Making Muslim Women European

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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 Hajdarspasić, 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 subjectation 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.¹

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

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. 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 \([\textit{am tiefsten}]\) is certainly reserved for the Muslim, who believes his God is best served by barking \([\textit{Herplärren}]\) a couple verses of the Quran in Arabic, a language incomprehensible to Him. The Greek-Orthodox Serb prays slightly better \([\textit{wenig besser}]\), 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.

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, orientalists 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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accompanying 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. 4 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. 5

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.
one another] in every aspect of intellectual, social, and economic life.”⁶ 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),⁷ an Ottoman nostalgia that “through the centuries, does not fade with the passage of years and days.”⁸ 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]!⁹

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].¹⁰

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.11 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,”12 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],”13 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.  
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**). 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.” 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 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. 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

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sublime meaning in and of itself.” 17 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. 18 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. 19

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 izmedu 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.20

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.

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.
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. 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.” 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.
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.\(^{23}\)

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-

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\(^{23}\) 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).
Community 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 (*prilagodivanje*) 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.24

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

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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].”25 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.26

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 farizatum 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.27

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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).28 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-19th century Ottoman Empire that captured the imagination of Bosnian Muslim intellectuals. Among the “pearls of the Ottoman Parnassus,”29 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


Turkish citizens.” 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.”

Bosnian intellectuals were especially struck by the biographies of these women, known as “the most prolific and greatest poetesses of the new Orient”. 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.”

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,” 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

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 Tahriral-mar’a, “The Liberation of Women”] endeavored to destroy the harmful customs of the patriarchy.”35 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.”36 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,”37 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.”38

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

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35 Džemal, “Što nam je dužnost,” 2.
36 Muhammed Ferid Vedždi, Muslimanska žena (Mostar: Tisak i naklada prve muslimanske nakladne knjižare i štamparije, 1915).
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.39

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 “ilmı-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-

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.40

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.41 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.\(^{42}\)

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.\(^{43}\) 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-
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. 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.

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.
again at the end of the year and to discuss the situation of secondary community schools.\textsuperscript{46} In the following months, the discussion about female education continued in Muslim journals and newspapers. The newspaper \textit{Musavat} (Equality), the MNO house organ, published on Karamhmedović’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, \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{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.”\textsuperscript{47} 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 \textit{[odnaroditi]} and Europeanizing them \textit{[europeiziriati]}, rather than allowing them to remain honest Bosnian Muslim women.”\textsuperscript{48} 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 \textit{hanum} directly attacked Karamhmedović’s arguments, and qualified Muslim women as “the greatest martyrs of the corruption of modern times and of its satanic liberty!”\textsuperscript{49}

The publication drew the ire of many figures engaged in the cause for female education, especially Karamhmedović. 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.”\textsuperscript{50} The mystery was rapidly solved; a few

\textsuperscript{46} Ćurić, \textit{Muslimansko školstvo}, 192.
\textsuperscript{47} Safije hanum [Sofija Pletikosić], \textit{Pisma u obranu muslimanskog ženskinja} (Sarajevo: Izdanje uredništva Muallima, 1911).
\textsuperscript{48} Safije hanum, \textit{Pisma u obranu}, 1.
\textsuperscript{49} Safije hanum, \textit{Pisma u obranu}, 1.
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.”  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 coquetries into Serbian society.

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,” and stated that they therefore deserved to be exposed as the “ones truly responsible for today’s backwardness and *džehalet* [Arabic term for ignorance].” *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.”

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,”

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51 “Safiije hanum—Sofija Pletikosić,” 2.
53 Džemal, “Što nam je dužnost,” 2.
54 Džemal, “Što nam je dužnost,” 1–2.
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 Safijje hanum/ Pupić-Pletikosić—called at this point “an unknown female writer”—seems to have radically changed. Not only was “the Safijje 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.” 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.”

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.” 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

60 Sofija Pupić-Pletikosić, Polemika o emancipaciji žene u obranu muslimanskog ženskinja, ujedno: Odgovor doktoru Hamdiji Karamehmedoviću i drugima (Opatija: V. Tomićić 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.”  

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,” who “do not reason,” and therefore “do not know how to educate their own children in this day and age.” 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. 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-

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64 Karamehmedović, “Naobrazba našeg ženskinja,” 3.
izing our women!” As for Muslim women, they were supposed to become “good mothers, good wives, capable women of the house” 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,” 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.”

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.

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

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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? 71

Requesting political rights, as did “modern, educated women, who, like men, are consumed by politics and socio-political relations,” 72 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.” 73 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.” 74

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

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,”75 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 [%iston na se, a momka uza se].”76 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 kriščansko 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.77

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.”78 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.” 79 The same would inevitably happen to young girls: send your Muslim daughters to school, the brochure cautioned, “and you will find them in Ilidža,” 80 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.” 81 “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.” 82 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.” 83

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-

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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.”

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 Ćuvidina (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 pros-vjetne ankete (Sarajevo: Izdanje Ulema Medžlisa, 1912), cited in Ćurić, 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 iđu 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).\(^8\) 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.\(^8\)

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 ruždijanka, “schoolgirl of ruždia,” 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.\(^8\) 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.\(^8\)

\(^8\) Hawkesworth, Voices in the Shadows, 250–1.
\(^8\) 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.
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. 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 Čazim Ćatić—who dedicated two of his poems to her, one of which, significantly, portrays her intent on playing the piano. 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. 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” (dječa novog v’jeka—that is, the new generation of educated Muslims of both sexes). 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-

Domesticating the Muslim Woman Question

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. 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. 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.

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

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94 Šemsudin Sarajlić and Našija 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.
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. 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; Našija 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.

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  
awaken 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!

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!99

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.

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. 100

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. 101 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 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.” 102 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.” 103

101 Besarović, Iz kulturnog života, 43–67.
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, Našija Sarajlić described her brief teaching experience in one of the reformed *mektek* 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.104

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.105

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 \[žiće\] / 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!\(^{106}\)

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

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 a religious, 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”\(^{107}\) 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.\(^{108}\) 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.\(^{109}\)

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

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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.dis., 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. 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.,” 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!112

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

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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.  

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].

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

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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-
interest 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.