoslav kingdom it was not unusual to receive clandestine flyers rejoicing the ongoing “crisis of capitalism,” denouncing Yugoslavia as “a capitalist, more in general fascist, dictatorship,” while at the same time shouting a “hurrah to the Third International, principal guide of world revolution.”<sup>18</sup> In the second half of the 1930s, the student movement found in university classrooms, student dorms, literary and other associations their principal meeting-places. As has been highlighted by a huge amount of scholarship, participants in this movement were ideologically close to communist ideas, and some of them were also enrolled in communist organizations like the Com-

17 Dobrica Vučević et al., *Studentkinje Beogradskog univerziteta u revolucionarnom pokretu* (Belgrade: Edicija revolucionarni studentski pokret na Beogradskom univerzitetu, 1988), 17–53.

18 AJ, 720, 740 *Proglaš Saveza studenanta komunista pod naslovom “kriza kapitalizma,”* Ljubljana, 1931.

munist Youth. Through them, it was able to enlarge its platform: the movement, in which female students were very active, added demands for female suffrage to agenda, and more in general for an end to the unequal legal treatment to which women in Yugoslavia were still subjected.<sup>19</sup> As a consequence of efforts by the state and the university authorities to isolate these forces within the university, tensions increased and the conflict also had its victims: three students were killed, both by fascist groups and the gendarmerie.<sup>20</sup>

Prima facie, the dozen Muslim girls that left Bosnia and Herzegovina at that time to pursue a university education in the university cities, and in particular in Belgrade, were not at the frontline of the movement. The few traces of Muslim women participating in strikes, street demonstrations, or the student associations that are usually considered to have been the closest to the Communist Party and to the Communist Youth are extremely weak. There are neither Muslim names among the dozens of women that, with 1600 volunteers, left for Spain to join the fight against fascism, nor among the female students arrested for subversive propaganda in the Yugoslav capital.<sup>21</sup> It seems, however, that the first Muslim women to study at university chose a different method: they signed public petitions along with their comrades from Bosnia. According to several sources under the directive of the Communist Party and its youth organization, in December 1937, March 1938, and December 1939, a group of Bosnian students published three open letters signed by more than five hundred students of each confessional group and of both sexes that had been printed and circulated clandestinely. If we pay careful attention to these three documents, we see a steady increase in the number of Muslim women among the petitioners. In the first petition, out of 380 Bosnian student signatories, 97 were Muslim and 2 of them—Fatima Brkić and Hiba Šerbić—were women.<sup>22</sup> In the third one, signed by 509 students from 66 different locations throughout Bosnia, and more precisely by 179 Muslim students, ten of them were female students.<sup>23</sup> These are of course small numbers, but are suggestive of a growing involvement. What's more, if we then cross-check the names of

19 Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 266–311.

20 Vjeran Pavlaković, "Radicalization at the University of Zagreb during the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939," *Historijski Zbornik* 62, no. 2 (2009): 501–6.

21 Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 397–404.

22 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 236.

23 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 238–9.

the Muslim female petitioners against the registers of Belgrade-based *Gajret Osman Đikić*, we find additional information: in the case of the 1937 public letter, more than half of Muslim students, including the two young women, had studied (or were studying) in Belgrade thanks to the association. In 1937 the number of female Muslims who, thanks to the dormitory, were able to attend the Yugoslav capital's high schools and university rose to almost thirty.<sup>24</sup>

Even though they were written in years in which the political situation was undergoing rapid changes, both inside and beyond the borders of Yugoslavia, these petitions seem to bear several common traits. Firstly, a preoccupation with events occurring on the international arena, and especially with the rise of the Axis powers in Europe. Yugoslavia's shift in international alliances in that period—from a traditional partner of France and England to an ally of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, a process particularly visible under the ministry of Milan Stojadinović (1935–1939)—was cause for consternation. However, the episode that most stirred Yugoslav students' attention and contributed to a general radicalization of their positions was the Spanish Civil War.<sup>25</sup> In the following years, the Austrian Anschluss in March 1938, and even more the unilateral Nazi annexation of Czechoslovakia's northern and western border regions in September 1938—a country with whom Yugoslav students had nourished friendly relations and many exchanges<sup>26</sup>—transformed anxiety into rage, a rage equally shared against the Axis Powers and the leaders of the liberal democracies, who had decided to abandon the Slavic country to its fate. In its description of the international situation, and of a war that has already touched the heart of Europe, the document celebrates Soviet Russia, designated as the only foreign country authentically seeking for peace, in contrast with the other countries in the service of capital (France, England and the US) or aggressive nationalism (Germany, Italy, Japan). In the text, Russia is celebrated as the protector of the little people of the Balkans against the aggression of the Axis powers, while the so-called liberal countries have already sacrificed Spain,

24 Alibegović, "Uloga Beogradskog Gajreta," 331–3.

25 Vjeran Pavlaković, *The Battle for Spain is Ours: Croatia and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2014).

26 Noah W. Sobe, *Provincializing the Worldly Citizen: Yugoslav Student and Teacher Travel and Slavic Cosmopolitanism in the Interwar Era* (New York: P. Lang, 2008), 45–61.

Austria, Czechoslovakia, Albania and China. The injustices committed by the great powers on a global scale were mirrored by another violence, this time against Bosnia and its population, on a Yugoslav scale. In the 1937 open letter in particular, university students from Bosnia denounced what they called “bourgeois anti-popular forces”—meaning the Serbian, Croatian and Muslim parties of that time—who with their constant rivalries had doomed Yugoslav society to conflict and had neglected the needs of the vast majority of the population—the youth, the workers, and the peasants. The tone of the 1939 open letter is even more tragic, given the changing political context. As already mentioned, on August 26, 1939, the Yugoslav prime minister Dragiša Cvetković and a Croat politician, Vladko Maček, signed an agreement that intended to solve once and for all the demands for autonomy of the Croatian political elite. The agreement established a Governorate of Croatia, an autonomous Croatian entity in Yugoslavia which was specifically intended to include as many ethnic Croats as possible, whose borders had mostly been drawn at the expense of the integrity of Bosnian territory. In reaction to this measure, taken without consulting the Bosnians themselves and used as a stop-gap solution to an internal conflict, the students—referring to themselves as “young brothers and comrades,” “Serbian, Croatian and Muslim youth!”<sup>27</sup>—asked for a new agreement that would recognize the autonomy of Bosnia and Herzegovina and a democratization of Yugoslav political life.

Another common trait that these documents share is the desire of the university youth to participate, and to make their voices heard, in a period in which Europe was running toward tragedy. In the words of the 1939 open letter, “While millions of working people are unnecessarily spilling their blood we, sons of the people, educated youth, we want to have our say on the events happening around us, and on the risks we run.”<sup>28</sup> Small and marginal as these signatures might seem, they nevertheless suggest that Muslim female students in the capital city saw the same process of politicization as the rest of the population.

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27 AJ, 66, 75, 208, Third Open letter of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Student Youth (Zagreb-Belgrade, December 1, 1939).

28 AJ, 66, 75, 208.

## GENDERING INFILTRATION

Besides the issue of measuring the true dimensions of this infiltration, an issue that has been neglected by historiography is the gender dimension of this process. What were the consequences on gender discourse and practices when the branch of an association turned red? What was the role of Muslim women in this process? Two relatively well-documented case studies can give us several clues as to the gendered dimension of infiltration.

The most striking example of a *Gajret* local branch taken over by communist sympathizers is probably the Mostar case. The ways in which this process happened are deeply linked to local circumstances. As we have already seen in Chapter One, this branch had been established since the Habsburg period in the principal Herzegovinian city. In 1928, the city also saw the establishment of a Popular Muslim Library (*Muslimanska narodna biblioteka*), established for, and run by middle-school pupils. A few years later, the library associated itself with the local *Gajret* branch, thus joining the network of the country's main Muslim cultural association. Renamed *Gajret's Library* (*Gajretova Biblioteka*) following this shift, this organization (which maintained separate elected charges) became the hub of associational life in Mostar, not only for Muslims but for the population as a whole. From the mid-1930s, a group of university students that had recently returned from Belgrade was elected to the library's governing committee.<sup>29</sup> Using the popularity of the library in town, these young men managed to get their delegates elected into the local branch of the association, and even to have one sent to the yearly assembly in Sarajevo. Three founding experiences united the members of the group of students who managed to take control of the Mostar *Gajret* branch: they had spent several years in Belgrade as university students, and had been hosted by the association's dorm, and they were already well-known as left-wing and antifascist activists.<sup>30</sup>

Under its new management, the library radically expanded the scope of its activities. First, the library acquired several dozen Marxist texts, thereby contributing to acquainting several thousand library users with commu-

29 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 219.

30 Fazlija Alikalfić, "Revolucionisanje mostarske omladine kroz rad Muslimanske narodne biblioteke u Mostaru," in *Četvrta i peta konferencija KPJ za Bosnu i Hercegovinu u istorijskom razvitku revolucionarnog pokreta 1930-1941* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju u Sarajevu, 1980), 434–5.



nist ideas. A range of activities were also organized, including parties, plays, concerts, lectures and extra classes for middle-school pupils. Given that the majority of middle-school teachers in the city were also library members, families—even those opposed to *Gajret* and its post-1936 political line—were happy to send their children to this institution.<sup>31</sup> With more than 1000 members, the library became “the largest institution in terms of visitors and members in pre-war Mostar.”<sup>32</sup>

High on the library’s agenda were women, and in particular—given their extremely high illiteracy rates—their education. Domestic sciences and literacy classes were organized, as well as talks on specific subjects. Though the association’s usual cultural tools were used, the library was pioneering in terms of the topics it broached. For example, lessons and informal meetings focused on domestic and international politics (particularly of the Soviet Union), women’s political rights and Clara Zetkin’s ideas on the emancipation of women. The association’s ability to build relationships with other associations and local institutions—such as *Seljačko Kolo* (Peasant Circle) and pupils living at the *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica* boarding houses<sup>33</sup>—suggests that these new topics may have circulated well beyond the thousands of library members.<sup>34</sup> Besides this, it also seems that under the new management Muslim women became increasingly involved in the running of the associational library. From 1938 a sizeable group of women, including a number of Muslims, worked their way into the managing committee. In addition to the ten or so non-Muslim schoolteachers, there were also almost a hundred Muslim students who were at or had graduated from the local secondary school; this group included the most active supporters of the association until the outbreak of the Second World War. At least three Muslim university students became part of the library’s managing committee: Nedžida Hadžić-Novak, who graduated in law in Belgrade and who was probably the first female provincial judge; and Bisera Puzić and Fatima

31 Hasan Čišić, “Privatna inicijativa i narodno prosvjećivanje – Prosvjetni rad Gajretove narodne biblioteke u Mostaru,” *Gajret*, no. 6 (1937): 96–7.

32 Mahmud Konjhodžić, *Mostarke: Fragmenti o revolucionarnoj djelatnosti i patriotskoj opredjeljenosti žena Mostara, o njihovoj borbi za slobodu i socijalizam* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1981), 36–40.

33 Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 219.

34 Samija Slipičević-Bubić, “Žene Mostara u prvim godinama rata,” in *Žene Bosne i Hercegovine u narodno-oslobodilačkoj borbi 1941–1945. godine*, ed. Jasmina Musabegović (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1977), 45–7.



Figure 35: Self-portrait of *Gajret's* Library in Mostar, late 1930s.

Source: Konjhodžić, *Mostarke*, 32.

Brkić, who both studied medicine.<sup>35</sup> All these women lived in Belgrade during their university years and Brkić at least boarded at the Belgrade branch of the association.<sup>36</sup>

The unconventional activities of the Mostar branch were a grave concern for the *Gajret* central branch in Sarajevo. In 1937 the local branch openly attacked the association's management, accusing it of centralist politics and being "detached from the population"<sup>37</sup> because of its nationalist stance. In consequence of this, *Gajret's* president Hasanbegović decided to appoint Besim Korkut as director of the student dorm in Mostar, in order to strengthen monitoring of the branch. The appointment of the latter, who had previously taught religion at the institute, sparked an all-out war between the central and local branches. Maintaining that employing a religious studies teacher as director would result in the students receiving a "reactionary education,"<sup>38</sup> the local branch openly violated the associa-

<sup>35</sup> Konjhodžić, *Mostarke*, 35–8.

<sup>36</sup> SANU, 14411, *Kartoteka studenata Beogradskog Gajreta*.

<sup>37</sup> ABiH, FG, 20, 616, MPG Mostar to GOG, (1937, undated).

<sup>38</sup> HAS, G4, *Zapisnik Plenarne sjednice Glavnog odbora Gajreta* (October 27, 1937).

tion's statutes and independently appointed Ismet Milavić, a former resident of Belgrade-based *Gajret Osman Đikić*, as director of the boarding house. Within the local branch, disputes between supporters and opponents of Korkut became violent, causing quite a stir in the newspapers. By late October 1937, the central branch recognized the eminently political and antifascist nature of some of the branch and the library's initiatives: from Sarajevo they decreed the chapter dissolved and sent the police and representatives of the central branch to the scene. This decision did not have the desired effect. The library group was so well established that it proved impossible to expel them from their elected seats. In August 1938, the central branch was forced to admit to the presence of communist supporters in the newly-elected local chapter, which, though under police control, remained active until the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>39</sup>

The Banja Luka branch of *Ženski Pokret* (active from 1935) is a second example of an association that gradually assumed pro-communist leanings. The situation in Banja Luka caught the attention of the press and the state authorities alike. As Mitar Papić tells it, ever since the siege of the Vrbas governorate in 1931, the city's school network had been growing rapidly.<sup>40</sup> In 1933, following a rise in the number of pupils attending secondary school, *Kolo Srpskih Sestara* opened its first boarding house for girls in the city, which housed twenty or so girls of mixed faiths each year.<sup>41</sup>

When we take a closer look at the activities of the feminist branch of *Ženski Pokret* in Banja Luka, it is clear that over time the feminist and communist agendas gradually began to blend into one another. Events which in a certain sense characterised the feminist struggles of the time—such as the Yugoslavia-wide demonstrations for women's suffrage in 1935 and 1939, and conferences on civil law reform for better equality—were increasingly held alongside other events related to international communism. According to Perko Vojnović, *Ženski Pokret* activists regularly got involved in activities that would happily have fallen into the category of International Red Aid: for instance, fundraising support for communist political prisoners in Yugoslavia and for help the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>42</sup> The merging of feminism and

39 Konjhodžić, *Mostarke*, 38.

40 Papić, *Školstvo u Bosni (1918–1941)*, 115.

41 Vojnović, "Ženski Pokret," 113–23.

42 Vojnović, "Ženski Pokret", 115.

communism is also apparent in the branch's social calendar. From 1935 until the outbreak of the Second World War, *Ženski Pokret* celebrated the International Day of Peace every November; from 1937, Women's Day (March 8) and Labour Day (May 1) were also celebrated. Labour Day was celebrated as *Dan priljatelja priroda*, "Day of the Friends of Nature," to circumvent police prohibitions: outings in the countryside, which were very popular among women, were the perfect opportunity for socialising and political debate.<sup>43</sup>

In an interview given several decades later on the activities of the association, activist Stana Kušmić gave a precious personal account of the specific atmosphere of those years. She remembers thus the activities of the association's festivities for International Women's Day in 1940, held at the Hotel Bosnia, with the participation of the association's choir:

In addition to the "Women's hymn," other songs were also performed, all of them from the Soviet Union. In the planning of the program several members distinguished themselves by their active engagement i.e. Ajša Karabegović, Boško Košanović, his sister who danced the Spanish dance, Kata Djin who recited a poem with the following lines: "you are not invited to go to the ball/ there go the girls of the upper classes/You do not know what the foxtrot or the tango are/since you come from the popular classes." The police gave her a fine for that. The party was swarming with police officers who finally forbade the party's opening address. All former Yugoslav army officers were invited to leave, on the grounds that it was a communist party.<sup>44</sup>

The association's dynamism not only caught the attention of the police (which constantly monitored the association and even banned certain events), but also the leaders of *Alijansa*, the aforementioned federation of women's and feminist associations in which *Ženski Pokret* was involved. In 1939 the head of the federation openly complained about the overtly antifascist nature of demonstrations organized by the Banja Luka branch of *Ženski Pokret*.<sup>45</sup>

Documents and printed sources related to the Banja Luka branch of *Ženski Pokret* show that three Muslim women—Fahira Fejzagić, Ajša Kara-

43 Vojinović, "Ženski Pokret", 122.

44 ARS, 498, Stana Kušmić, "Ženski Pokret u Banjaluci" (January 11, 1963).

45 Vojinović, "Ženski Pokret," 114.



Figure 36: Vahida Maglajlić in the early 1940s.

Source: Jasmina Musabegović, *Žene Bosne i Hercegovine u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi 1941-1945. godine: sjećanja učesnika* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1977), 560.

begović and Vahida Maglajlić—took part in associational activities, alongside a majority of non-Muslim activists. While there is no information that enables us to determine the role, education and social class of two of these women with any degree of certainty, we know that the third, Vahida Maglajlić (April 17, 1907–April 1, 1943), was “first secretary and then president of the Banja Luka *Ženski Pokret*,”<sup>46</sup> and a great deal of information on her does exist. Vahida distinguished herself, and died, during the Second World War on the partisans’ side and she is therefore documented in numerous publications. The first-born of a Banja Luka *kadija*, Vahida received a standard education for her time: *mekteb*, primary school and then a school for female handiwork. According to accounts gathered after her death, when she started to be celebrated as a socialist national hero, it appears that as a young girl Vahida wanted to follow in the footsteps of her younger brother Ekrem and go to study in Zagreb. This her father opposed, as he believed “there is no need to send daughters [to study] away from home,”<sup>47</sup> and Va-

46 Vojinović, “Ženski Pokret”, 114.

47 Beoković, *Žene heroji*, 183.

hida was forced to stay in Banja Luka, where she became strongly involved in local associations. Communist ideas probably entered the Maglajlić household through Ekrem, who studied at the University of Zagreb and was a supporter of the Communist Party. In a volume of memoirs dedicated to his older sister, Ekrem writes that he used to send her books, pamphlets and letters so that she could participate, as much as possible, in the political and intellectual climate of Zagreb.<sup>48</sup>

From her mother's, brother's and childhood friends' accounts, one gleans a picture of a life in which revolutionary ideas went hand in hand with small domestic revolutions, as well as arguments with her *kadija* father about clothing, lifestyle and taking charge of her own body and mobility. As her brother Ekrem recounts:

When in 1931 I returned to my parents' house after a particularly long time away, I immediately noticed that a revolution had taken place in relation to my family's lifestyle. As soon as I stepped inside I noticed that the table was laid with ceramic plates, one for each member of the family. I was astonished and asked myself what on earth could have persuaded my father to get rid of his beloved *sofra*. It was Vahida.<sup>49</sup>

A transformation of the public space was often accompanied by transformations in dress and in body culture more in general. As recalls again Vahida's brother, the veil question was at the very centre of conflicts between the girl and her father: "My father had been very tough on this—continues Ekrem Maglajlić—but in the end Vahida won." The question was not only whether she should veil herself or not, but how she should cut her hair and whether she should wear her clothes according to Western fashions:

I remember that at a certain point she decided to cut her hair: following her example, other friends and family members also cut theirs. For my father and grandmother this decision was a complete tragedy, particularly since other women in the family were following her example. Nobody was able to persuade her that cutting her hair was something of which she ought to be ashamed.<sup>50</sup>

48 Beoković, *Žene heroji*, 195–6.

49 Beoković, *Žene heroji*, 187.

50 Beoković, *Žene heroji*, 190.

This corpus of memories, that stressed so much the importance of generational factors in explaining the different attitudes toward these changes in personal and family life, also reveals unexpected solidarities between Muslim women of different generations. As stated later on by Vahida Maglajlić's brother:

To try and make her see sense, my mother and grandmother took her to visit aunt Ziza. She was the eldest woman in the family and well-respected and esteemed by the district as a whole. When she saw Vahida with her new haircut, Ziza turned to the two women who had accompanied her and said, "don't look at her like that. In our time we did what was right, today things have changed. Every era has its own style!"<sup>51</sup>

New forms of engagement in the public space were therefore associated with small revolutions in the private sphere, each mutually legitimizing and reinforcing the other.

#### BRINGING CLASS INTO THE WOMAN QUESTION

In these years of fervent left-wing activism in Bosnia and in the main university cities of the country, it is also possible to register the development of a new approach to the Muslim woman question. The melting-pot for this largely original approach to the issue was Zagreb, a city whose student population grew from 2,800 in 1920, to almost 7,000 on the eve of the Second World War, and where in the late 1930s there were almost sixty different student organizations and clubs.<sup>52</sup> In female student associations, readings of the evergreens of socialist feminism like Zetkin and August Bebel were alternated with more recent biographies of Soviet women, thus putting them on an equal footing with inspiring figures for the younger generations.<sup>53</sup> Immersed in these texts, students of both sexes were often fascinated by the women perceived to be the most backward and enslaved in the country: Muslim women. Vera Erlich for instance, at that time teaching anthropology and psychology at the University of Zagreb, recalls how the issue of Muslim family relationships in rural areas, and more precisely of Muslim women, considered as "enslaved," was

<sup>51</sup> Beoković, *Žene heroji*, 190.

<sup>52</sup> Pavlaković, "Radicalization," 491.

<sup>53</sup> Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 349–53.

a topic that regularly haunted the conversations with her fellow-students.<sup>54</sup> In this city Muslim male students from Bosnia influenced by Marxism strove to create a new discourse on the Muslim woman question, taking in account not only gender and confessional variables, but also class. The journal that in this period gave the strongest contribution to the recharging of the Muslim woman question was, beyond any doubt, the magazine *Putokaz* (Signpost), published in Zagreb between 1937 and 1939.<sup>55</sup> The journal was established by left-wing Bosnian Muslim students who, from the publication's outset, claimed to belong to a "third generation"<sup>56</sup> of educated Muslims, in opposition to a first generation of the Habsburg period, and a second nationalist and bourgeois one active in the 1920s and early 1930s.

A first specific characteristic of this group is that they insisted a great deal on the importance of class variables in explaining the subaltern position of Muslim women in Yugoslavia. This idea modified the discourse on Muslim women developed until then, which so far had been implicitly limited to urban and middle-class populations, framing gender in a broader context. According to this group, women's oppression was universal, but the different social classes had to be taken into account with it: "women's slavery is not the same across all classes; the level of slavery changes according to class."<sup>57</sup> This group looked favorably, and with some curiosity, upon the Soviet gender policies being implemented in Central Asia, a region predominantly inhabited by Muslims.<sup>58</sup> In any case, sympathy for the Soviet world and for left-wing solutions for the emancipation of Muslim women did not prevent this group from expressing admiration—again—for Kemalist gender politics, and from celebrating the "development of the Turkish woman" in every domain of public life.<sup>59</sup>

54 Erlich, *Family in Transition*, v.

55 Šaćir Filandra, "Putokaz i nacionalnost bošnjaka," *Diwan*, no. 23–24 (2007): 185–9; Muhamed Filipović, "Putokaz u historiji naše kulture i politike," *Diwan*, no. 23–24 (2007): 176–84; Edhem Muftić, "Putokaz: socijalno nacionalne tendencije," *Diwan*, no. 23–24 (2007): 196, 205; Ismet Smailović, "Još nešto o časopisu Putokaz i njegovu uredniku Hasanu Kikiću," *Diwan*, no. 23–24 (2007): 170–3. Edhem Muftić, *Bošnjačka ljevica* (Sarajevo: DES, 2002).

56 Rizo Ramić, "Tri generacije književnika muslimana," *Putokaz*, no. 1 (1937): 17\*. The page numbers for the *Putokaz* articles marked with a star (\*) are not the original ones, but the those found in the reprint; Muhidin Džanko and Esed Karić, *Putokaz, književnohistorijska monografija* (Gradačac: Biblioteka Alija Isaković, 2006).

57 Mustafa Orlanović [pseud. for Benjović], "Položaj muslimanke u Bosni," *Putokaz*, 6 (1938): 197\*.

58 Fanina Halle, "Muslimanke dalekog istoka bude se...", *Putokaz*, no. 6 (1938): 213–5\*.

59 Sabiha Zekerija, "Pogled na razvoj turske žene," *Putokaz*, no. 2 (1937): 57–62\*.



As one *Putokaz* article from 1938 put it, responsibility for the subordination (*podređenost*) of Muslim women should be assigned not to Islam in itself, nor to men's patriarchal attitudes, but to a specific group defined in the text as the feudal class, i.e. the Muslim landowning families (*begovat*). According to the author, the Ottoman ruling families, in order to protect their family fortune and mark their social difference from field labourers, created a set of new gender roles upon which they built their own political hegemony. They "invented a closed family model and, in a bid to implement it, imposed restrictions on what women should wear and deprived women of their most basic rights in matrimony."<sup>60</sup> In order to reinforce their dominant status in Ottoman society, they "created new rules, which however went against religion, and suited them better,"<sup>61</sup> including introducing compulsory veiling for women. Interestingly enough, the *Putokaz* circle seems here to recall the Islamic progressive argument that saw the veil as a non-religious garment (see Chapter Four).

*Putokaz's* contributors seem to have acknowledged that 1878 was a year of crucial change for the Bosnian social order. Nevertheless, the arrival of the Habsburgs is not analysed in cultural terms as some kind of "new era" announcing a Muslim intellectual renaissance, but as the arrival in Bosnia of capitalism. As stated in the same article:

capitalism does not care about gender [*spol*], it does not care about age. It cares for more profit and it has no compassion for anyone or anything... [it] drags women and children into the production process, a cheaper work-force than men... [it] brings an end to the tradition of Muslim women having a strong connection with their families.<sup>62</sup>

Under the capitalist system, traditional sexual and confessional segregation in Muslim urban society was fading away.

An unreserved contempt for urban upper- and middle-class women is expressed in the pages of *Putokaz*. As we read in the same article, Muslim women from the growing bourgeoisie "are human beings that do nothing, like

60 Mustafa Orlanović, "Položaj muslimanke u Bosni," 195\*.

61 Orlanović, "Položaj muslimanke u Bosni," 195\*.

62 Orlanović, "Položaj muslimanke u Bosni," 198\*.

a doll [*lutka*], a luxury object. They are parasites and even if they are educated they do not become productive members of human society.”<sup>63</sup> Here again, we can hear an echo of the omnipresent Orientalist arguments about Muslim women—passivity, luxury, being an object in men’s hands—although here the image is not applied to all Muslim women, but instead used to describe upper-class women as a way to discredit the Muslim economic elite.

The group’s interest was openly oriented instead toward Muslim women working in factories, where they “work alongside working-class women of other faiths, they collaborate together, they share their lives and their goals”<sup>64</sup> and especially Muslim peasant women. This shifting focus from the city to the countryside made *Putokaz*’s contributors highly attuned to the interplay between women’s and worker’s questions. The conditions of Muslim women field workers was particularly criticized. In a 1937 text, a female contributor to the journals offered a moving fictional portrait of Mejra, the ideal figure of the Muslim woman peasant, described as a:

poor and wretched twenty-year old woman; close [to where she reaps], under the walnut trees she can hear her child crying. A swarm of flies has covered the stooping body of this poor creature whose bitter destiny was decided the day she was born into a family of poor peasants. Oh, how much she would love to pick up her child and feed him. How happy she would be to throw away the sickle that has rubbed painful sores into her hands. She would do all this. If it wasn’t for wretched Mujaga, whose half-closed eyes persistently follow the reapers’ every move.

This short story sketches a poor Muslim woman who works in the countryside and who is distanced from maternal care due to her hard job. Her overseer is described as “once very rich,” now working for others—an example of the economic decadence and marginalization that the Muslim elite saw in post-Ottoman times.

“Look at how we are forced to live,” thinks Mejra. “We country women have to work in the fields and at home, in the winter we weave all day until late at

63 Orlanović, “Položaj muslimanke u Bosni,” 201\*.

64 Orlanović, “Položaj muslimanke u Bosni,” 198\*.

night, we have to feed and look after the children, while our husbands hardly recognize, hardly see what we bear, what we suffer!" This is what Mejra thinks and Mejra's life is the life of Muslim women living in the country... Our Muslim women are the worst sorts of slaves. They are enslaved in the fields, enslaved in the home and enslaved by their husbands.<sup>65</sup>

The specific feature of the Muslim woman question, developed by this group of university students, is tangible. Not only for the points raised above, but also for those that were neglected. Indeed, this group was less concerned with the veil question, and clearly considered it to be a marginal question. In February 1937 Safet Krupić, a philosophy student in Zagreb and a regular contributor to *Putokaz*, advised Muslim women not to get involved in "marginal and secondary issues like whether to wear a hat, a fez or the veil, when economic, social, political and educational issues were being ignored."<sup>66</sup> The strategy to improve these conditions and reach the final objective of "freedom of and total equality between the sexes [*sloboda i potpuna jednakost spolova*]"<sup>67</sup> was simple: "[Muslim women] must join the rest of the working world in its struggle and awaken an inner sense of class consciousness to tie together progress and freedom between the sexes and oppressive types of work."<sup>68</sup> In other words, Muslim women should put aside lesser issues such as clothing, and dedicate themselves to more social issues to address the larger priority of working toward the global struggle against capitalism.

### TRACING THE RIGHT PATH

As we have seen until now, in the second half of the 1930s the spread of left-wing ideas among the Muslim educated youth became a growing concern for the leaders of many associations: cultural, philanthropic and feminist alike. Nevertheless, middle- and upper-class secular Muslim notables were not the only ones to be alarmed by the resurfacing of communist sympathies among the Yugoslav youth. Many *ulema* in particular put themselves

65 Derviša Ljubović, "Život naše žene," *Putokaz*, no. 1 (1937): 49-50\*.

66 Safet Krupić, "Današnjica i mi," *Putokaz*, no. 1 (1937): 22\*.

67 Orlanović, "Položaj muslimanke," 201\*.

68 Orlanović, "Položaj muslimanke," 201\*.

at the forefront in opposing this process. This growing hostility toward communist ideas was, for religious leaders of conservative leanings, part of a larger source for discomfort: the worry that Yugoslav society was becoming increasingly secularized, especially in towns. Islamic learned men were not alone in feeling this. As Sandra Prlenda's research on Catholic organizations has shown, religious officials of all faiths shared the belief that rapid social change—education, media, urbanization, consumption practices—posed a threat to religious institutions “in their position as the supreme arbiter in society.”<sup>69</sup> If Catholic institutions were probably the most active in the interwar period in forging a militant Catholicism in contemporary Europe, other religious institutions did not remain passive. In the second half of the 1930s the *ulema* in Bosnia proved themselves capable of adopting new strategies in order to reaffirm their leading role in the Muslim community, and challenged more openly and with new tools progressive discourses and organizations.

In the late 1920s, something seems to have changed in the relationship between the *ulema* and the press. As seen in Chapter Four, until that time the interventions of conservative religious officials in journals were extremely rare: the press remained a domain firmly in progressive, and more broadly secular, hands. The debates sparked in 1928 by Čaušević's declarations provoked a major shift: the conservative Islamic scholars decided to play the game of the public debate, and after this point became visible in the Bosnian Muslim press, publishing a long list of articles, public statements, and pamphlets. Some of Čaušević's more conspicuous attackers decided in 1929 to establish the journal *Hikjmet* (Wisdom) in the Bosnian town of Tuzla, with the explicit purpose “of demonstrating... the wisdom and the positive features of the Islamic precepts and institutions.”<sup>70</sup> The journal was led by *muftija* aforementioned Ibrahim Hakki Čokić, who had received his education at a local *medresa* and at the Sarajevo School for Sharia Judges. Čokić had then gone on to complete his education in Arabic language and literature at the University of Vienna, before becoming a teacher of the same subjects in the high school of Tuzla. In its seven years of activity (1929–1936),

69 Sandra Prlenda, “Young, Religious, and Radical: The Croat Catholic Youth Organizations, 1922–1945,” in *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, eds. John R. Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 82.

70 Chamerani Posavina, “Pravac Hikjmeta,” *Hikjmet*, no. 1 (1347/1929): 3.

*Hikjmet* became the mouthpiece for those conservative *ulema* in Yugoslavia who openly rejected the Islamic modernist interpretation of the sources.<sup>71</sup>

In the second half of the 1930s, a group of Islamic scholars moved a step further and launched a new project: the establishment of a large-scale Muslim association led by religious officials. This new association, established in 1936 in Sarajevo, was called *El-Hidaje*—“Right Path” in Arabic.<sup>72</sup> The establishment of this organization brought about a significant shift within Bosnian associational culture. Until then, voluntary associations had been synonymous with the liberal and pro-Western elites eager to catch up with European modernity; with the establishment of *El-Hidaje*, the association was for the first time brought into the service of a different, diametrically opposite agenda, which aimed to bring Islam to the very center of society.<sup>73</sup> As it is possible to read in the pages of the association’s monthly journal, the eponymous *El-Hidaje*, the motivation that led to the establishment of the association was a clearly pessimistic perception of Muslim society at that time, and of its imminent future. As explained by one of the activists in 1938, “the lives of our peasants, merchants, artisans and workers are not even close to being in accordance with Islamic moral and religious prescriptions,”<sup>74</sup> and this lack of Islam affected both the public and private space. The association’s creation was seen as a solution to this state of affairs. As explained during the first assembly, the aim of the association was to “give Muslims a religious and moral lift,”<sup>75</sup> to strengthen Muslim economic solidarity, and to consolidate the economic means of the Islamic institutions. In a society perceived to be increasingly secular and open to ideas that were indifferent, or openly hostile, to religion, the association decided to take on an ambitious goal: “to strengthen the authority of the *ilmija* as the spiritual guides of Muslims”<sup>76</sup> and to reorganize the Muslim youth.

The establishment of this association in the second half of the 1930s is often explained as a consequence of the shifting balance of power within the Muslim community. The relaxing of the dictatorship that followed the as-

71 On the *Hikjmet* experiment, see Adnan Jahić, *Hikjmet: Riječ tradicionalne uleme u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Tuzla: BZK Preporod, Općinsko društvo Tuzla, 2004).

72 Mehmed Handžić, “El-Hidaje, analiza samog imena,” *El-Hidaje*, no. 5 (1937): 73.

73 On the relationship between religious officials and associations, Dautović, *Uloga El-Hidaje*, 12–18.

74 Kasim Dobrača, “Zadatak i svrha ‘El-Hidaje,’” *El-Hidaje*, no. 4 (1938): 52.

75 Dobrača, “Zadatak i svrha ‘El-Hidaje,’” 52.

76 “Društveni glasnik,” *El-Hidaje*, no. 1 (1936–1937): 15.

sassination of King Aleksandar in 1934, and the following return of parliamentary life, deeply modified the position of the JMO, which after several years of marginalization had regained importance in Yugoslav political life. After the 1935 election, Mehmed Spaho accepted to participate in the formation of a government with Stojadinović and Korošec, asking in exchange, among other things, for new regulations for the Islamic institutions of Yugoslavia. The new text, adopted in October 1936, reintroduced the elective principle for the leaders of the institutions, the seat of the *Reis-ul-ulema* was returned to Sarajevo and the charge of the *muftija* abolished. Moreover, the new regulations assigned a greater role to secular Muslims in the administration of the pious foundations, de facto reducing the role of the *ulema* in this domain. Moreover, the JMO managed to place its men in many key positions in the institution, de facto putting Islamic institutions under the control of the main Muslim political party. Spaho's biggest success nevertheless came two years later when he managed to have elected as new *Reis-ul-ulema* Fehim Spaho (1877–1942), a man with a limited religious education and who had the principal merit of being... Mehmed Spaho's brother.<sup>77</sup> With this context in mind, the establishment of *El-Hidaje* can be interpreted as a means for religious officials to protest against their marginalization in the decision-making processes of the Islamic institutions. In this respect, it is not astonishing that *El-Hidaje's* leaders repeatedly called for a revision of the 1936 regulation of the Islamic institutions, and expressed coldness, sometimes open hostility, toward Fehim Spaho.<sup>78</sup> As a delegitimizing act, the association refused to grant membership to their own *Reis-ul-ulema*, justifying this act by stating that, given his secular education, "it [was] not possible to affirm that he is a member of the *ilmijja*."<sup>79</sup>

At the same time, the establishment of this association can and must be understood on a different scale, as part of social and political changes happening in the Muslim world more in general. In order to grasp this second dimension of the establishment of *El-Hidaje*, it is important to take a look at its founders. In their biographies it seems possible to detect two different generations of Islamic learned men. First, there is an older one, composed of people born mostly in the 1880s, educated in Bosnian religious institu-

77 Jahić, *Islamska zajednica*, 521–47.

78 Dautović, *Uloga El-Hidaje*, 42–63.

79 Jahić, *Islamska zajednica*, 551.

tions and sometimes in Istanbul, and who at that time were already serving in important Islamic institutions: Muhamed Tufo (born 1885), professor at the Muslim Teachers' School of Sarajevo, Muhamed Mujagić (born 1876), sharia judge, Mustafa Mujezinović (born 1883), teacher at the Gazi-Husrevbeg *medresa* in Sarajevo, etc. The religious officials of this generation were also accompanied by men of a different generation, born in the early 1900s, often educated abroad; among the leaders of the association were Muhamed Fočak (1906), professor at the School for Sharia Judges and the Gazi-Husrevbeg *medresa*, or Mehmed Handžić (born 1906), librarian and *vaiz* (preacher) of the Careva mosque in Sarajevo. Handžić, who was probably the most active Islamic scholar of this constellation, and a very prolific author, began his career as an *El-Hidaje* activist; treasurer in 1936, between 1939 and 1943 he was elected president of the association, and was also the journal's editor-in-chief for many years.<sup>80</sup> A common trait in the trajectories of these men, and in many of the other founders of the association, was that they had studied at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, a city that, at that time, was a melting-pot for new conservative Muslim initiatives. It seems that the initial idea of establishing a Muslim conservative association was directly linked to this stint in the Egyptian city: Ali Aganović (born 1902), who graduated from Al-Azhar, and was one of the founders of *El-Hidaje*, seems to have attempted as early as 1927 to establish in Cairo two fairly unsuccessful associations for Bosnian Muslim students, one named *El-Hidaje* and another named *Mladi Muslimani* (Young Muslims—the name that during the Second World War was assumed by *El-Hidaje*'s youth branch).<sup>81</sup>

A privileged link with the Middle East was visible throughout the association's lifetime: the association's journal gave, for example, full coverage to initiatives of the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood, the organization established in 1928 in Egypt by the schoolteacher Hasan al-Banna who in those years became a global model of Muslim engagement. As highlighted by Moaddel Mansoor, Al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood proposed a new kind of Muslim activism "sharply defined in its opposition to liberal nationalism, Western capitalism, and international communism. A series of binaries defined its identity and distinguished [the Muslim Brotherhood] from

80 Dautović, *Uloga El-Hidaje*, 73–5. On Mehmed Handžić, see in particular Mehmed Handžić, *Izabrana djela*, 6 vols., ed. Esad Duraković (Sarajevo: Ogledalo, 1999).

81 Jusuf Ramić, *Bošnjaci na El-Azheru* (Sarajevo: Rijaset Islamske zajednice u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1997).

other movements: Islamic activism versus religious retreatism and apathy, Islamic unity versus political parties' disunity and factionalism, puritanism and modesty versus sexual laxity, gender segregation versus the mixing of sexes... spiritualism versus Western materialism."<sup>82</sup> Educated and socialized in the same city, the promoters of *El Hidaje* and of the Muslim Brotherhood shared the same vision of Islam as an all-encompassing religion.

The association—which, interestingly, in its internal structure mimicked the structure of the progressive association *Gajret*—was based around a central branch in Sarajevo, with local branches throughout the country.<sup>83</sup> Offering itself as a meeting-point between the Muslim population and the Islamic officials, *El-Hidaje* sought and succeeded in systematically building relationships with the numerous Muslim associations in existence. Even its relationship with journalism and public writing seems to have changed radically: as stressed by Article 3 of the association's statutes, one of the aims of the association was "to strive toward the public debate on Islamic-religious questions being conducted in an appropriate and suitable way as to these questions, exclusively involving people with far-reaching religious qualifications and solid expertise."<sup>84</sup> Interestingly enough, Handžić himself strove to demonstrate the Islamic legitimacy of printing a journal by the *ulema*, reasoning that "this method of explaining the faith has also been used by the same *Alejši-selam* [Muhammad], who wrote letters to foreign rulers inviting them to [convert to] Islam."<sup>85</sup> In accordance with its statutes, however, the association also decided to resort to a supplementary set of tools: sermons (*vaz*, or *hutba* in the case of Friday ones) held by qualified itinerant preachers sent by the association, but also public lectures, the organization of *mevluds*, etc.<sup>86</sup> All of these organizational means were openly put to the service of an ambitious project: as stated in the association's journal in 1938, "we have to become real Muslims [*moramo postati pravi muslimani*]. We have to cooperate with one another and always undertake every action together. Wrongdoers are those who put their own interests before the interests of the

82 Mansoor Moaddel, *Islamic Modernism, Nationalism and Fundamentalism: Episode and Discourse* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 198.

83 On the territorial organization of *El-Hidaje*, see in particular Dautović, *Uloga El-Hidaje*, 76–91.

84 *Pravila društva "El-Hidaje" Organizacija ilmijje Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Sarajevu* (Sarajevo: Štamparija Omer Šehić, 1936), 1–2.

85 Mehmed Handžić, "Uloga uleme u narodu," *El-Hidaje*, no. 2 (1937): 22.

86 Dautović, *Uloga El-Hidaje*, 103–4.



community [*zajednica*], and who sew discord in the community.”<sup>87</sup> In other words, in a period perceived to be one of open decadence and of the degradation of religion among the Muslim population, the association aimed to promote a re-Islamisation of the Muslim population of Yugoslavia.

### THE CORNERSTONE OF (RE-)ISLAMIZATION

Unsurprisingly, in this ambitious project of making Bosnian Muslims “real Muslims,” women were deemed to have a crucial role. Before analysing *El-Hidaje’s* gender agenda, it is worth saying few words about the transformation of gender norms in Muslim urban society in the 1930s. A text written by the aforementioned Maksim Svara—who was a fervent admirer of Mustafa Kemal’s reforms in Turkey—provides a useful opportunity for gaining a glimpse into these transformations. In addition, the rich photographic repertoire conserved in the Bosnian archives can help us to visualize what the Croatian journalist from Sarajevo had in mind.

In this 1932 text, entitled “The Emancipation of Muslim Woman,” Svara dedicated several pages to the ways in which, in the interwar years, Bosnian Muslim women had transformed their dress practices in urban spaces, in a period in which Bosnian towns were becoming increasingly mixed from a confessional point of view.<sup>88</sup> According to Svara, if you were to walk in the towns of Bosnia at that time, you would have encountered three kinds of Muslim women. The first to attract your attention would be those walking unveiled: “A fairly significant number of women and girls, coming almost exclusively from the more educated social circles, dress in a completely European way, stroll with their faces uncovered [*otkrivene*].” His endorsement of these women, who as seen in Chapter Five and Six found in associations one of the privileged spaces of expression, is unreserved: they “represent the vanguard of the new era, the guides of the Muslim religious community’s female half... It is beautiful that these women’s numbers are growing and that today a growing number of them go to school—and graduate from it.”<sup>89</sup>

87 Mustafa Busuladžić, “Društveni glasnik,” *El-Hidaje*, no. 4 (1938): 51.

88 Seka Brkljača, “Stanovnici gradova u Bosni i Hercegovini 1914-1941,” *Prilozi Instituta za istoriju* 35 (2006): 61-104.

89 Svara, *Emancipacija muslimanke*, 38.



Figure 37: Ifaket Salihagić with her sons Omer and Halil, Banja Luka, late 1930s.

Source: MRS, photography collection.

One of the most delightful examples of a woman from this group is probably a picture of Ifaket Salihagić, the wife of Suljaga Salihagić, an engineer and a well-known *Gajret* activist from Banja Luka.<sup>90</sup> In this picture, dating from the second half of the 1930s, and probably taken for private use, Ifaket poses in hunting dress, wearing “knickerbockers,” her curly hair showing beneath a cloth cap. Standing outdoors, she poses as a victorious hunter with her prey, a dead bear, at her feet. Motherhood is somehow still present: her sons, Omer and Halil crouch at her feet. However, she still presents herself here as a hunting mother, far from traditional representations of appropriate femininity.

If we return to Svara’s line of reasoning, after this first group of Muslim urban women, you would be likely to spot a second group on the urban

90 On Suljaga Salihagić, see Kemura, *Uloga Gajreta*, 75, 145, 200–3, 246, 378 and 388.

streets of Bosnia, one that still wore feminine Muslim garments. The author notes that the choice to maintain this kind of garment was not only linked to the conservatism of the women or their family, but also to class variables: traditional Muslim female clothing was particularly prevalent among the urban poor, who typically made these kinds of garments with poor materials, until the end of the Second World War (see Figure 38). Many pictures taken during the 1930s confirm Svava's observation. As it is possible to see by the pictures below representing the Sarajevo market, Muslim women covering their faces with the *peča* remained part of the Bosnian urban landscape throughout the interwar period. Among the numerous pictures of Bosnian urban spaces taken in the late 1930s, one is particularly striking: taken at the funeral of the former *Reis-ul-ulema* Mehmed Džemaluddin Čaušević in March 1938, the picture shows several rows of women poorly dressed, observing the passage of the coffin along the wall in the court of the Gazi-Husrevbeg mosque in Sarajevo, wearing the *peča*—the garment whose abolition the deceased *Reis-ul-ulema* tried to enforce in 1928 (see Figure 39).

The third category of woman that Svava identified in Bosnian urban spaces was one that chose an intermediate path between the two. As stated by the journalist:

today, there are not many Muslim women in the cities that observe the custom of veiling attentively. If someone does not believe this he should take a tour in the *čaršija*, and he will see that women, when they are about to buy things, raise the *peča*. There are none that do not do this, since none will take the risk of being cheated: something that could easily happen if women circulated at all times covered by the veil. Few women now cover [their faces] before their neighbors or friends, even though the list of people to whom they can show their faces is strictly defined. If they say the opposite, it is not true. I would like to make a public appeal: find at least one girl who, when her boyfriend comes to meet her under the window or in another place, goes out with the veil, even within the more conservative families. And while those without the veil have a job, go to school, dance at parties and more generally enjoy their youth like all other women in the world, those half-unveiled [*poluotkrivene*], whose husbands and parents cannot accept the present state of affairs, walk fully-dressed in European style, and wear a small hat on their heads to which is usually attached a veil that can be raised. In such a way, the



Figure 38. Muslim women doing shopping in Sarajevo's market, interwar period.

Source: ZM, photography collection, 23.



Figure 39: Mourners at Mehmed Džemaludin Čaušević's funeral in March 1938.

Source: Gazi husrefbeg library, photography collection.

women can, in the neighborhood [*mahala*] or in any other place, when she wants to look interesting or pious, let it fall over her face. This is the [third] kind of woman, the woman of transition [*prelazni*]. This kind [of woman]

especially loves short skirts: because, while it is “immoral” to show the face, it is moral to walk in incredibly short skirts.<sup>91</sup>

Svara’s words here are interesting for several reasons. First, they show that the dichotomy between “veiled” and “unveiled” women, and “modern” and “traditional” dress, was nothing but a male construct, and that in everyday practice, women were able to mix traditional and modern garments, combining them according to their age, class—and personal taste. As shown by several researchers, since the beginning of the twentieth century towns in the Yugoslav space were increasingly exposed to fashion trends from the two imperial centers, Istanbul and especially Vienna, and Muslim women of every social class were influenced by them.<sup>92</sup> The interwar period accentuated this same process, and a new set of fashion newspapers, mostly published in Zagreb and Belgrade, began to circulate in Yugoslav towns, influencing the tastes of Yugoslav citizens and tailor shops all over the country.<sup>93</sup> Pictures from that period taken in different Bosnian towns, especially those taken in Sarajevo, show how Muslim women mixed styles, accessories and materials, combining veils, bags and sandals in very original ways. Svara’s reference to the hat, a fashionable garment that could cover both the head and even the face when a black reversible foulard was added to it, represents the best example of this hybridity between a (supposedly) “traditional” and (supposedly) “modern” way of dressing.<sup>94</sup> Here again, pictures of that time give us many examples of the variety of ways in which Muslim women dressed up and dealt with the veil. Women produced hybrid dress styles, depending on their means and personal taste, and negotiated their dress styles with family, neighborhood, and national and transnational trends.

A final, important feature that emerges in Svara’s text are the performative and relational features of the veiling practice. The moments in which Muslim women chose to use the veil depended on context—be it in the res-

91 Svara, *Emancipacija muslimanke*, 39.

92 On the evolution of dress styles in Zagreb and Belgrade across the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, see in particular Mirjana Prošić-Dvornić, *Odevanje u Beogradu u XIX i početkom XX veka* (Belgrade: Stubovi kulture, 2006) and Katarina Nina Simončić, *Kultura odijevanja u Zagrebu na prijelazu iz 19. u 20. stoljeće* (Zagreb: Plejada, 2012).

93 Marina Vujnović, *Forging the Bubikopf Nation: Journalism, Gender and Modernity in Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 29–68.

94 On hybridity between “traditional” and “modern”, see also Zorislava Čulić, *Narodne nošnje u Bosni i Hercegovini*, (Sarajevo: Zemaljski muzej, 1963).



Figure 40, 41, 42: Muslim women from Sarajevo, 1930s.  
Source: HAS, photography collection.

idential quarter, the *mahala*, or the city market, the *čaršija*—and their activities—buying something, strolling, meeting with friends, going to the cinema—and the people they met—a shopkeeper or a relative, a Muslim or a non-Muslim, a boyfriend or a father. Muslim women thus clearly showed themselves to be capable of playing with the veil, negotiating its use (or non-use) with their environment.

It was precisely against this variety of ways of wearing the headscarf and the face veil that the men around *El-Hidaje* launched their attack in the second half of the 1930s. Women's laxity in wearing these garments became an object of constant criticism from the Islamic learned men in the press, which they assimilated with a violation of sharia. As stated in an article in the association's journal, abandoning the practice of completely covering the body should to be considered a true "profanation" (*profanisanje*) of Islam:

Today we are witness to the conscious and unconscious profanation of the *zar* and the *peča*. While some of our mothers, wives, sisters and daughters continue to wear this wonderful piece of Islamic clothing, others have shamed it. *Zar* are stitched in such a way as to leave half the face, neck and chest uncovered... *Zar* and *peča* are stitched in such a way that when the *peča* is lifted, it would be impossible to tell Hanka apart from Anka. Some women, on the other hand, wear the *zar* without the *peča*. I also know that prostitutes sometimes wear the *zar*, as it seems a most useful thing for them. Most of all, I ask myself why nobody revolts against all this, why nobody protests. A great ill roams among us!<sup>95</sup>

These lines represent a vehement act of protest against the abandonment, but also the relaxation, and even the misuse, of the female veil. And the consequences of this process were clear: "it is not possible to tell who is Hanka [a Muslim female name] and who is Anka [a Christian female name]" i.e., to distinguish a Muslim woman from a non-Muslim woman. The protest here is against the invisibilization of religious belonging, the "incorporation" of Muslims into the Yugoslav population, and a consequent reduction of the faith to a private issue, invisible to the public space. This invisibilization of the Muslim religious specificity, this dilution of the Muslim element into

95 Muhamed Sadik, "Profanisanje zara i peče," *El-Hidaje*, no. 2 (1938): 44–5.

the broader community seems to have been the principal preoccupation of the *ilmijja* gathered around *El-Hidaje*.

When it comes to men—*ulema*, fathers, husbands—as the guardians of female morality, the article focusses mostly on the Muslim men who had ceased to preserve Islamic institutions. The targets here are the secular and religious intellectuals who, in deference to progress, have allowed their women to use gendered customs that enter into conflict with religious principles. The author continues:

Even those who should not, given their religious education and influence on others, have started to do it. Not long ago I met an old *hafiz* with his family sitting around a table in the middle of a pastry shop. The *hafiz* was wearing the *fez*, his wife was wearing the *zar* with the *peča* lifted and a cigarette in her mouth, and his daughter-in-law wore no *zar* at all! From what we can gather, this *hafiz* respects Islamic precepts, but does not like the prescriptions that order women to wear the veil and which prohibit them from taking walks. Evidently he likes walking... If a woman wants to wear the *zar* and the *peča*, then she must wear it properly and not go out walking or stand in front of a coffee shop; if, however, the *zar* and the *peča* bother a woman, then she had better take them off completely. It is better that way, rather than watching the profanation of that wonderful symbol of Islamic purity.<sup>96</sup>

The right path outlined here thus proposed to draw a clear line between Muslims and non-Muslims, and to reinforce the visible markers of the Muslim community.

#### TOWARD A RESEGREGATION OF YUGOSLAV SOCIETY

With this discourse in mind, it seems worth asking what kind of gendered division of associational labour these men aspired toward. According the statutes of *El-Hidaje*, membership was open to both “Muslim men and women who are citizens of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia”; all members had to conform “to Islamic *adab* [etiquette] and to behave, everywhere and anywhere, in an immaculate way, as exemplified by the sainted class of the

<sup>96</sup> Sadik, “Profanisanje zara i peče,” 45.



*ilmijja*.<sup>97</sup> Because the registers, and indeed all archival material for this association, is missing, it is very difficult to know whether, in the association's lifetime, any of its 2000 to 2500 members were women.<sup>98</sup> From what can be gathered from its journal, Muslim women were not regularly involved in the association as members. Nevertheless, women were regularly included through several of the association's initiatives especially devoted to them, such as female *mevluds* or lectures. In some cases, the students of the female *medresa* of Sarajevo, established in 1933, took part in these initiatives.<sup>99</sup> Otherwise, it seems that women did not have any decision-making roles in the association, which remained firmly in the hands of male religious officials.

One of the first actions of the association was to condemn the forms of sociability that, since the end of the Great War, had been gradually putting Muslim women in contact with non-Muslims and with men. Unsurprisingly, they regularly attacked the practice that in the interwar period had become the most popular tool of the association: the *zabava*. Mehmed Handžić, the president of *El-Hidaje*, protested virulently and regularly against the spread of these events among the Muslim population. As he said in his letters to Muslim associations in the spring of 1940, the associations' need to augment their revenues should never excuse initiatives that were in contrast with Islamic precepts:

parties are a tool through which large amounts of money depart from Muslim hands; only some, and to tell the truth, a minority of this money, goes back into Muslim society [*muslimansko društvo*]. The majority lands in the pockets of traders, most of whom are non-Muslims, or is spent on luxury goods of which—given our current economic situation—we should be cautious. At parties, men and women mix in a very sensitive way, and from this mixing could spring bad consequences.<sup>100</sup>

97 *Pravila društva "El-Hidaje"*, art. 40 and 16, p. 6.

98 Dautović, *Uloga El-Hidaje*, 94–5.

99 Nermina Jašarević, "Gazi husrev-begova ženska medresa u Sarajevu," *Anali Gazi Husrev-begove biblioteke*, 6, no. 9–10 (1983): 281–9 and Kasim Hadžić, "Pedesetogodišnjica prve mature u ženskoj medresi u Sarajevu (1938–88)," *Anali Gazi Husrev-begove biblioteke* 51, no. 5 (1988): 584–7.

100 HAS, NU14, 554, Mehmed Handžić to GONU (May 20, 1940).

In this rejection of modern festive culture, two interesting points are helpful in informing us about the association's project. First of all, the rejection of sexual and confessional desegregation, a point that has already been discussed in Chapter Six. Moreover, Handžić stresses here that parties meant a transfer of Muslim economic resources beyond the Muslim population, and that this was a negative outcome. Clearly, from these lines we can conclude that the Muslim community is the only collective intent that deserves to be stressed and enforced, while any form of national solidarity—Serbian, Croatian, Yugoslav—is completely absent.

*El-Hidaje*, however, did not simply limit itself to fighting the popularity of non-Islamic social events whose *raison d'être* was the desegregation of the Muslim population. In its almost ten years of activity, the association's central and local branches implemented a set of practices that were labelled as truly Islamic. The rightfulness of these practices was primarily dictated by their calendar: while associations like *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica* adopted mixed calendars for their activities, i.e. the Islamic calendar and the national and/or state calendar (see Chapter Six), *El-Hidaje's* activities were uniquely elaborated around the religious calendar. The month of Ramadan, *bajram*, the Islamic New Year's Eve thus became core periods of activity, in order to bring back an Islamic temporality among Muslims.<sup>101</sup> In this purely Islamic calendar, the date that became the most important day for this association was the seventeenth night of Ramadan, the *Lejletul Bedr*, or the Badr Battle. That night Muslims celebrated a key battle in the early days of Islam and a turning-point in Muhammad's struggle with his opponents among the Quraysh in Mecca. The celebration of this military victory was an opportunity for local branches of the association to organize *mevluds* and/or public lectures or sermons.

This special calendar of activities also required different spaces of sociability. While Muslim cultural associations chose fancy, non-Muslim venues such a theaters, cinemas, and ballrooms, *El-Hidaje* put a different kind of space at the center of its activities, in particular the headquarters of the Muslim philanthropic associations,<sup>102</sup> but especially the mosque. Of course, the choice of venue helped to reinforce the sexual and confessional segregation

101 Dautović, *Uloga El-Hidaje*, 77.

102 Dautović, *Uloga El-Hidaje*, 105.

that the association wished to foster. For example, in the town of Goražde, the local branch of the association organized in 1937 a *ramazanski vaz* for women on the Tuesday in the Sinan-beg mosque, and for men on the Friday and Sunday in the Džafer-beg mosque. The same went for the Banja Luka branch, which for the seventeenth night of Ramadan organized two lessons, the first for men and the second for women.<sup>103</sup> In an increasingly secularized Yugoslav society, the activists of *El-Hidaje* strove to put the mosque back at the center of Muslim social life, and to bring women back within the perimeter of the religious community.

### YOUNG, MUSLIM, AND RADICAL

As already stated, *El-Hidaje's* leaders openly took on the challenge of the public sphere and decided to contest the progressives' hegemony in the domain of the press. *El-Hidaje's* journal had a double aim: "to spread the ideas of the association in the propagandistic and moral-religious direction, and to be the house organ of the *Ilmija* professional organization."<sup>104</sup> The journal had a fairly good circulation. In 1937, it had a print run of around 2000, and by 1939 the journal was read by around 1000 subscribers.<sup>105</sup> One of the journal's principal aims was to oppose the idea, widely broadcast by the progressive press (see Chapter Four), that the woman question was not a social but a religious question, and thus that other people besides Islamic learned men—that is, secular Muslims—could legitimately contribute to the debate in this domain.<sup>106</sup> However, beyond this defensive action, the journal also proposed new models of appropriate Muslim femininity.

The skills of *El-Hidaje's* activists in Arabic allowed them to read, and translate journals from the Muslim world. As several publications have shown, Bosnian Islamic scholars, even after the Habsburg conquest, did not cease to read journals and texts from other regions of the Muslim world.<sup>107</sup>

103 "Svim društvenim jednicama 'El-Hidaje'," *El-Hidaje*, no. 3 (1937): 57.

104 "Društveni glasnik," *El-Hidaje*, no. 1 (1936–37): 15.

105 Dautović, *Uloga El-Hidaje*, 114–6.

106 For an overview of the publishing activities of *El-Hidaje*, and the contents of its publications, see Osman Lavić, *Bibliografija časopisa El-Hidaje i Islamska misao* (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 2001), 7–67 and Dautović, *Uloga El-Hidaje*, 113–45.

107 Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain, "Muslim Networks in Christian Lands," in *Islam in Interwar Europe* eds., Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain (London: Hurst & Company, 2008), 22–30.

The association's journal translated several articles by a certain Aziza Abbas Usfur, contributor to many Egyptian magazines, in particular *El-Feth*.<sup>108</sup> Her texts seem to have been so well-appreciated by *El-Hidaje's* Banja Luka branch, that it decided in 1937 to print one of her articles in a brochure—the first of a long series published by the association.<sup>109</sup> Despite the very sparse information we have on Aziza, we know she was Egyptian, a law student from Cairo University. In her 1937 text, the author—who ironically admits to having been called in Egypt “the girls’ enemy”—intervenes on difficulties in marriages and makes a strong statement: “women are responsible for the crisis of marriage.”<sup>110</sup> Her line of reasoning deserves attention:

Girls have changed their lifestyles and taken a road that is not theirs. In consequence, men have lost faith in them and have started to doubt their purity [čistoća] and innocence [nevinost]. Girls have let go of the way they previously lived their lives and have taken their freedom too far. They have forgotten their country's traditions and abandoned their faith. The girl has left her home, she has stamped on her honour, destroyed herself and lost her reputation [ugled]. They have therefore committed an injustice to themselves, to their family, to their country and to their husbands. So they have been punished, because what is not right must be punished.<sup>111</sup>

According to the author, when women lived a traditional lifestyle in the home, marital crises were practically non-existent. Nowadays, however, women “walk around half-naked, flaunting their feelings and saying to men: are there any suitors, are there any friends?”<sup>112</sup> Aziza provides here a direct criticism of the idea of marriage that had been imported from Western Europe—a monogamous marriage, based on romantic love, chosen more and more autonomously by the two partners involved:

you will certainly agree with me that “women are to blame”... Before, these poor creatures [bijednica] were happy at home, satisfied with themselves and

108 According to the information we have from *El-Hidaje*, the articles were published in *El-Feth* 549 and 654.

109 Aziza Abbas Usfur, *Djevojka je glavni uzrok ženidbenoj krizi* (translated by Muhamed ef. Pašić), printed in 1937 by the association's local branch in Banja Luka. See Dautović, *Uloga El-Hidaje*, 133–4.

110 Aziza Abbas Usfur, “Djevojka je glavni uzrok ženidbenoj krizi,” *El-Hidaje*, no. 7–8 (1937): 127.

111 Usfur, “Djevojka je glavni uzrok,” 127.

112 Usfur, “Djevojka je glavni uzrok,” 127.

with their lives. They were happy to pray to God and love their children and they considered it the greatest honour to submit to their fathers and obey their husbands. They loved their husband because he was theirs and they loved their children because they were theirs. They therefore considered marriage to be the foundation of love and not love to be the foundation of marriage.<sup>113</sup>

*El-Hidaje* paints a portrait here for its readers of a woman rejecting the ideal of Western romantic love, and (re)inverting the relationship between love and marriage. Aziza Abbas nevertheless does not stop here. In the same text, she addresses one of the issues that had gone uncontested among the new generation in Bosnian educated circles: the right for women to choose their life partners themselves, instead of that choice being dictated by their families. As Aziza continues:

By working for their independence [*samostalnost*] and for increased freedom, women have started to believe they have the right to choose the man they think is right for them, but they end up choosing a worse husband than their parents would have chosen. Women think that love is the foundation for marriage and so they start to look incessantly at men's faces until they no longer feel the need to get married.<sup>114</sup>

Aziza's texts were also used by the activists of *El-Hidaje* to challenge one of the very goals of interwar progressives, i.e. to legitimise and foster access for women to higher, and in particular university education. In the same article, Aziza uses vehement language to denounce the intrusion of women into what she calls the "male sciences" (*nauke muškaraca*), an expression that in fact refers to all of the formal disciplines with the exception of pedagogical sciences. The entry of girl students into these faculties had a major consequence: it put women "in competition with men [*takmičenje sa muškarcem*],"<sup>115</sup> in this way engendering deep and long-lasting tensions, visible from a smaller scale (the family) to the broader one (society) between the two sexes. Women who chose to receive a higher education in disciplines not directly connected to her primary function, motherhood, "become a

113 Usfur, "Djevojka je glavni uzrok," 127.

114 Usfur, "Djevojka je glavni uzrok," 127.

115 Usfur, "Djevojka je glavni uzrok," 127.

danger to their husbands”<sup>116</sup> and more broadly, to the entirety of God’s order. What is interesting here is that these words come from a young female university student, who studies Law, and who has not hesitated to enter into the public sphere herself.

The association’s journal also published a second text by Aziza, a public letter that had been printed in *El-Fetah* (Victory) that same year and was addressed directly to no less than the rector of Al-Azhar University, the most prestigious forum for the education of the *ulema* in Egypt. The letter is written from Port Said, a city that lies in north-eastern Egypt on the Mediterranean coast, established in 1859 during the construction of the Suez Canal. Due to its strategic position, this city had become one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world, where many non-Muslims and Westerners settled and did commerce, lived and introduced their own social practices. In Aziza’s words, this place recalled a theme that was important to the Bosnian *ulema*; the *miješanje*, or “mixing,” of men and women, and its terrible consequences. She also criticized the tourist culture, and the relaxation of Islamic customs due to an osmosis between Muslim and non-Muslim social practices, as well as places of new sociability in this colonial place—“coffee houses, clubs, restaurants, cinemas, dance halls, where they [men and women] sing their shameless songs and dance their nauseating dances in shameless groups.”<sup>117</sup> In these places Muslim women sat in restaurants, or on beaches, “in the company of young men and people without any difference of nationality, class or religion, so that—Sir, *alim*—with your daughters sit the non-Muslims.”<sup>118</sup> Again, we see here the resurfacing of an old adage: the penetration of Western practices, provoking a pernicious desegregation, multiple in nature: sexual, confessional, class, mixing up everything, invisibilising boundaries. The very end of the text announces the saviours who could repair this state of affairs:

I walked along... the beach and I saw such a show that virtue became sick, and faith lifted its hands and screamed: “help me, help me you sitting on the chairs from where you should protect me, you who are responsible for my defence!

116 Usfur, “Djevojka je glavni uzrok,” 127.

117 Aziza Abbas Usfur, “Miješanje muškaraca i žena sa svojim najgornim pojavama. Otvoreno pismo gospodinu rektoru El-Azhera sa obala Portsaida,” *El-Hidaje*, no. 11 (1937): 170.

118 Usfur, “Miješanje muškaraca,” 170.

Help me, *ilmija!* Why do you remain sleeping, while the daughters and wives of your people do such things that destroy the wall [*zid*] that you have built to protect them, and whose destruction will bring you so much evil?"<sup>119</sup>

Religious officials are presented here as being capable of bringing back segregation in Muslim society, and restoring the wall separating men from women, Muslims from non-Muslims.

### REINFORCING THE BORDERS OF THE COMMUNITY

The article cited above, with this reference to walls, brings us to the very core of *El-Hidaje's* political proposal. In other words: what kind of community did they aspire toward? What kind of social bond did they hope to foster? In the texts published by this group of Islamic learned men, several keywords seem to have been borrowed from the nationalist rhetorical repertoire: the need to build a "fraternal tie"<sup>120</sup> (*bratska veza*), or to awaken "consciousness"<sup>121</sup> (*svijest*) among Muslims, while the association *El-Hidaje* is openly qualified as the "matrix"<sup>122</sup> (*matica*) for building and fostering this goal. However, this first impression is misleading. In *El-Hidaje's* discourse there is simply no place for nationalism, neither Croatian, Serbian, nor Yugoslav. The dominant, and mostly unique, dimension that can be detected in the public discourse of this circle of religious leaders is instead a religious one. Even a quick glance through the pages of the journal of the association makes it very clear that Islam is the only legitimate social tie mentioned; the *umma*, both in its global (the community of believers beyond time and space) and the local (Muslims of Bosnia and Yugoslavia) declinations are described as the only ground upon which a sense of collective belonging and action should be built.

This drive to consider the religious as the only meaningful collective bond was not only visible in the association's public discourse, but also in concrete initiatives taken in the late 1930s, in particular in the domain of marriage, and more precisely interfaith marriages—called *mješoviti brakovi*, "mixed mar-

119 Usfur, "Miješanje muškaraca," 169.

120 "Društveni glasnik," *El-Hidaje*, no. 6 (1937): 90.

121 "Društveni glasnik," *El-Hidaje*, no. 4–5 (1943): 151.

122 "Društveni glasnik," *El-Hidaje*, no. 1 (1941): 27.

riages,” in the press. According to Hanafi law, the juridical school officially in use in Bosnia since Ottoman times, this kind of union was scrupulously regulated and admitted only in one case: when a Muslim man married a non-Muslim woman, and when the spouses agreed to raise their children according to Islam. As highlighted by Adnan Jahić, mixed marriages of this kind remained extremely rare in Bosnia and Herzegovina, confined almost exclusively to the educated upper class. Despite their limited number—in 1937, it seems there were no more than 800 interfaith marriages involving Muslims in the entire province<sup>123</sup>—the choices that led to these unions had the power to excite debate and reprobation in the population and sometimes in the press. Almost absent from the public debate in the 1920s (the 1928 text by Hasnija Berberović mentioned in Chapter Four being an interesting exception), interfaith marriages became in the 1930s a recurring controversial topic. The activists of *El-Hidaje* were at the forefront in leading the charge, multiplying in the pages of their organ attacks against this behaviour.

A long article by Mehmed Ali Ćerimović (1872–1943),<sup>124</sup> a judge of Islamic law, published in *El-Hidaje* in 1937, gives a clear idea of the arguments opposing to this kind of behaviour. According to the author, mixed marriages had remained very rare in the Habsburg period, gradually becoming a social phenomenon only after 1918. The secularisation of Yugoslav society, and in particular the decreasing weight of religion in orienting individual and collective choices was considered to be the main reason for the normalization of this problematic practice. As Ćerimović stated with open regret, “we are now gradually getting used to the idea, as if in Islam marriage between a Muslim and a non-Muslim was an uncomplicated issue.”<sup>125</sup> Insofar as “the subject has not been discussed enough, particularly with regards to the damage it does to families and the Islamic community,” his first goal was to open the discussion among the Islamic scholars and to push religious institutions to take concrete measures: “what would happen,” he asked with concern, “if Muslim families broke away from the Islamic community?”<sup>126</sup> Incidentally, launching the debate on interfaith marriages provided the author with the opportunity to underline two additional points; first, the prox-

123 Jahić, *Muslimansko žensko pitanje*, 376. On the same topic, see also Karčić, *Šerijatski sudovi*, 137.

124 Alija Nametak, “Merhum Mehmed Ali ef. Ćerimović,” *Kalendar “Narodna Uzdanica”* (1943): 171–172.

125 Mehmed Ali Ćerimović, “Mješoviti brak,” *El-Hidaje*, no. 3 (1937): 33.

126 Ćerimović, “Mješoviti brak,” 33.



imity of *El-Hidaje* to the Muslim population, ready to support the popular strata's disdain for this kind of behaviour, in contrast with educated circles; second, the exclusive competence of the *ulema* to discuss and decide upon these issues. The participation of secular intellectuals was thus firmly excluded from the outset.

For Ćerimović, and for the other men gathered around *El-Hidaje* more generally, campaigning for the total ban of interfaith marriages was not self-evident. For a circle who was very suspicious of innovation, introducing changes in the rules codified in the first centuries of Islam demanded cautious justification. After introducing marriage as “a contract between a man and a woman agreed in accordance with Islamic laws with the intention of living a shared life,”<sup>127</sup> the author listed eight aims for marriage:

- 1) To procreate until the end of time. If Muslims procreate more than others the community will be strengthened and therefore be able to protect its members' happiness [*blagostanje*] and cultural, economic and social progress.
- 2) To maintain morals and fight against immorality. No evolved society can exist without morals.
- 3) To protect descendance, because it is imperative to be clear about the paternity of a child.
- 4) To protect inheritance, as it is imperative to know who owns what and who has the right to inherit.
- 5) To bring up children in the Islamic faith and according to Islamic morals.
- 6) To keep children and a wife, as it is imperative to know whose duty it is.
- 7) It is imperative to know whose duty the *mehr* [dowry] is.
- 8) It is imperative to know the degree of kinship of the man and woman entering into marriage.

This definition of marriage was seen as the basis for a stable society: it moralized individuals and their sexual lives, it provides rules for inheritance and paternity, it fixed different duties and the rights connected to them. As we can read in the first point, this institution also brought about “progress” (*napredak*) for the community—a community that is essentially a Muslim

<sup>127</sup> Ćerimović, “Mješoviti brak,” 33.

one. With this definition in mind, Ćerimović stresses, a marriage between Muslim spouses was of course the best configuration.

But on what ground was it possible to delegitimise interfaith marriage, and with it centuries of well-established Hanafi jurisprudence? The core of Ćerimović's arguments centres around the current position of Bosnian Muslims as a religious minority in an overwhelmingly European and Christian state. As the author recalls, in the lifetime of the founder of the Hanafi juridical school, in the eighth century, Islam was a victorious and expanding polity; the idea of Muslims living permanently as a religious minority outside of *Dar al-Islam* (the House of Islam, denoting regions where Islamic law prevails) was considered unlikely. The first half of the twentieth century offered a very different and despairing picture: the vast majority of Muslim peoples were under the yoke of European colonialism, and in Southeastern Europe Muslim minorities ran the constant risk of being assimilated into the non-Muslim majority. As the author continued, "they [the Islamic scholars] could not have foreseen that mixed marriages would put the Islamic family [*islamska obitelj*], and particularly children, the main aim of and most precious treasure to come out of marriage, in danger."<sup>128</sup> In such unfavourable political and demographic circumstances, Bosnian Muslims should do their utmost to ensure that no member of the Muslim community turn his or her back on Islam, or that any alien presence, i.e. a non-Muslim woman, enter the sacred perimeter of the family and endanger it. For Ćerimović, the Muslim family:

absolutely must not be lost; the Islamic institution's concern in this regard is absolutely understandable. We know that a Muslim man, and especially a family, should not and cannot be allowed to break away from their milieu of origin [*sredina*]. Islam does not force anyone to accept it: as it says in the Quran, "forced conversion is not permitted" (*surah El Bekare*, 257). But if one is already a Muslim, then Islam does not permit one to break away from the faith in any way.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Ćerimović, "Mješoviti brak," 33.

<sup>129</sup> Ćerimović, "Mješoviti brak," 37.

According to the Islamic learned men gathered around *El-Hidaje*, not only should Muslim women be considered the very touchstone of the family and the community, but they were also pivotal to the successful re-Islamisation of a Muslim population who has lost its compass. No matter the reasons and feelings that might push two Yugoslav citizens of different faiths to establish a family: new rules in the domain of Islamic family law had to be discussed and introduced, in order to prevent a non-Muslim woman from undermining Muslim families and the border between Muslims and non-Muslims in Yugoslavia.

In the following years, *El-Hidaje* activists continued to publish articles of this kind and to spread their ideas among Bosnian Muslim religious officials, proposing a complete ban on mixed marriages, or at least that they only be exceptionally allowed after close monitoring by the Islamic authorities. A few months after the publication of Ćerimović's article, the campaign among Muslim religious officials bore tangible fruit: on December 21, 1938 the *Reis-ul-ulema* and the supreme council of the Islamic Community of Yugoslavia officially banned any form of interfaith marriage involving Muslims, thus introducing a significant innovation into the Islamic law of the country.<sup>130</sup> Even if in the following months the ban was softened, the adoption of this rule represented a sound victory for the men gathered around *El-Hidaje*, who managed to transform their vision of a Muslim community under siege, at risk of losing its authenticity, into a legally binding regulation.

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Two brand new phenomena shaping Muslim society come to the fore when we look at Bosnian associational culture in the second half of the 1930s; first of all, the growing success of communist ideas and organizations among the youth, especially those who received a secondary or university education. Secondly, the rise of an Islamic revivalism that aimed to counter the progressive secularization visible in Bosnian and Yugoslav society, by reinstating the representatives of the ulemas in their dominant position in the Islamic institutions. Both communist and revivalist groups injected fresh ideas into the debate on the Muslim woman question, and introduced new social practices. At the crossroads between changes happening both in Europe and the Mid-

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130 Jahić, *Islamska zajednica*, 600–3.

dle East, the Muslim population adopted in this period new political opinions that expressed radically different ideas of modernity.

The visibility of both communists and Muslim revivalists is of interest to us for at least three reasons. First, because despite their conflicting political projects, they both saw in the Muslim woman question, and more broadly the issue of gender relations, the potential to realize their respective political projects. Thanks to the associational structures that they created, or to those they were able to bring under their control, these forces promoted new forms of (in)visibility and (non-)involvement for Muslim women, both in associational life and in the Yugoslav public space more in general. The communists put class at the center of their critique of society and their project for social change, judging the political project of the Muslim progressives leading the cultural associations to be ineffective and moderate. The revivalists grouped around *El-Hidaje* put Islam at the very center of their analysis and action, launching a project for the (re)Islamisation of Muslim society and reframing religion as the only legitimate factor upon which the political community should be built. Second, especially when we analyze the spread of communist ideas among voluntary associations, we see a changing participation in public life by Muslim women, as shown in particular by the case of Vahida Maglajlić in Banja Luka, and by the Muslim female students who began signing petitions for peace and against fascism. In other words, in the years preceding the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, we witness Muslim women's first steps in politicization. Third, and more broadly, the rise of both communists and revivalists in Yugoslav civil society threw into crisis something that is often considered to be a postulate of Western associational culture: its assumed intimate, somehow natural bond with liberalism, and its supposedly active role in the secularization process of modern society. Conversely, the late-1930s shift tells a different story: voluntary associations could also be a space where individuals could prepare a revolutionary subversion of the existing political order in the name of radical ideals.



## CONCLUSIONS



This book sketches out a social history of the Bosnian Muslim population in the first six decades of its post-Ottoman history, through the analytical prism of voluntary associations. In a historiographical landscape largely focused on (male-only) political actors i.e. governments, parties, religious and cultural institutions, I made the choice of focusing on this constellation of highly differentiated, and often ephemeral, organizations, and to analyze it through the lens of gender. The path of my inquiry was twofold: on the one hand, to sketch out the transformation of gender discourses and practices within the Muslim community, and on the other, to track down the traces and specificities of Muslim women's voices and choices. The first goal was the easiest of the two to achieve: the notoriously intimate relationship between associations and the public sphere meant that it was relatively easily to track the different power relations, transnational borrowings and semantic choices that shaped the fabric of the debate on gender relations. The second goal proved far more difficult: information on flesh-and-bones Muslim women often remained fragmentary and lacunar; only in a few cases was it possible to track, for a few months or years, the career of engagement of the same woman. Nevertheless, this book has attempted to provide a response to the—albeit largely rhetorical—question asked in the Introduction: did Muslim women from Bosnia and Herzegovina remain “untouched” by the social transformations taking place in their country in the decades from the end of Ottoman rule to the Second World War, and from the Empire(s) to the nation-state? Without surprise, the answer is no. Throughout its seven chapters, the book seeks to show not only that Muslim women were affected by social change well before the war and the establishment of the socialist state, but also that they were actors of that change.

Associations appear to be an extraordinary site of analysis for the gender historian for at least two reasons. In a context in which ego-documents that can give us insight into women's lives are generally lacking, at least in respect to other European regions of the same period, associational archives and press articles offer a web of written artifacts where Muslim women's words and experiences have been trapped and preserved; they reveal traces of ordinary and extraordinary women discovering new forms of knowledge, sociability and consumption that were until recently absent, or reserved to other members of society. Associations are also precious documented sites of observation for tracing the biographical trajectories of Bosnian Muslim women—at least those who were Slavic-speaking, urban, and middle-class—learning to write and speak in public, to invest their time and energies in voluntary work, to enter into and resolve conflicts, and to develop different networks of solidarity going beyond the family and sometimes the religious community. In other words, Bosnian Muslim women learning to gain access to the public space.

If voluntary associations can give us valuable insight into individuals of the past navigating through times of change, they can also be considered the driving forces of that change, especially in the domain of gender representations, norms and practices. No less important than the state, religious institutions or the market, as collective endeavors associations contributed to the creation and circulation of competing ideas of appropriate Muslim post-Ottoman femininity—and thus, implicitly, of masculinity too. As this book attempts to show, one common trait that the people involved in volunteerism all shared—men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims, self-defined progressives, conservatives, or feminists—was the certainty that they were living a time of unprecedented change. No matter how they evaluated this change, positively or negatively, all of the actors we encounter in this book are convinced that 1878 and the Great War mark a moment of radical change in gender relations, and that that change has to be addressed, discussed collectively and channeled in the right direction.

A first forum in which associations invested their energies was of course that of the public discourse; journals, pamphlets, lectures, congresses, but also sermons and religious gatherings, were the privileged tools employed to fix and broadcast appropriate gender norms and behaviors. At the risk oversimplifying the cacophony of diverse and individual voices making them-

selves heard in this period, this book seeks to identify a number of different discursive threads regarding Muslim women, each of them built in one way or another as a reaction to the well-known tropes of European Orientalist discourse: secular progressive, Islamic progressive, feminist, communist and Islamic revivalist. Each of these threads sketched a different formula for how Bosnian Muslim women in the post-Ottoman era should study, work, dress, and how they should identify. At the same time, voluntary associations also developed an expanding array of actions in order to implement their gender agenda. Meetings, handiwork workshops, theater performances, parties, choirs, student dorms, beauty contests, *mevluds*; many were the practices imagined by activists to remake women according to their ideas.

### LOCATING THE COMMUNITY

As highlighted in the Introduction, gender has not been the most practiced category of analysis in the scholarship on Balkan Muslims. We might refer, as many others have done, to Joan W. Scott's widely-cited 1986 article, by asking in which ways gender could be *useful* in this field of knowledge. Across its seven chapters, this book tries to demonstrate that gender relations, as they were imagined and practiced, became an extraordinarily effective device for locating the Bosnian Muslim population between the poles of two different axes: civilised and uncivilised, religious and national. It is worth looking at these two dimensions in detail.

As seen in Chapters One and Two, the domestication within the Muslim community of the debate on gender relations is only understandable if we take it within the context of the major shifts that shook the region at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The passage from Ottoman to Habsburg rule overturned social hierarchies between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the Bosnian educated elite was forced to reconsider its place within a powerful Orientalist framework dividing the world into a hierarchical binary: a civilised Europe in opposition with an Orient incapable of serious progress. From the late nineteenth century, gender relations became, in the Yugoslav region as elsewhere, a “discursive dynamics that secure a sovereign subject status of the West”;<sup>1</sup> in other words, the most compelling proof of the intrinsic backwardness and

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1 Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, 1.



inferiority of Muslim populations all over the globe. And indeed, throughout the period under scrutiny, and even far later than that, non-Muslim cultural entrepreneurs, including feminist ones, were never able to entirely rid themselves this pervasive intellectual background. The Muslim educated elite both interiorised and contested this vision; *Gajret* and *Narodna Uzdanica*'s associational life became the privileged stage for imagining and performing new gender relations inspired by the European middle classes, and thus for climbing the ladder from the uncivilised to the civilised. If there is one theme that is a constant in the sources regarding virtually all of the actors that appear in this book, it is that Bosnian Muslims were constantly represented as being on the move between different poles—between civilization and barbarism, the East and Europe, and the West and the Orient. In Chapter Seven we also see that, in the late 1930s, the *ulema* leading *El-Hidaje* openly inverted the poles of this social ladder. Europe ceased to be the gold standard against which “the rest” should measure their place in the world, and the first centuries of Islam were instead held up as the new model for imagining Muslim gender relations, while any indulgence towards novelties hailing from non-Muslim neighbours, or from Western Europe, should be rejected as dangerous imitations leading to a loss of authenticity.

It is clear that all of the different actors involved in the debate on the Muslim woman question, regardless of their convictions, were unanimous about one important point: that gender relations demonstrated, both to oneself and to others, one's place in the world. And this statement can indeed be applied to many other contexts in the world; as has been convincingly demonstrated by Irvin Cemil Schick, establishing hierarchical differences between groups is always a gendered and sexualised endeavour.<sup>2</sup> In the specific case of Bosnian Muslims, however, an additional element was added to the mix, and it is a direct consequence of their ambiguous location in a Southeastern Europe wracked by rising nationalisms. As a white-skinned, Slavic-speaking population, they were considered (and considered themselves) to be South Slavs, and thus legitimate members of the national community; as Muslims, they were considered (and considered themselves) to be a minority profoundly linked to centuries of Ottoman rule, and thus

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2 Irvin Cemil Schick, *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alteritist Discourse* (London & New York: Verso, 1999), 77–104.

to have a limited legitimacy in a de-Ottomanised Southeastern Europe. This very specific position left room for different political options. As highlighted by Nathalie Clayer and Xavier Bougarel, this process of positioning was “somewhat hesitant... neither linear nor homogeneous; it frequently peaked during periods of violence, which favored the polarization of identities. Moreover, this politicization had two main dimensions—the one national and the other religious—which were not always separate.”<sup>3</sup> Remaking Muslim women became thus for different segments of the political elite a way to position themselves along the continuum between these two political options; as a cursor, women’s bodies were used by the Muslim elite to position themselves between nationalism and communitarianism. The men gathered around *Gajret*, and to a more limited extent *Narodna Uzdanica*, were of course the social groups who drew the closest to the former option. Surpassing sexual and confessional segregation, favoring Muslim women’s integration through education and work, and supporting the abandonment of the veiling practices, were the most visible tools for making the integration of Muslims into the broader national community—Serbian, Croatian or Yugoslav, according to periods and sensibilities—real. The *ulema* leading *El-Hidaje* were the most effective in articulating a very diametrically opposed project; the restoration of segregation, with an emphasis on female domesticity and the visibility of Islamic markers on women’s bodies all served a larger project, that of putting Islam firmly at the center of the endeavor to build a political community.

In summary, gender appears to be a powerful device for building and reproducing competing political projects in a changing world. As eloquently stated by Deniz Kandiyoti, “refashioning gender... implies the creation of new images of masculinity and femininity that involve the repudiation of the old as well as the espousal of the new. These images and styles are selectively appropriated by different sections of society, making gender a contested and polyvalent marker of class, social extraction, and cultural preference.”<sup>4</sup> This is also why women, and gender history are always also political history.

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3 Clayer and Bougarel, *Europe’s Balkan Muslims*, 64–5.

4 Kandiyoti, “Some awkward questions,” 284.

## A POST-OTTOMAN STORY

This book insists upon the significance of the European reference for all of the actors involved. Indeed, from the very first chapter we see that the location of Bosnia on the European continent, and the Slavic ethnicity of the Muslims living there, had a strong impact on the development of both gender discourses and practices. In other words, reforming Muslim women in Bosnia had to be done by taking into account her specific Yugoslav, and more broadly European location. Western and Central Europe were thus extremely important sources of inspiration, especially for Muslim progressive circles, throughout the decades in question; numerous are the transnational circulations of ideas, people and practices described in this book that connected Bosnia with Vienna, Budapest and Paris, often through the intermediary of Belgrade and Zagreb. At the same time, it is interesting to note how the Ottoman Empire, even decades after the end of its rule in the region, did not lose its attractive force for Bosnian Muslims. The networks of religious officials, students, intellectuals and families innervating the Balkans and the Middle East did not simply disappear after the decisions of the Congress of Berlin in 1878, and neither was this the case after the Habsburg annexation of Bosnia in 1908, nor after the very collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922. The ties connecting the Bosnian Muslims to their coreligionists in the newly established Republic of Turkey, and more generally with the Muslims of the post-Ottoman space, were adapted to the redrawing of the political map and continued to connect people's minds, bodies and hearths. The Bosnian Muslim debate about gender relations, as well as the adoption or the rejection of new gender practices, was constantly and dynamically affected by what was going on in the Ottoman Empire and, after the Great War, in the country perceived to be its most direct heir, the Republic of Turkey. The ongoing transformations of gender relations in the Muslim community in Yugoslavia analyzed in this book can be understood only in the framework of the specific historical and geopolitical position of Bosnian Muslims: at the crossroads between two (post-)imperial spaces, Ottoman and Habsburg, and by extension at the crossroads between the Middle East and Europe.

The book also highlights the extent to which associations seemed to be interested in understanding and comparing the different gender regimes under construction around them. Especially in the interwar years, activists

of both sexes dedicated the greatest attention to different national models of femininity, and the “French woman,” “Soviet woman,” “Egyptian woman,” “German woman,” etc., were each assigned with different qualities and flaws. Nevertheless, among the feast of gender regimes proposed and imposed in Europe and the Mediterranean space in the interwar period, Bosnian Muslims seem to have looked with particular persistence to the *turska žena*, the “Turkish woman.” Although Turkophilia (of more precisely, Kemalophilia) was widespread in the interwar years, in Europe and as well as in Yugoslavia,<sup>5</sup> the evolution of the Turkish gender regime became of capital significance for Muslims in Bosnia. This predilection had of course a post-Ottoman dimension; after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Muslims of Yugoslavia, who in the new state were considered from a juridical standpoint to be a minority, saw Ankara as a special reference. Despite the efforts of Kemal’s entourage to establish a new state that was in diametric opposition to its Ottoman past, the perception of continuity between the epoch of the sultans and that of Kemal remained strong for the Muslims of Yugoslavia, as it probably did for the Muslims of the post-Ottoman space more in general. Thanks to its military success in the liberation war against the European powers, and to the impressive set of reforms implemented by the new republic, Turkey became in the interwar years an extremely important symbol for Muslims: living proof that being Muslim was not incompatible with being modern, and that even a segment of the Muslim population, once it had (re)discovered its national identity, could attain, and even surpass, the level of European civilization without having to go through the symbolic and practical pains of colonialism. The special place that post-Ottoman Turkey held in the Bosnian Muslims’ imaginary is probably best exemplified in Mustafa Mulalić’s words, who in his book on the fate of the Yugoslav Muslims in 1936 defined the relationship between the two as follows: if Bosnian Muslims, given their condition as a numerical minority in a European state, were “The Orient in the West” (*Orijent na Zapadu*), then Turkey, given the impressive reform efforts implemented by its political leadership, should be considered “the West in the Orient” (*Zapad na Orijentu*).<sup>6</sup> In the

5 Andelko Vlašić, “Modern Women in a Modern State: Public Discourse in Interwar Yugoslavia on the Status of Women in Turkey (1923–1939),” *Aspasia* 12 (2018): 68–90.

6 Mulalić, *Orijent na zapadu*, 440.

eyes of Bosnian Muslim progressives of both sexes, the Kemalist gender regime was there to finally refute the Western narrative of the relentlessly enslaved and silent Muslim woman.<sup>7</sup>

#### AN ASSOCIATIONAL EMPOWERMENT

Muslim women were seen as the cornerstone for building competing political projects, and for ensuring the success or failure of the community's post-Ottoman destiny. It is not astonishing, then, that those who managed to gain access to the public space after 1918 had to move cautiously. The fragmented traces of Muslim women engaged in voluntary work tell us a common story; engagement came at a cost. The interwar years seem to have been for the Bosnian Muslim leadership a difficult moment to navigate; a transition wracked by physical and symbolic violence, marked by uncertain and fragile access to state decision-making, and plunged in economic crisis. A great deal of scholarship has already shown that when a social group perceives itself to be under attack or in crisis, male anxieties concerning women's behavior usually increases. Volunteering, and more generally all behavior that challenged sexual and confessional segregation, remained for some of the population highly problematic. Rasema Bisić's 1935 words, analyzed in Chapter Four, probably offer the most articulate analysis of the fragile position of Muslim women who gained access to such a polarized public space: with their individual behavior under constant scrutiny, the accusation of immorality, which could deeply affect a woman's everyday life and life choices, stood as a constant threat for these women. If, to these political factors, we add the very low literacy rates of the Bosnian, and especially Bosnian Muslim, female population, we have an idea of why Muslim women only very rarely gained access to the public space, and if so with circumspection. More interestingly, however, when they did, they repeatedly called for the Muslim elite to abandon its dichotomy between veiled/unveiled, civilised/backward women, with the argument that it both repeated the tired European Orientalist prejudice against Muslim women, and made it all the more difficult for women to gain access to the public space.

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7 Giomi, "Seduced by Gender Corporatism," 178–216.

Voluntary associations, from feminist to Muslim cultural and philanthropic, with the limited and fragile means they had at their disposal, created a space for action for those Muslim women who wanted to and could get involved in their activities. This space for a regular, extra-domestic and extra-familiar sociability was never safe and always contested, especially during moments of tension, such as political elections. Notwithstanding this sometimes difficult terrain, with their vast panoply of activities and devices, associations created the conditions for allowing a small yet important number of women to push their lives in unexplored directions. The ethics of solidarity and care developed by voluntary associations legitimized women to expand the perimeter of their individual and collective action, challenging existing gender rules. Muslim women coordinated with each other, with men and non-Muslim women, learnt how to discuss, negotiate, vote in assemblies—and all of this several decades before Socialist Yugoslavia gave them the right to vote. Associations became a space from which Muslim women managed to negotiate, sometimes more loudly, more often discreetly, their own place in a changing Bosnian and Yugoslav society. Of course, there were also limits and contradictions to these new possibilities. Feminist organisations, albeit exceptionally (Banja Luka's branch of *Ženski Pokret* in the late 1930s, as we see in Chapter Seven, being one example), made it possible for Muslim women to climb the ranks of the association, and to become secretary or president. On the contrary, within the perimeter of the Muslim associations we witness a paradox: the cultural associations that were at the forefront for the emancipation of Muslim women, *Gajret* in particular, always managed to avoid letting Muslim women have their say in the associational central decision-making bodies. This reticence to practice male-female equality within their own association is, in my opinion, an expression of the limits, and contradictions, of the whole Muslim progressive project, often more interested in promoting female visibility than in promoting real equality. Despite all these limits, voluntary associations can still be considered tools of female empowerment.

Usually considered by scholars to be champions of liberalism and as a testing ground for democracy, the voluntary associations analysed in this book also allow us to detect, starting from the late 1930s, more radical choices and unexpected politicisations. Vahida Maglajlić is probably the best-documented case of a Muslim woman who, socialized within the Mus-

lim cultural and feminist associations of her hometown, opted for more radical engagement and turned toward communism—an engagement that she ended up fighting and dying for. The diversification of female political engagement would continue in the years following the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia. In autumn 1943, groups of young women from Sarajevo, Mostar, Prijedor and Travnik created female branches of the *Mladi Muslimani* (Young Muslims), an association founded in Sarajevo at the beginning of the Second World War and officially recognised as the youth branch of the Muslim revivalist association *El-Hidaje*. In the middle of the war, dozens of young Muslim women committed to a pan-Islamist association who saw in Muslim solidarity a fundamental principle for political action.<sup>8</sup> Muslim women, who, once they had appropriated the tools of middle-class liberal associational culture, did not hesitate to use them to pursue different ends, and to cultivate projects that were very far from those the Muslim male elite had imagined for them.

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8 Muniba Korkut-Spaho, Safija Solak-Šiljak, eds., *Mlade muslimanke: svjedočenja i sjećanja, Mladi Muslimani*, (Sarajevo: Mladi Muslimani, 1999). For Bosnia in WW2, see in particular Emily Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941–1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler's Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

## C O N S U L T E D   A R C H I V E S

*Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine (ABiH)*, Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo

FG, *Gajret*

PDS, *Personalni dosije službenika*, Officials' personal files

SSOS, *Sudski spisi okružni sud*, District court files

ZV, *Zemaljska vlada*, Provincial Government (Habsburg period)

ZV2, *Zemaljska vlada 2*, Provincial Government (interwar period)

*Arhiv hercegovačko-neretvanskog kantona (AHNK)* Archives of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, Mostar

MŽZM, *Muslimanska ženska zadruga Mostar*, Muslim Women's Association

*Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ)* Archives of Yugoslavia, Belgrade

14, Ministry of Interior

66, Ministry of Education

720, Progressive Students' Movement

*Arhiv Republike Srpske (ARS)* Archives of the Republic of Srpska, Banja Luka

498, Collection of memoirs on the workers' movement and the national liberation struggle

*Gazi Husrev-begova biblioteka*, Gazi husrefbeg Library, Sarajevo

Photography collection

*Historijski arhiv Sarajevo (HAS)* Sarajevo Historical Archives

34, MŽOŠ Muslim Female Elementary School

G4, *Gajret*

J175, *Jedileri*

M9, *Merhamet*

NU14, *Narodna Uzdanica*

Photography collection

Poster collection

Sarajevo City Government

*Istorijski arhiv Beograda (IAB)* Belgrade Historical Archives, Belgrade

1084. *Društvo "Kneginja Ljubica"*

*Muzej grada Sarajeva (MGS)* City Museum of Sarajevo

Photography collection



*Muzej Republike Srpske (MRS)* Museum of the Republic of Srpska, Banja Luka  
Photography collection

*Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti (SANU)* Serbian Academy of Sciences and  
Arts, Belgrade  
14411, *Beogradski Gajret's* student files

*Zemaljski muzej*, Provincial Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo  
FranjoTopić's photography collection

# B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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<i>Behar</i>	<i>Kalendar "Gajret"</i>	<i>Putokaz</i>
<i>Biser</i>	<i>Kalendar "Narodna Uzdanica"</i>	<i>Reforma</i>
<i>Bošnjak</i>	<i>Kalendar "Prosvjeta"</i>	<i>Sarajevski List</i>
<i>Budućnost</i>	<i>Letopis Matice Srpske</i>	<i>Tarik</i>
<i>Domovina</i>	<i>Muallim</i>	<i>Vardar. Kalendar "Kolo Srpskih Sestara"</i>
<i>Đulistan</i>	<i>Musavat</i>	<i>Večernja Pošta</i>
<i>El-Hidaje</i>	<i>Nova Evropa</i>	<i>Vrijeme</i>
<i>Gajret</i>	<i>Novi Behar</i>	<i>Zeman</i>
<i>Glas Slobode</i>	<i>Obrana</i>	<i>Žena i Svet</i>
<i>Glas Težaka</i>	<i>Politika</i>	<i>Ženski Pokret</i>
<i>Hikjmet</i>	<i>Pravda</i>	

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## A B O U T   T H E   A U T H O R

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