Making Muslim Women European

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

This chapter also insists on another point: that the trajectories of Muslim women did not play out in a vacuum, and that Muslim women’s engagement in volunteering cannot be separated from Bosnian Muslim, and more broadly Yugoslav, political history. For the entire interwar period, associations had intimate relations with Muslim and non-Muslim political parties, different branches of the Yugoslav administration, and religious institutions—relationships that were always far from stable, and at constant risk of upheaval and renegotiation.
CHAPTER 3

Beggars and Protesters

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

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

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

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6 Monica Krippner, Žene u ratu: Srbija 1915–1918, (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1986). For the impact of the First World War on families in Serbia, see Božica Mladenović, Porodica u Srbiji u Prvom svetskom ratu (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 2006).
South-Slav women in the Habsburg regions also went through a terrible period of extraordinary economic privations, hunger, and disease. Family units were dealt a heavy blow. However, generally speaking their trajectory was different from that of their Serbian and Montenegrin counterparts. For the women of the Habsburg provinces, the battlefront remained a distant reality. In particular, Bosnia, which in the summer of 1914 had been at the focal point of European diplomacy, rapidly lost its importance, becoming a secondary scene for military operations. Episodes of violence—such as the pogroms against Serbs that followed the attack—remained limited to the regions bordering Serbia. In the urban centers of the Habsburg Empire women assembled, sometimes succeeding in circumventing the ban on gatherings imposed by the authorities at the beginning of the conflict. As shown by research done on Zagreb and Croatia more broadly, urban women successfully organized into philanthropic organizations for the care of wounded and invalid soldiers, to supply food to the families of mobilized soldiers, and to care for orphans and pregnant women. All of these initiatives were of course undertaken within a patriotic discourse, and in support of the Habsburg military effort.

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

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

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

10 Kecman, Žene Jugoslavije, 16–22.
11 Nedim Šarac, Sindikalni pokret u Bosni i Hercegovini do 1919 godine (Sarajevo: Narodna Prosvjeta, 1955), 177.
manufacture of uniforms for the Habsburg Army. However, these first steps remained limited in scope, riling local Muslim notables hostile to the idea of Muslim women working, even at the behest of a member of the religious hierarchy. In Bosnian urban centers the war thus first of all gave visibility to a growing population of Muslim women begging in the streets or seeking the meager aid offered by the authorities.\textsuperscript{14}

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

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


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

\textbf{“Let us unveil the women!”}

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

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

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


\textsuperscript{20} Bajić, “Pregled učešća žena,” 247.
rights. In the same period, the Sarajevo-based journal Jugoslavenski List (Yugoslav Journal) published contributions from the likes of Tomáš Masaryk, or the British feminist activist Edward Carpenter, advocating full equal rights for both men and women in the new post-war European order. The pre-war debate on Muslim women, which had focused on appropriate forms of, and spaces for, female education, suddenly seemed to be completely outdated.

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

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

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

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

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

This pessimistic, in some points disdainful, picture of Muslim women in the wartime and post-war Yugoslav space is even less appealing when compared with that of non-Muslim women. While urban Jewish and Chris-
tian women had “become employees, drivers, shopkeepers,” and thus learned to earn a living through salaried work while their fathers and husbands were absent, Muslim women “did nothing of the sort.” According to Sulejmanpašić, the backward, illiterate and shameful Muslim women had no other choice than to participate in an economic activity that required—at least according to him—no specific skills: sex work. Supporting his claim with data collected by the Sarajevo police department, the author claimed that the vast majority of prostitutes operating in the main Bosnian towns were desperate Muslim women—a miserable state of affairs in itself, but which also brought shame upon the entire Muslim community.

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

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

27 Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 21.
28 Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 21.
29 Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 16.
30 Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 5
phlet unmistakably calls for the adoption of a rational approach. As stated a few pages later: “the implementation of these changes... is more or less in direct conflict with the precepts of Islamic law. In these circumstances, we must unwaveringly choose to conform to the pressing needs of our times.”

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

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

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

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

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31 Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 14.
32 Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 9.
33 Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 3.
34 Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 27.
our children’s education depends upon the unveiling of our women, and through them the future of our people, and such a thing does not have a price.\textsuperscript{35}

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

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

Let us unveil the women!

And their social progress will bring forth the quality that makes a man a real man in their hearts: devotion and love for their own home.\textsuperscript{36}

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

\textsuperscript{35} Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 28–9.
\textsuperscript{36} Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 34.
\textsuperscript{37} Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 25.
\textsuperscript{38} Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 25.
\textsuperscript{39} Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 25.
the power of the čaršija [the main commercial and artisan square in Sarajevo, meaning here, by allusion, the Muslim traditional elite] stops at the door of the House of the People. In there, there are only comrades, in there Muslim women sit beside non-Muslims, drinking and talking with them; this is the point at which the Muslim masses give way to the proletariat, organized according to the principles of international socialism.40

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

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

40 Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 25.
41 Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 25.
42 Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 35.
43 Sulejmanpašić, Jedan prilog, 35.
44 Abduselam Balagija, Les Musulmans yougoslaves (Alger: La Maison des Livres, 1940), 117.
In the following weeks, a Muslim religious scholar wrote a series of articles published in a Muslim newspaper, attacking Sulemanpašić’s thesis, stressing its incompatibility with Islamic law, and the author’s lack of competence for dealing with these subjects. In any case the pamphlet marked a point of no return in the debate on the Muslim woman question. By calling for Muslim women to participate in extra-domestic work, Sulejmanpašić had challenged the entire ideology of the separate spheres. The principle by which contemporary needs should take precedence over sharia law had been explicitly expressed. The veil, the manifestation of Muslim woman’s sexual and religious segregation, had been attacked and despised in the public eye, and highlighted as a symbol of all the constraints burdening Bosnian Muslims and their survival in their post-Ottoman geopolitical setting. It was no longer possible to simply reduce the Muslim woman question to a debate on education; it had now taken on a political, economic and national dimension.

**Enter Philanthropic Associations**

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

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46 AHNK, MZZM, 12, Minutes of MZZM’s Constituent Assembly (August 13, 1919).
promoters who signed the open letter were the Muslim elementary school teachers who had been trained at the Sarajevo Muslim Girls’ School.47 In April of the same year, nearly sixty Muslim women met for a public assembly at the reformed female mekteb of Džinin Alley and officially founded Osvitanje (Dawn). Unlike Muslimanska ženska zadruga, which had rapidly ceased to be active, this Sarajevo association met with considerable success. Within a year, it had grown from 51 to over 300 members, not only from Sarajevo, but also from other towns throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina.48

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

49 Ahmet Đumišić, Ko smeta napretku i prosječivanju muslimana, a osobito muslimanki? (Banja Luka: Izdajanje muls. prosvjetno i potporno društvo “Spas,” 1919). The pamphlet was recently reprinted in Enes Karić, Bosanske muslimanske rasprave, vol. 3 (Sarajevo: Sedam, 2003). The quotation comes from Đumišić, Ko smeta, 3.
50 Đumišić, Ko smeta, 4.
of Islam. “Read the Islamic history of the Arabs,” Đumišić again incites his readers, “and you will see how many Islamic female poets and writers there were at that time, you will see how Zaynab, daughter of Ali, impressed her audience with her eloquence at the great assembly of Kufa.”

51 In conclusion, the Muslim philanthropist from Banja Luka called upon Muslim women “who have sufficient time and means” to help “[their] poor sisters, alongside [their] husbands and [their] community.”

52 The voice of Đumišić was not an isolated one. Even the editors of Pravda supported the involvement of Muslim women in voluntary associations with an official statement, claiming to see in this initiative a “middle way [srednji put], both tangible and practical, without clamor or rhetoric” for improving the conditions of Muslim women. Words of praise also came from several members of the religious hierarchy who, while irrevocably condemning Sulejmanpašić’s radical statements, saw in Muslim female associations a commendable way to approach the needs of the community. For all these male notables, the Muslim character of these initiatives was crucial, insofar as “only in Islam, in culture and mutual support, only in true Islamic culture lies our salvation.”

53 The news of the establishment of the first Muslim female associations in Bosnia also crossed borders within the Muslim population. In early 1920, the Belgrade-based feminist newspaper Ženski Pokret (The Women’s Movement), also devoted several pages to enthusiastic articles about these two organizations, seeing them as a sign that Muslim women were ready to join other Yugoslav women in their common struggle for civil rights. Though for different reasons, this new engagement in voluntarism by Muslim women was thus warmly welcomed both inside the Muslim community and by others outside of it. As stated in March 1919 by Hasnija Berberović, the writer and teacher who had been elected to be the first president of Osvitanje, “there is no place large or small in our country... from which we do not receive support from our brothers and sisters, with monetary contributions or warm letters, full of kind thoughts and thanks to the women that have begun to make this noble idea a reality...”

51 Đumišić, Ko smeta, 15.
52 Đumišić, Ko smeta, 57.
are revealing of the trust and optimism for a new era of Muslim women’s activism and visibility in the Bosnian public space.

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

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

59 AJ, 14, F63/J194/2, statute of “Bratstvo” muslimansko dobrotvorno društvo (1929).
60 HAS, J175, statute of Humanitarno muslimansko društvo “Jedileri” (undated).
had signed the Osvitanje address, for example, claimed that in consequence of the Great War, women needed to act: “Muslim women fall into decadence in the following manner: hunger brings Muslim women out into the streets, then leads them to beg, until they have reached the lowest point to which an individual can fall: immorality [nemoral]!” Here again, the text appears to allude to the rise in the number of sex workers among poor Muslim women, an issue that surely had the power to distress even the most conservative elements in Muslim urban society. Similar reasoning was also given in the statutes of Mostar’s Muslimanska ženska zadruga, and by 1919 was still given as the justification for the association’s foundation, with the aim to “compensate for the lack of religious and domestic education [vjerski i kućni odgoj], maintain good habits and reject bad ones, counter ostentation [raskošt], unemployment, debauchery [raskalašenost], and begging.” The enrolment of Muslim women into voluntary associations was thus presented here as a hard necessity of history, and as the lesser of two evils.

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

61 ABiH, ZV2, 86/140/136, Apel Osvitanje (undated).
62 ABiH, ZV, 18/26/29, Statute of Muslimanska ženska zadruga (1919, undated), article 3.
1931, the branch’s first goal, “through a well-intentioned propaganda campaign among the female population,” was “to strengthen Muslim awareness [muслиmansка свијест] as much as possible, spread the idea of mutual solidarity, unity, and love, instill in our female population the importance of saving money and distain for superfluous luxury [luksz].”

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

In the Midst of Political Turmoil

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

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

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63 Munir Šahinović Ekremov, Spomenica dvadesetgodišnjice opstanka i djelovanja Muslimanskog dobrotvornog društva ”Merhamet” u Sarajevu: 1913–1933 (Sarajevo: Merhamet, 1933), 4.
64 Filandra, Bošnjačka politika, 65–82 and Purivatra, Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija, 47–8.
65 Purivatra, Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija, 54–5.
Despite that they both agreed on the establishment of a constitutional monarchy under the Karadžorđević dynasty, the two factions were divided over several issues. The JMO campaigners believed that the Muslims of Bosnia should form a unified political entity, independent of the other parties and capable of protecting its interests through direct negotiation with the central government—first and foremost an agrarian reform that would limit losses for Muslim landowners. According to Maglajlić’s party, only a state that allowed for broad forms of autonomy could best safeguard Muslim interests. This autonomy would need to have at least two dimensions: territorial, with the protection of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s historical administrative borders, and religious, guaranteeing that the Statute for the Autonomy of Religious Affairs of 1909 be preserved and that the courts of Islamic law be maintained. At the same time, the JMO leadership stressed the importance of ensuring that the Bosnian Islamic religious officials remain in contact with the Šejh-ul-islam, “just as the Catholics are in contact with the papal see.”

This aspiration to be autonomous and remain distinct from non-Muslims was reflected in the issue of national identity, a topic upon which members of the JMO remained quite prudent—and they would remain to be so for the duration of the interwar period. As stated in the party’s official program, “we believe in the full equality of the three tribal names [potpune ravnopravnosti plemenskih imena]” and “as for the question of nationalization [nacionalizovanje], we are of the opinion that this falls within the cultural domain of society, and is not a matter that regards everyday politics.” According to party leaders, “efforts in this domain must be based upon tolerance and caution, understanding and progress. For this reason, we are opposed to all pettiness and inconsideration, and we are particularly opposed to the conspicuousness of any one ethnic group. We will come closer together, therefore without parting ways. We cling to Yugoslavism as the most suitable path to conciliation and unification.”

Despite lending a national description to their party name (“Yugoslav”), the party chose not to give a clear position on the crucial question of what nation the Muslims of Bosnia belonged to.

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

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

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68 Filandra, Bošnjačka politika, 82–92.
69 Kemura, Uloga Gajreta, 150–3.
During the same months, Osvitanje also became involved in the rivalry between Muslim political factions. At its first assembly, Osvitanje had elected to the control committee, the only organ of the association in which men were present, Edhem Mulabdić, Abdurezak Hivzi Bjelevac and Šemsudin Sarajlić. As seen in Chapter One, these three men had already distinguished themselves before the war for their support of education for Muslim women, and their engagement in the public sphere. Since 1914 Mulabdić had been the director of the Muslim Girls’ School in Sarajevo, while Bjelevac and Sarajlić were the spouses of two female writers, Šefika Bjelevac and Nafija Sarajlić. These men were not only close to the female cause, but also among the earliest JMO campaigners. In the following months, multiple signs indicated that Osvitanje was being drawn more and more into the orbit of Maglajlić’s party. Prominent figures from the JMO were also the association’s most generous donors, which the wives and daughters of the party’s Sarajevo militants had quickly joined. In June 1919 the party decided to entrust the activists of Osvitanje with the creation of a supplement for the party house organ.

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

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

72 This special insert came as a four-page supplement with an issue of Pravda, no. June 26 (1919).
73 Šukrija Kurtović, Gdje je istina?, an 8-page paperback printed separately and distributed with the newspaper Budućnost, with neither date nor publisher. Likely published with the issue of October 15 (1919).
association was open to “Muslim men and women.” In October, Gajret publicly invited Muslim women to take part in their venture:

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

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

Enter Cultural Associations

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

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

Chapter 3

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

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

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

77 Kemura, Uloga Gajreta, 156.
78 Kemura, Uloga Gajreta, 156.
of view,” according to one of the leading figures of the association. Attracting more students in Belgrade to higher education institutions also meant curbing the flow of Muslim students toward the University of Zagreb; especially after 1918, students had taken to pursuing their studies there, and often ended up identifying with Croatian nationalism. The leading figures that contributed to the establishment of this organization in the kingdom’s capital were Hasan Rebac (1890–1953) and hafiz Habduselam Džumhur (1885–1933). Rebac in particular had been a volunteer officer for the Serbian Army during the First World War, and after the war had been appointed to the Ministry of Religious Affairs as an advisor. Since its establishment, the Belgrade-based association Gajret Osman Đikić was able to count on generous financial support from several members of the Radical Party and of the capital’s bourgeoisie. King Aleksandar alone, as a personal contribution, regularly gave a monthly donation to the association amounting to 25,000 dinars, to which were added donations of 10,000 dinars for Christmas and other religious holidays.

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80 Kemura, Uloga Gajreta, 160–1.
Muslim women joined Gajret’s ranks in this context of high political polarization. More often, they formed “local female chapters” (ženski mjesni pododbori), alongside the—unspecified, exclusively male—“local chapters” (mjesni pododbori). Sometimes, in areas lacking a sufficient number of supporters to justify a female chapter, a woman was appointed as local “commissioner” (povjerenica) for a certain period, with aims to recruit other women and form a local female chapter. In 1921, only two out of 44 local branches were female, in Stolac and Sarajevo, and in 1924, Stolac was no longer active and out of 60 local branches, only the one in Sarajevo still survived, alongside two commissaries (Bosanski Šamac and Čajniče).\(^8^1\) In the second half of the 1920s, however, the number steadily grew, and female chapters were founded in Mostar, Bihać, Tuzla, Derventa, and Livno, reaching a total of 13 by 1929.\(^8^2\) After 1929, the number stabilized at around fifteen and would remain constant until the Second World War.\(^8^3\) The female chapters remained a small percentage of the local chapters, with a ratio of 2 to 44 in 1921, 13 to 139 in 1929, and 18 to 170 in 1933, thus never exceeding 15% of the total number of chapters.\(^8^4\) In 1932, the number of Muslim women throughout the entire province with regular memberships in the association would reach 4,000, alongside 20,000 men; these numbers made Gajret the largest-reaching Muslim association in Yugoslavia.\(^8^5\)

The vigorous pro-Serbian shift that had been under way since 1923 also affected the activities of the female local branches. After repeated calls from the Central Branch, Gajret female volunteers began collaborating regularly with Serbian philanthropic associations, particularly with Kolo Srpskih Sestara.\(^8^6\) Established in 1903 by women of the Belgrade bourgeoisie, in the interwar years this association extended its network of local chapters to areas

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\(^8^1\) HAS, G4, Zapisnik XVIII. glavne godišnje skupštine Glavnog odbora društva Gajret u Sarajevu – Izvještaj Tajnika, reprinted in Gajret, no. 12–13 (1924): 189. Among the members of the female board of Sarajevo were Šemsa Čengić, Seadet Šarac, Fata H. Karić, Ema Lutvo, Šefika Bjelevac, while Hafiza Vajzović was the representative for Bosanski Šamac and Fata H. Smajlović, for Čajniče.

\(^8^2\) “Osnivanje Lijevnu Gajretojim Ženskim odborima,” Gajret, no. 7 (1929): 126.

\(^8^3\) HAS, G4, Izvještaj Glavnog odbora Gajret o radu u društvenoj godini 1930-1, reprinted in Gajret, no. 13 (1931): 320. Of 154 local branches (24 more than the previous year) and 190 delegations (77 more than the previous year) there were 16 local branches and 7 female delegations.

\(^8^4\) Kemura, Uloga Gajreta, 275.

\(^8^5\) HAS, G4, Zapisnik XXVI. redovne glavne godišnje skupštine društva Gajret, reprinted in Gajret, no. 10 (1932): 225.

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

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87 IAB, 1084, Drustvo “Kneginja Ljubica”, 76.98.48, Pozdrav srpkinjama-muslimankama (undated).
the different confessional and tribal segments of the Yugoslav population. A photograph published in 1928 in the association’s official journal, showing a Panslavic celebration organized in the Bosnian town of Travnik, is particularly illustrative of the association’s ambitions to foster ties between different segments of the female population of the new country. Kolo Srpskih Sestara was not unique in aspiring toward this: in the aftermath of the war, the press was unanimous in confirming that “without Yugoslav women, there would be no Yugoslavs at all.”

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

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

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

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

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92 Purivatra, Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija, 117.
93 Purivatra, Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija, 117.
94 Kemura, Značaj i uloga, 110.
95 For more specific information on the Peasant Party’s positions on women, see Suzana Leček, “‘Dosada se samo polovica hrvatskog naroda borila.’ Hrvatska seljačka stranka i žene (1918.–1941.),” Historijski zbornik 59 (2006): 93–130.
tian political history, the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina were considered to be “Croats of Muslim faith,” and Bosnia to be an integral part of the historic Kingdom of Croatia. The collaboration between Narodna Uzdanica and Croatian associations led to the formation of a local Narodna Uzdanica chapter in Zagreb as early as 1923. This local branch fulfilled a very special role in interwar Yugoslavia, somewhat comparable with the significance of Belgrade-based Gajret Osman Dikić for Gajret. First and foremost, the structure linked Narodna Uzdanica to the Croatian intellectual and political elite, and secondly it became a reference-point for the many Muslim students studying at the University of Zagreb. The exceptional nature of this society was also apparent in its organizational structure; unique in the landscape of Muslim cultural associations of the time, between 1927 and 1935 it was under the direction of a woman, Anka Dinagl-Domačinović, who was also the president of Hrvatska Žena.

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

96 Hrvoje Matković, Povijest Hrvatske seljačke stranke (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 1999), 114–27.
97 Zlatko Hasanbegović, Muslimani u Zagrebu 1878.-1945: doba utemeljenja (Zagreb: Medžišliš islamske zajednice u Zagrebu and Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2007), 91.
substitute intermediary between Belgrade and the Muslim population. The careers of Gajret’s leaders offer striking examples of this governmentalization: president Hasanbegović, after holding other administrative offices, became first lieutenant governor of the Drina Governorate, and subsequently a minister; Gajret’s vice-president Ibrahim Hadžiomerović succeeded him as lieutenant governor; Rebac, one of the leading figures of the Belgrade branch, was promoted to the administration of the Islamic religious foundations in Macedonia, and so on. Gajret’s pro-regime trajectory also remained prominent after 1931, when a simulacrum of parliamentary life was resumed. That year, the King authorized the formation of a unified party, the Yugoslav National Party (Jugoslavenska nacionalna stranka), led by many supporters of the old Radical Party, and which acted in close collaboration with the Court. At the government’s request, Gajret threw itself into popularizing the new party among Muslims, using the association’s local chapters to host rallies of the new party, thus making Gajret an organ of government propaganda. 100

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

A Missed Encounter? Muslim Women and the Feminist Movement

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

100 Kemura, Uloga Gajreta, 206.
ing in Belgrade the first umbrella organization in the country, the *Narodni ženski savez Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* (Popular Women’s Council of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes).¹⁰¹ By 1921, 205 women’s associations had joined the organizational network, making up a total of 50,000 activists throughout the country,¹⁰² and encompassing a wide spectrum of associations ranging from philanthropic to professional, from nationalist to open advocates of women’s suffrage. Soon after its foundation, the organizational network became affiliated with the first transnational women’s association, the Washington-based International Council of Women.¹⁰³ Although there were differing opinions on this issue within the *Narodni ženski savez*, the primary objective that dominated the initial efforts of the association was to have universal male and female suffrage included in the constitution of the new kingdom, and to this end, protests and conferences were organized in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Sarajevo.¹⁰⁴

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

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


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


¹⁰⁵ These differences within *Narodni ženski savez* would lead the women’s associations most hostile to the feminist agenda to pull out in 1926, and to the establishment of *Narodna ženska zajednica* (Popular Women’s Union), with an agenda essentially limited to philanthropy. Within this new coalition, which brought together over eighty associations throughout the country, the Serbian philanthropic association that had retained the most extensive female associational network in the country throughout the entire interwar period, *Kolo Srpskih Sestara*, played a particularly important role. Cf. Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 171.
their efforts were already publicly expressing their need for a separate organization, to more effectively wage their own battles. In May 1923, a group of associations mostly based in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade launched a new organizational network called Alijansa feminističkih društava u državi SHS (Alliance of the Feminist Associations of the State of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). As its name clearly indicated, the coalition explicitly adopted the agenda of the international feminist movement, affiliating with the International Woman Suffrage Alliance as its first act. The new coalition’s agenda centered, in addition to women’s right to vote in both political and administrative elections, around changes to the civil code concerning marriage law and inheritance, which penalized women, though to different degrees throughout the country. The associations that joined the coalition strove to effect profound changes in traditional customs that were seen to be patriarchal and antiquated, with the aim of achieving complete equality between men and women.

In Bosnia, the feminist association that was most able to gain a wider visibility was Društvo za prosvećivanje žene i zaštitu njenih prava (The Association for the Education of Woman and the Defense of her Rights), better known under the name of its official journal, Ženski Pokret. The organization had been founded in Belgrade in April 1919 by a group of teachers and journalists initially close to the Socialist Secretariat of Women’s Affairs, and a Ženski Pokret chapter was established in Sarajevo in September of the same year. The two associations had since the beginning participated together in the establishment of the pro-suffrage organization Alijansa feminističkih društava u državi SHS. Early on, the organization had some success in establishing chapters in the rest of the province; by late 1922, the association’s journal reported that the network had already expanded into Tuzla, Doboj,
Bijelina, Mostar, Prijedor and Zavidovići. However, compared with the enthusiasm of the Sarajevo-based feminist activists, the expansion of Ženski Pokret in Bosnia turned out to be a complicated task in the 1920s and 1930s; the response from Bosnian women was less enthusiastic than expected by the activists. The president of the association admitted in 1933 that: “Ženski Pokret Sarajevo also tried this year to extend its network into the province. Of the thirty women we wrote to... only two replied to our letter, and only to decline our offer.” However, the following year a Ženski Pokret chapter was established in the city of Banja Luka, and the association would become highly active in the second half of 1930s (see Chapter Seven).

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

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

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110 “Ženski pokret,” Ženski Pokret, no. 11–12 (1922): 351.
111 “Godišnja skupština Ženskog Pokreta u Sarajevu,” Ženski Pokret, no. 3 (1933): 36.
112 Vojinović, “Ženski pokret,” 113–24. According to Verica M. Stosić in her article “Pravila društva Ženski Pokret Bosanski Brod,” Glasnik udruženja arhivskih radnika Republike Srpske 2 (2010): 461–74, since 1934 there had also been a Ženski Pokret chapter in Bosanski Brod (northern Bosnia). However, a close reading of the association statutes shows that, despite their common name, this association was not a feminist one, but simply a philanthropic interfaith one.
autonomous but united to the Belgrade chapter by the same political agenda.\textsuperscript{114} The role of the association’s gazette, published in Belgrade but open to contributions from all activists, was to federate the various chapters.

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

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

\textsuperscript{115} Božinović, \textit{Žensko pitanje}, 115.
\textsuperscript{116} Rebac, “Pojava Muslimanke,” 25, editor’s note.
inists. The Ženski Pokret journal celebrated as an important victory this first trip by a Muslim woman outside of the communal space and the province, as a sign that Muslim women would soon rejoin the ranks of Yugoslav feminism. At the same time, the feminist paper underlined the different reactions that her presence provoked among non-Muslim activists; Rasema Bisić’s speech in Zagreb in 1920 was for many of the women present the first time they had seen a Muslim woman in real life.  

Despite this first contact, it does not seem that the Sarajevo branch of Ženski Pokret, nor those subsequently founded in the region, sparked the interest of Muslim women. Their ties to, and much less membership in, feminist associations remained extremely limited throughout the entire interwar period, except for a few isolated figures. As for the Sarajevo branch, there is no sign that a Muslim woman ever held office in the governing bodies of the association. According to the reports of the Sarajevo branch, during the 1920s only the aforementioned Rasema Bisić devoted her spare time to organizing literacy courses for poor women with Ženski Pokret.  

The only clue that suggests a Muslim woman can be traced back to the Sarajevo feminist association dates from 1928, when Nafija Baljak, another elementary school teacher, described herself as a member of Ženski Pokret in a letter to a newspaper. The Ženski Pokret chapter in Banja Luka, active since the early 1930s, counted only three female Muslim activists. The same is true for the Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena (Association of University Educated Women), an association for female university graduates that Neda Božinović ascribes to the feminist movement; even in this organization, active in Bosnia from 1933 to 1941, Muslim women appear to have been all but absent. In 1923 a non-Muslim activist from Ženski Pokret had already publicly lamented the difficulty of involving Muslim women in the association’s activities, due to their “fear” (bojažljivost) of public activities: “Try to involve them in a somewhat larger project, that forces them to step

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117 Rebac, “Pojava Muslimanke,” 25.
outside of their homes and take a public stance,” the activist wrote “and immediately they will tell you: ‘No, No!—We can’t do that... such a project will never succeed.’”

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

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

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

**Gospodice and Hanume, Fathers and Husbands**

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

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

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126 ABiH, FG, 2, MŽPG Stolac to GOG (1921, undated).
127 ABiH, FG, 10, 3517, ŽMPG Tešanj to GOG (August 13, 1931).
128 ABiH, FG, 10, 2247, MPG Tešanj to GOG (June 28, 1931).
129 Božinović, Žensko pitanje, 70–4.
If we again take Osvitanje as an example, in the association’s ranks were: Halida and Hafa Šahinagić, respectively the daughter and daughter-in-law of Avdo Šahinagić, one of the province’s most prominent merchants; Remzija Dugalić, the wife of Asim beg Dugalić, an insurance executive; Şehzada Bašagić from the family of Safvet beg Bašagić, the well-known landowner and writer; Esma Spaho, from the family of Mehmed and Fehim Spaho, the former director of the Sarajevo Chamber of Commerce and subsequently secretary of the JMO, and the latter the future Reis-ul-ulema; Şemsə Čengić, from a renowned Sarajevo Muslim family of landowners, and so forth. As can be seen from this example, a significant number of the Muslim bourgeoisie rapidly joined the teachers in volunteer initiatives. Muslim women from prominent families also entered Muslim cultural associations such as Gajret and Narodna Uzdanica. This latter group differed from the first not only in terms of class, but also in terms of where they had received their education, and what kind. While the teachers had been educated in state schools—the Habsburg and later the Yugoslav Female Teachers’ Schools—the women from wealthy families had been able to count on an education provided usually within the domestic sphere. Some of these women had benefitted from tutors and private teachers. Hafa Šahinagić, first secretary of the Gajret female branch in Sarajevo, had for instance received her education from a private French tutor. A second, more informal method was through male family members studying abroad, and the wealth of goods and knowledge they brought home with them in the summer when they returned from the universities of Europe. It is by means of this wealth—even in the literal sense!—of books, newspapers, clothing, and photographs that these Muslim women received an education and took up new habits and lifestyles without having ever left Bosnia or the domestic sphere.130

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

130 In terms of the education of women in wealthy Muslim families, we come up against an almost complete lack of reliable documents and prior research. Carried out entirely within the limits of the domestic sphere, the education of these women has left almost no trace in the archives of associations or institutions, and not even in personal archives. In writing this section, I drew from informal interviews conducted in Sarajevo in July of 2010 – with Zulejha Merhemić and Zulejha Ribanović, the descendants of Hafa Šahinagić, elected the first president of the Gajret female branch in Sarajevo in 1921, and with Jasmina Cvjetić in Mostar, the descendant of several female members of the local chapter of Merhamet in the late 1930s.
experience, had involved both groups—from 1921 the former mostly rallied around cultural associations, while the latter remained predominant in philanthropic associations. It is no coincidence that Osvitanje, born of unitary and non-partisan ambitions, after the establishment of female Gajret branches (1921) and Narodna Uzdanica (1923) in Sarajevo, lost its most dynamic members and rapidly ceased to be active. While the cultural associations had a mostly varied sociological profile—teachers, students, women from the emerging middle class, wives of state officials, members of landowning families—philanthropic associations remained almost exclusively the domain of wealthy women. If we look at the profiles of the female members of the Sarajevo chapter of the philanthropic association Merhamet from 1931, we can see that this philanthropic association was composed predominantly of married women, probably more advanced in years than those involved in cultural associations, from rich Muslim families of “landowners, ulema and the professional milieu.” The intelligentsia was strikingly absent from the philanthropic associations. The only exception seems to have been the couple of writers Nafija and Šemsudin Sarajlić, who were often involved with Merhamet in Sarajevo. However, Nafija, who had been the first pre-war Muslim female writer, seems to have ceased her writing activities. According to some sources, she abandoned the pen following the death of her son, and by the interwar period had already withdrawn from public life.

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

131 Its members migrated toward the two cultural-national associations, and by the late 1920s—if we exclude a failed attempt to revive it in 1934—it was no longer in operation.
132 Bavčić, Merhamet, 37.
133 HAS, M9, 8, Tajnički izvještaj društva “Merhamet” za 1932. godinu (January 21, 1933).
134 For this information, see Chapter Two, footnote 95.
Figure 17: *Gajret*’s female chapter in Bihać, 1921.
(Sarajevo: Glavni odbor Gajreta, 1928), 115.

Figure 18: *Merhamet*’s female chapter in Trebinje, late 1930s or early 1940s.
Source: courtesy of Jasmina Cvjetić.
in most cases a veil is draped over their hair. Other elements of the composition are interesting as well, such as the carpets on the floor and Islamic calligraphy hanging on the background wall. The Muslimness of these two groups of activists, completely invisibilized in the first picture, is on the contrary very tangible in the second one.

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

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

135 Kemura, Uloga Gajreta, 277.
wife of Mehmed Spaho, leader of the JMO. It is important to highlight the extent to which women’s access to the public space through the associations was rarely achieved uniquely on their own initiative. On the contrary, more often than not a woman’s path toward membership in an association began under the careful guidance of her husband or father, or less often, of her brother. It is therefore possible to identify within the life of the associations recurring male-female relationships, both of the father-daughter and husband-wife variety. As evidence of the importance of these family relationships, and more specifically of couples, some activists are listed in official communications as “wife of”; this was true of the Merhamet association in Sarajevo, where appellations such as “hanuma Memnuna of Mr. Mutevelić,” “Halida of Doctor Bakarević” or “hanuma Fatima of Doctor Hadžikadić” were quite frequent in internal documents. In some isolated cases a wife and husband were involved in different organizations, but nearly always in outlying areas, not in Sarajevo. For example, the secretary of the Gajret branch in Ključ was also a member of Narodna Uzdanica, and the wife of a Narodna Uzdanica commissioner was in turn the local commissioner of the Gajret branch. This says something about the difference between Sarajevo, where the central branches of the two rival, politicized, and deeply antagonistic associations were located, and the smaller towns, where political and national differences were less pronounced and where the recreational and cultural aspects of these associations prevailed over political and national agendas.

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

136 Kemura, Uloga Gajreta, 110.
137 HAS, M9, 8, Tajnički izvještaj društva “Merhamet” za 1932. godinu (January 21, 1933).
138 Kemura, Značaj i uloga, 123.
139 Kemura, Značaj i uloga, 123.
decided to send all his offspring—one son and four daughters—to school. The picture (most probably a photomontage) associated with the text stages two different generations of progressive Muslims; at the very center, posing as the patriarch of the family, there is old Midžić himself, wearing a fez and mustache like a late-Ottoman gentleman. Arranged behind him, in a circle, his young son wears glasses, the daughters show off their short hair, v-necklines, and smiling faces. The message is clear: “awareness and understanding for the schooling of our Muslim women,” as the title states, produces stable, modern and even happy families (see figure 19).140

Figure 19: The paternalist emancipation.

140 “Lijep primjer svijesti i razumijevanja prema školovanju naše muslimanke,” Gajret, no. 3 (1938): 56.
Even more telling is a 1931 article published in the same paper, celebrating an activist couple from the city of Mostar, Salih and Fatima Ćišić (see figure 20).

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

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

**Between Self-Initiative and Cooptation**

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

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142 “Portreti gajretovih radnika,” 299.
143 “Portreti gajretovih radnika,” 299.
144 “Portreti gajretovih radnika,” 299.
from women of other faiths who were already experimenting with associational work. For the same reason, even in situations where Muslim women appear to have been more passive in the formation of local female branches, we cannot exclude the possibility that these women had previously and informally expressed a desire to come together and form an association, a desire that the documents, in most cases formal exchanges between men, do not take into account. Despite the limits of the available sources, it is possible to identify a dominant modality in the processes that brought about the encounter between Muslim women and the associational phenomenon between 1919 and 1941.

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

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

145 ABiH, FG, 2, MŽPG Stolac to GOG (1921, undated).
146 "Osnivanje pododbora u Stocu," Gajret, no. 6 (1928): 95.
147 ABiH, FG, 10, 2247, MPG Tešanj to GOG (June 28, 1931).
Contact between the (aspiring) female activists at a local level and the leaders of the associations was thus not direct, but mediated by the existing male branches. For example, the Gajret female chapter of Bihać, the third largest in the province, seems to have been set up in 1928 on the initiative of local male activists. Based on a summary of the meeting minutes of the local branch, it appears that the local male activists discussed the possibility of forming a local female chapter. At the same time, however, reference is made to a Gajret party held for women (gajretova ženska zabava)—which suggests that separate gatherings for men and women were still being organized in the late 1920s!—during which the women supposedly independently discussed the creation of a female chapter. According to the available information, it therefore seems that rather more complex forces lay behind the formation of the female chapter; the women discussed the matter at a party reserved solely for them, whereas the local male branch discussed it at an official meeting and formally communicated the request to the central branch. Needless to say, according to this second method, the relationship between the women of the provinces and the central authorities of an association, at least in the initial phase, relied on the mediation of men.

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

148 “Gajretov ženski pododbor u Bihaću,” Gajret, no. 11 (1928): 175.
149 ABiH, PDS II, Halka Hasanbegović.
150 ABiH, FG, 9, 1815, MZPG Tuzla to GOG (June 16, 1930).
tude to the podbanica and “honorary president Doctor Halka Hasanbegović, thanks to whose initiative our association was founded.”151

In the early 1930s, when the royal dictatorship was at its most severe, another woman was striving, in Sarajevo as well as the provinces, to bring Muslim women together in the more and more openly pro-Serbian and pro-government Gajret association: Vida Čubrilović.152 A ministerial official, Čubrilović is, for example, mentioned as the promoter of the Gajret female branch in Rogatica, a town near Sarajevo, which had managed to recruit 70 Muslim women by early October 1931.153 An activist of Fidaka, the female branch of the Muslim association Budućnost in Banja Luka, and of Narodni ženski savez, Čubrilović was one of the most active figures, in the press and at an organizational level, in working toward the pro-Serbian nationalization of Muslim women.

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

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

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

151 ABiH, FG, 9, 1815.
152 ABiH, PDS II, Vida Čubrilović.
153 ABiH, FG, 10, 4069, MŽPG Rogatica to GOG (October 6, 1931).
154 ABiH, FG, 8, 665, MŽPG Tuzla to GOG (undated).
155 ABiH, FG, 8, 665.
gressives and conservatives alike. Especially in the aftermath of the war, Muslim men had shown a great deal of institutional creativity in including women in the work of the associations, and in particular in allowing them to participate in the decision-making process. Osvitanje in Sarajevo appears to have been the association that afforded activists the greatest amount of autonomy; its president was a woman, its board of directors was composed of women, and the decisions were made by women. However, even this association maintained an Oversight Board whose members included men; both religious authorities and the husbands of the activists themselves. In the absence of specific records for this association, it is not possible to know whether this male oversight committee had a significant role in its activities.\(^{156}\)

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

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

\(^{156}\) Kujačić, “Osvitanje,” 147.
\(^{157}\) ABiH, ZV2, 18/26/29, Statute of Muslimanska ženska zadruga (1919, undated), 7–8.
\(^{158}\) ABiH, ZV2, 18/26/29, Statute, 12.
form of control over them, thereby limiting their agency. In the provinces, however, the problem lay more often in the very visibility of women within the association, which was considered to be in flagrant violation of the rules of segregation between the sexes. The Muslim philanthropic association *Bratstvo* (The Brotherhood) in Gornji Šeher, a predominantly Muslim village only a few kilometers from Banja Luka, offers a particularly telling case of a Muslim male elite torn between the desire to integrate women into the associational workforce, while still preserving some form of segregation. The statutes of the association approved in 1929 did allow Muslim women to join its ranks, but at the same time decreed that “Muslim women do not have the right to participate in the assembly, nor to be elected to the boards of directors; they can send their vote by [written] mandate, drawn up in the presence of two witnesses.”¹⁵⁹ A unique case, this statute reveals the contradictory injunctions burdening the Muslim elite of the time, and the unresolved tensions between female segregation and participation in associational work.

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

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

¹⁶⁰ HAS, M9, 8, *Pravilnik o poslovanju ženskog odbora muslimanskog dobrotvornog društva Merhamet u Sarajevu*. The articles were approved by the central branch of the association on January 21, 1933.
creased progressively in the 1930s, this model of relations between male and female activists in the Muslim philanthropic associations was never called into question.

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

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

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

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

162 *Gajret*, to be more precise, provided for *pododbori*, or local “sub-branches,” while *Narodna Uzdanica* maintained *odbori*, “branches.” The difference was, however, purely a matter of terminology.
activists of Gajret or of Narodna Uzdanica. The only attempt to include female representation in the central branch can be credited to Gajret. In fact, following the reform of its statutes in 1929, the association had made provisions for a woman to be admitted into its central decision-making body, to represent its female membership. At the association’s annual assembly the following year, it was proposed that aforementioned Halka Hasanbegović, be nominated as representative of the association’s female component. Hasanbegović’s greatest merit was not only her status as Gajret activist but especially... as the wife of the president, Avdo Hasanbegović. The proposition was rejected by Hasanbegović himself, who stated that he would prefer to consult with the female chapters, rather than impose a nomination from above.  


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

Source: Gajret, no. 12 (1931): 369.
making had been removed,\textsuperscript{164} and was not proposed again, even under subsequent reforms.\textsuperscript{165}

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

\textsuperscript{164} HAS, G4, \textit{Gajret Statutes} (1932): 12.
\textsuperscript{165} Kemura, \textit{Uloga Gajreta}, 266.
In a few cases, Muslim female activists vocally expressed their frustration over their marginal position in associational life, especially when more political issues were at stake. One example of this comes from the aforementioned Gajret female chapter in Tuzla, founded in 1929 and extremely dynamic in the early 1930s, when it counted over 160 members. The chapter’s activities in its first year were impressive, and by far exceeded those of its male counterpart. The activists organized benefits and public lessons on children’s education, collaborated with other local women’s associations, and founded a home economics school for girls. The chapter was particularly efficient at fundraising; at just one event, the activists were able to collect the enormous sum of 34,000 dinars. It was perhaps at this very moment, when the local women’s circle began to realize the importance of its contributions, that it introduced an interesting change to the terminology in its official communications; as early as 1930, it addressed the local branch as the local *male* branch, placing itself on an equal footing. Curiously, the male activists seem to have accepted this terminological leveling imposed by the female activists, going so far as to add the adjective “male” in neat type beside their letterhead. The visit of the president of the association Hasanbegović to Tuzla in 1932, however, was to put the female activists back in their place. A letter from the president of the female branch, written to the Central Branch, reveals that the female activists were not even invited to participate in the official meeting. “Not only did they not invite us, but they went so far as to keep the visit hidden from us.” Despite this, the president of the local female branch decided to go to the meeting in any case, “in order to see the president and give my regards to him independently.” However, this attempt at insubordination ended with frustration: “I was finally admitted to attend the assembly, but only alone, and unprepared thanks to our brothers’ lack of chivalry [*nekavalirstvo*], and I gave a clumsy speech…”

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

171 ABiH, FG, 9, 1815, MŽPG Tuzla to GOG (June 16, 1930).
172 ABiH, FG, 9, 3814, MŽPG Tuzla to MPG Tuzla (December 9, 1930).
173 ABiH, FG, 12, 1485, MŽPG Tuzla to GOG (June 10, 1932).
174 ABiH, FG, 12, 1485, MZPG Tuzla to GOG (June 10, 1932).
visible in the Bosnian public space: a first group of Muslim women, mostly composed of teachers and students, engaged in volunteering activities. The forms of sisterhood tested in theory in their writing before the Great War started to become a reality in 1919, and took the form of different kinds of activities. For the entire interwar period, it seems that the Muslim communal space was considered by Muslim women to be the most appropriate one for their engagement: city-based philanthropic associations of Islamic inspiration, or Muslim cultural organizations were the places where female engagement converged. However, the communitarization of volunteering was not total. As we have seen, being a member of Gajret and Narodna Uzdanica meant in many cases interacting on a regular basis with Orthodox and Catholic women in the name of national solidarity, thus pushing Muslim women beyond the perimeter of their community space. Across the fence, feminist associations, which appeared in Bosnia immediately after the war, and who openly called for full political rights, do not seem to have succeeded in involving a significant number of Muslim women in their ranks. As we have seen, each kind of association developed its own discourse on Muslim women, and legitimized their access to volunteering—and by extension, to the public space—by resorting to different keywords: Muslim solidarity, national solidarity, female solidarity. Beyond the various discourses, the experience of Muslim women in these different types of voluntary associations presented a common trait: they were substantially excluded from associational decision-making processes.

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