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**Muslim women in Sarajevo: An empirical study of self-  
positioning, narrating faith, and everyday practice**

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**Franziska Singer**

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## **Muslim women in Sarajevo: An empirical study of self-positioning, narrating faith, and everyday practice**

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Central question

When I first visited Sarajevo, I completely fell in love with it. I remember a particular afternoon where I was sitting in a café in the old town, next to the old synagogue. At noon, I had heard the *ezan* and the church bells blend, creating a soundtrack to match what I was seeing now. On the menu of the mixed-gender café there was both traditional coffee served in a tiny shining pot and cappuccino. Around me I could see many women enjoying one or the other type of coffee—some veiled, some unveiled, some blond, some dark. This scene went against the narratives I had heard so often in Germany. Like baklava with Nutella, which you can also find in Sarajevo's old town, there is a delicious mix to be found in Bosnia-Herzegovina's capital. It is precisely these clichés of 'East' and 'West' that come together in this city and make up its fascination; this juxtaposition and superimposition, often as contrastingly drawn images, make taking a closer look worthwhile.

The central question of this book is how twenty- to thirty-five-year-old Muslim working women and students in Sarajevo live their faith in everyday life, what their religious practice looks like, and what role the value of being a good person and free choice play in their self-positioning. The result of almost two years of in-depth fieldwork, a range of interviews with many different women, and a comprehensive literature review, the work offers new insights into the topic of identity construction and Muslim religious practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although situated in South Eastern Europe, specifically in the city of Sarajevo, the dissertation is also relevant further afield, specifically in Western Europe, where an opposition between 'Islam' and 'Europe' is often perceived and constructed.

Challenging the idea of Islam as the Other, as a backward, non-European religion, this work draws upon qualitative research to analyse the self-positioning of young Muslim women in Sarajevo. In doing so, it presents an alternative, if not singular view, describing how a 'European Islam' is lived that completely contradicts stereotypes commonly-held in Western Europe. A key point of inquiry is whether being a Muslim is increasingly in the foreground of identity formation and is understood transnationally and how the idea of being

a good person is given priority over strictly following the rules of Islam. This can also provide insights for the debate on the role of Islam in the rest of Europe.

Although the city of Sarajevo is located in Europe, it also has many connections to other countries with a predominantly Muslim population and is often imagined as a multi-religious city by inhabitants and visitors alike. On a first visit, and again and again after a prolonged absence, it is noticeable that Islam, as it is practised here by many, seems to be easily compatible with a European identity. How this complex facet of identity of 'being European' is perceived by Muslim women in Sarajevo will be further unpacked below.

In Sarajevo, one witnesses a specifically European facet of Islam, an Islam that that does not stem from relatively recent migration but which has resided on the European continent for centuries uninterrupted. It is based on the Yugoslav socialist and Ottoman past. These historical influences are still relevant today in different ways, informing both identity and religious practice. Ethno-religious divisions as practical categories were introduced in the Ottoman era and were reproduced during socialism. Both periods are seen by Sarajevo's people now as a golden time, albeit in various ways. A substantial difference to Istanbul is the location in the relative periphery of the Ottoman Empire, the history as part of Austro-Hungary and the background in socialist, mixed-religious Yugoslavia. The focus of this research is on women living in Sarajevo who are explicitly religious, identify themselves with Islam, and participate in working life or in life at higher educational institutions, such as universities.

The self-positioning of these women is forged in the private sphere as well as in public life at work or university. With 'self-positioning', I describe the phenomenon by which these women negotiate their role in larger contexts, be it religious, political, societal, or cultural. As a result of these diverse spheres, there are various moments of negotiation which can be observed and reflected in conversations. The boundaries the women draw to delineate their identity are positioned against a variety of diverse Others. One dominant religious identification in the region is that described in terms of ethnicity: 'Muslim' is an ethnic marker, which in Bosnia-Herzegovina is often used (along with the word Bosniak) in contrast to Serbs (denoting the Eastern Orthodox religious affiliation) and Croats (denoting Catholics). This ethno-religious affiliation is for

example reflected in the country's political power-sharing arrangements and is often discernible through one's name. More on the ethno-religious complex can be found in the next chapter.

However, more importantly, Muslim believers, as those in my study all self-identified, differentiate themselves from cultural Muslims, or 'Muslims by name'. Muslim believers are also a diverse group in the country, as various forms of Islam can be found in Bosnia. There is the dominant, officially organised way of the Islamic Community, but there are also Salafis influenced by Arab states, as well as the Sufi Order and groups or individuals independent of any institution. Some more details can be found below.

Sarajevo, is imagined as multi-religious and multi-ethnic by inhabitants and outsiders alike. This makes the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where people of different origins, traditions, and political orientations meet, particularly suitable as a field of investigation. In this cultural, political, and religious centre, the processes of negotiation and interdependence can be analysed in a concentrated way. This project is furthermore of great importance because these European Muslim women, the inhabitants of Sarajevo I focus on, have identities that are often seen as contradictory. The mere existence of the Muslims of Sarajevo is thus a focal point for debates on Europe and religion. Europe is regarded as largely secular, and yet as undeniably Christian, especially in contrast to Islam. In Sarajevo, the way Islam is practiced within the geography of Europe is analysed by examining how these women both identify themselves and demarcate themselves in words and actions.

In order to analyse whether these women's self-positioning varies in different contexts, I considered diverse variables, such as gender relations, families, social networks, and everyday working life. In addition, local traditions and international influences were evaluated on the basis of mosque attendance, eating habits, clothing, and holidays. The consideration of demarcations on the one hand and identifications on the other hand was useful because the approach from two sides enabled a sharper picture to be gained of the self-positioning of young Muslim women in Sarajevo. By demarcation I mean the view of what one is not, of drawing a boundary against an Other and finding a position through the negation. While this can also build identification, by

identification I generally mean the positive view of what one is, including oneself in a group and positioning oneself as part of it.

An essential question and primary goal of my research is to characterise how these women practice Islam in their day-to-day life, which includes descriptive, ethnographic sections from which analytical results can be drawn. I focus on the particular aspects of religious life and practice that emerged as the most salient topics during my field work, using an approach inspired by the sociological methodology of grounded theory. Although the analysis is developed against the background of key theoretical debates, including on global, de-ethnicised Islam, Balkanism, and Bosnian Islam, my research is largely driven by empirical data collected in the field.

Due to the discipline in which this work is situated, study of religions, and the necessity of focusing any work, the analysis of day-to-day life will mainly centre around religion, faith and practice. However, it is important to keep in mind that while the women I spoke to are Muslims and Europeans, they are also mountain climbers, wives, people who like to cook or don't like to cook, introverts and extroverts. Thus, I would like to stress that my aim is not to reduce them to one facet of their identity. Even when looking at the identity of 'Muslim', this encompasses several facets and layers, particularly in the context of Bosnia-Herzegovina. As my research demonstrates, the category of Muslim can be a religious, political, cultural, and/or ethnic identity. In this work, I prioritise the personal believer identity over the collective 'ethnic' identity as it is often used in Bosnia-Herzegovina, particularly as the women I spoke to often juxtaposed and contrasted these two categories.

Overall, I focus on the self-positioning of twenty- to thirty-five-year-old Muslim women in Sarajevo, all of whom work or attend an institution of higher education. I examine how these women practice religion, how faith features in their day-to-day life and in particular how they value free choice and being a good person. The next section looks at what the current state of research is, on whose shoulders I stand, and where I am adding height myself.

## 1.2 Current state of research

Examining how young Muslim women in Sarajevo construct their identities and practice their faith is a rich and interdisciplinary topic for which I could draw on a range of literature. This book contributes via an empirical perspective from South Eastern Europe to debates from various topics, including Europe and religion, social change, identity construction, post-socialism, and processes of interdependence and globalisation. The research comes from a number of disciplines, including history, sociology, Islamic theology, political science and anthropology, each using their own (sometimes the same) methods and with discipline-specific questions.

This study presents a wealth of new empirical data from fieldwork, specifically with young Muslim women in Sarajevo. The work I drew on in the process of preparing for and executing my research is presented below, beginning with that structured around Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, then that literature focused on the country more generally, European Muslims and finally other literature dealing with Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Balkans more generally. One crucial point to note is that although my work borrows from multiple disciplines, one field I don't draw from much is theology, as the questions discussed there are quite different in focus both from study of religions more generally and from my work, which rather centres around identity formation and religious practice.

### 1.2.1 Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina

The existing research closest to my work is that around Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which exists in a number of disciplines. More than ten years ago, it was established by Dubravka Zarkov that the conceptualisation of women as victims is central to both academic writing and activism in the region.<sup>1</sup> For the most part this is still the case, and here the project presents a counterpoint by focusing on the self-positioning of women actors today.

There are several exceptions to this tendency to frame female actors as victims, particularly when focusing on Muslim women of faith. One such work is the

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<sup>1</sup> Dubravka Zarkov, 'Feminism and the Disintegration of Yugoslavia: On the Politics of Gender and Ethnicity', *Social Development Issues* 24, no. 3 (2002).

2012 study on Muslim, female, and feminist identities in Bosnia and Kosovo by Zilka Spahić-Šiljak.<sup>2</sup> My study complements this work by including everyday practice and focusing not only on prominent activists, but also on various female students and working women. Three other authors have published notable articles that cover a field close to mine. Julianne Funk, a peace researcher, focused on hijab-wearing as one of two public expressions of lived faith and particularly emphasizes the double role of religion as something personal and public in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>3</sup> Alenka Bartulović, a cultural anthropologist, focused on gender relations and the various facets that influence women's religious understanding, such as theological interpretations, Bosnia-Herzegovina's socialist legacy, and education.<sup>4</sup> Andreja Mesarič also is an anthropologist, looks at hijab and dating; overall her sample is narrower and more conservative.<sup>5</sup> The results of Funk, Bartulović, and Mesarič are largely reproduced in my analysis; where I come to different conclusions, I point it out in the relevant sections. Overall, in contrast to these three works, my study takes a more comprehensive approach, by on one hand including a range of believers, even those that don't wear hijab, and on the other looking at many different facets of belief and practice.

Several other publications which I don't refer to as much also cover Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their area does not map as closely to what I am examining compared to the work of Funk, Mesarič, and Bartulović, and as such, I did not reference them as heavily. In her PhD thesis from 2013, completed within Women Studies, Sanja Bilic compares Bosnian and UK

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<sup>2</sup> Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, ed. *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo* (Sarajevo: Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies, University of Sarajevo, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Julianne Funk, 'Public Expressions of Bosnian Muslim Religiosity and Lived Faith: The Cases of Friday Prayer and Hijab', in *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity*, ed. Arolda Elbasani Olivier Roy (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Alenka Bartulović, 'Islam and Gender in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina: Competing Discourses and Everyday Practices of Muslim Women', in *Gender (In)equality and Gender Politics in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Christine Hassenstab and Sabrina P. Ramet (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Andreja Mesarič, "Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', *Nationalities Papers* 45, no. 4 (2017); Ibid., 'Muslim Women's Dress Practices in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Localizing Islam through Everyday Lived Practice', in *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity*, ed. Arolda Elbasani Olivier Roy (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015); Ibid., 'Wearing Hijab in Sarajevo: Dress Practices and the Islamic Revival in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 22, no. 2 (2013).

Muslim women.<sup>6</sup> Although attempts were made to distil relevant points of the Muslim identity of her participants and she offers an interesting insider perspective, the work unfortunately was limited by its lack of distance and uncritical reproduction of narratives from the field. The works of Elissa Helms, in Gender Studies, have dealt mainly with women's non-governmental organisations in the post-Yugoslav region.<sup>7</sup> Since non-governmental organisations were very much promoted as civil society actors, especially in the post-war period, and influenced the perception of gender and religious relations, her works constituted necessary background knowledge for analysing change and networks in the scope of my study. However, Helms doesn't focus on individual faith nor the self-perception of women.

Tone Bringa's *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way* does not explicitly focus on women, but the book does contain a wealth of material about them.<sup>8</sup> Based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in a village before the Bosnian War of 1992–1995, the subject differs quite a bit from urban Sarajevo of the mid-2010s, where I collected my data. From Đermana Šetas research, I was able to build on publications about women in the formal Islamic Community and on living and working with hijab.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas the above works focus on religious practice today and are generally contemporaneous with my own research, there are various studies on the history of women in Bosnia that have also helped enormously in the execution

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<sup>6</sup> Sanja Bilic, 'Muslim Women in the UK and Bosnia: Religious Identities in Contrasting Contexts' (PhD, University of York, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Elissa Helms, 'The "Nation-ing" of Gender? Donor Policies, Islam, and Women's NGOs in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 21, no. 2 (2003); *Ibid.*, 'Bosnian Girl; Nationalism and innocence through images of women', in *Retracing Images: Visual Culture after Yugoslavia*, ed. Slobodan Karamanić and Daniel Šuber (Leiden: Brill, 2012); *Ibid.*, 'Gendered Visions of the Bosnian Future: Women's Activism and Representation in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina' (PhD, University of Pittsburgh, 2003); *Ibid.*, 'Women as Agents of Ethnic Reconciliation? Women's NGOs and International Intervention in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', *Women's Studies International Forum* 26, no. 1 (2003); *Ibid.*, 'The gender of coffee: Women and reconciliation initiatives in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 57 (2010).

<sup>8</sup> Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and Augustus Richard Norton, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Đermana Šeta, 'Uloga i pozicija žena u Islamskoj Zajednici u Bosni i Hercegovini', in *Žena u džamiji : prilozi za razumijevanje njene pozicije, uloge i doprinosa*, ed. Sehija Dedović (Sarajevo: Centar za edukaciju i istraživanje "Nahla", 2018); *Ibid.*, *Zašto marama? Bosanskohercegovačke muslimanke o životu i radu pod maramom* (Sarajevo: Centar za napredne studije : Centar za interdisciplinarnе postdiplomske studije, 2011).

of this dissertation. Such works tend to mostly focus on politics and the women's movement in Bosnia. This scope is relevant to my own research because it allowed for the lines of development and change to be identified. Above all, the ideas of the works described below aided me in understanding the historical background of the people in my sample: although my work focuses on data from the mid-late 2010s, knowledge of the history of the region was vital.

Fabio Giomi looks at the period of 1878–1941 and the role of voluntary associations for Muslim women in Bosnia in the post-Ottoman period.<sup>10</sup>

Nadina Grebović-Lendo gives an overview of women's associations of the 20th century.<sup>11</sup> The role during socialism and the discrepancies between the official government line and practice can be based on the research of Chiara Bonfiglioli.<sup>12</sup> Obrad Kesic deals with gender images before and during the war.<sup>13</sup> He also points out the problem of reproducing images, which can arise when researchers always question the same people and reproduce answers too uncritically.

### 1.2.2 Bosnia generally

There are many publications in different disciplines that have Sarajevo or Bosnia-Herzegovina as a topic without being focused on women or Islam that nonetheless I draw on in my work. They either offer important background or work on an area that overlaps with what I do.

In study of religions, the largest body of work on Bosnia-Herzegovina in German-language academia is that of Zrinka Štimac, whose work focuses on

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<sup>10</sup> Fabio Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European. Voluntary Associations, Gender and Islam in post-Ottoman Bosnia and Yugoslavia, 1878-1941* (Budapest: Central European Univeristiy Press, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Nadina Grebović-Lendo. "On the Trail of Female Activism..." Nahla - Centar za edukaciju i istraživanje, <http://english.nahla.ba/tekstovi10.aspx?tid=213>, (accessed 2.3.2013).

<sup>12</sup> Chiara Bonfiglioli, 'Becoming citizens: the politics of women's emancipation in socialist Yugoslavia', *Citizenship for Southeast Europe* (2012), <http://www.citsee.eu/citsee-story/becoming-citizens-politics-women%E2%80%99s-emancipation-socialist-yugoslavia>, accessed 7.1.2013.

<sup>13</sup> Obrad Kesic, 'Women and Gender Imagery in Bosnia: Amazons, Sluts, Victims, Witches, and Wombs', in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*, ed. Sabrina Ramet (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1999).

religious education in the region, particularly by using schoolbooks.<sup>14</sup> Internationally, Milica Bakić-Hayden is an author who I refer to extensively; her theoretical concept of 'nesting orientalism' proved particularly useful for my work.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, Sofia Garcia and Bronwyn Kotzen look at how spatial and political structures interact with memory, an approach I found relevant both for how people experience Sarajevo and also how the city interacts in turn with their identity.<sup>16</sup>

While I draw on a wealth of historical work, cited in detail in the second chapter, here are some that proved particularly relevant for this dissertation. They are summarized briefly below.

Holm Sundhaussen's 2014 *Sarajevo: Die Geschichte einer Stadt* elaborates on the history of the city over more than 400 pages.<sup>17</sup> Offering a wealth of details, the volume serves as a reference work for a specific moment in history. At the other end of the spectrum is Noel Malcolm's *Bosnia: A Short History*, which, although published just after the war, in 1996, nonetheless offers quite a balanced view of the contested history of Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>18</sup> An even wider view is offered by Marie-Janine Calic, who analysed the history of the whole of Yugoslavia in her 2010 work.<sup>19</sup>

Another discipline that offered interesting insights to my own research is anthropology. As I also conduct qualitative research and am interested in deep understanding of specific fields rather than a large historical overview, the methodologies and research concerns of anthropology are often close to my interest. A difference between anthropology and this work is that my focus is not so much on further developing theoretical understanding, but rather on presenting tangible insights based on empirical data. One particularly influential

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<sup>14</sup> Zrinka Štimac, *Kampf um Deutungsmacht: Religion und Bildung in Bosnien und Herzegowina 1994-2008* ed. Udo Tworuschka, vol. 3, Studien und Dokumentationen zur Praktischen Religionswissenschaft (Berlin: LIT Verlag Dr.W.Hopf, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Milica Bakić-Hayden, 'Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia', *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995).

<sup>16</sup> Sofia Garcia and Bronwyn Kotzen, 'Reconstructing Sarajevo: Negotiating Socio-Political Complexity', in *Department of Sociology, City Studio* (London School of Economics & Political Science, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Holm Sundhaussen, *Sarajevo: Die Geschichte einer Stadt* (Wien Köln Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (London: Papermac, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Marie-Janine Calic, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens* (München: C.H.Beck, 2018 (2010)).

anthropological account is that of Ivana Maček, which describes Sarajevo during the siege.<sup>20</sup> Her captivating style is inspiring, and the content offers a crucial insight into the period of occupation and, particularly relevant to me, how ethnicity, national identity, and political violence interacted in the war. Other useful anthropological texts that have focused on Bosnia-Herzegovina include the work of Stef Jansen, both that which he authored alone or in collaboration, as well as several by authors listed below, who work more specifically on Islam or Muslims in Bosnia.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, for more general current issues, I draw upon newspaper articles and other media. Often, these sources serve as a verification of things that occurred or phenomena I observed or heard about while in the field.

### 1.2.3 European Muslims

When starting this research, I was very interested in the idea of the Muslim women in Sarajevo being 'European Muslims'; however, eventually this focus changed. On the one hand, the data showed that for the women themselves the category of 'being European' was not very salient, and for many of them, such a label was simply altogether uninteresting. On the other hand, I noticed that several phenomena that had been identified analysed in the Muslim diaspora, such as that in Germany, also appeared in Bosnia-Herzegovina in a non-diasporic context. This is a new contribution from my research and thus something I explore in more detail. Following Martin Baumann, diaspora is defined as "any migrant people living in a new country that retain their religious practices, beliefs, and communal life"<sup>22</sup> ODER "diaspora consists of a perpetual recollecting identification with a fictitious or faraway existent geographic territory and its cultural-religious traditions" p.461 . Regarding work on various Muslim diaspora communities, the literature I draw on the most here is are

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<sup>20</sup> Ivana Maček, *Sarajevo Under Siege: Anthropology in Wartime* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Stef Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime. 'Normal Lives' and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2018); Stef Jansen, Čarna Brković, and Vanja Čelebičić, 'Introduction: New Ethnographic Perspectives on Mature Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina', in *Negotiating Social Relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina-Semiperipheral Entanglements*, ed. Čarna Brković Stef Jansen, Vanja Čelebičić (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Baumann 456

Synnøve Bendixsen, Sigrid Nökel and Nilüfer Göle.<sup>23</sup> Olivier Roy must also be mentioned in this context, as his seminal work *Globalized Islam* addresses questions that pertain to the Muslim diaspora on a wide geographic scale, with a focus on Western Europe.<sup>24</sup>

From study of religions I have used the work of Paula Schrode and Verena Maske, who looked at food consumption patterns and group formation respectively.<sup>25</sup> In her article 'Umma—Be part of it!', Maske examines identity construction through distinction within a particular German Muslim youth association. Similarly to her, I found that there are negative as well as positive identifications relevant for positioning; I also found a (less strong) emphasis on global ummah. Schrode particularly looks at the role of food and drink in identity formation, also through the lens of people who identify culturally with Islam, the so-called 'Muslims by name'. I found some of her findings reproduced in my fieldwork, though less strongly, as in the example that the default option in Sarajevo is halal food.

A vast area of research I could only dip into is that of practices surrounding hijab in Europe. The work of Anna C. Korteweg and Gökce Yurdakul, developed within social sciences, provided an overview of key critical debates.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the work of Reyhan Şahin, in linguistics, is inspiring for its fine-grained analysis of practice and what and how different styles of headscarf communicate.<sup>27</sup> Although her work focused on hijab in Germany, some of her ideas are transferable to the Bosnian-Herzegovinian context, particularly how

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<sup>23</sup> Nilüfer Göle, *The Daily Lives of Muslims: Islam and Public Confrontation in Contemporary Europe* (London: Zed Books, 2017); Synnøve K.N. Bendixsen, *The Religious Identity of Young Muslim Women in Berlin: An Ethnographic Study*, ed. Felice Dassetto Jørgen S. Nielsen, Aminah McCloud, *Muslim Minorities* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Sigrid Nökel, *Die Töchter der Gastarbeiter und der Islam: Zur Soziologie alltagsweltlicher Anerkennungspolitiken - Eine Fallstudie*, *global, local Islam* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Verena Maske, '„Umma – Be part of it!“ Vergemeinschaftung und soziale Grenzziehungen in der popislamischen Jugendkultur in Deutschland', *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 27, no. 1 (2019); Paula Schrode, 'Ritualisierte Konsumpraxis als Form von 'ibāda', in *Die Sunna leben. Zur Dynamik islamischer Religionspraxis in Deutschland*, ed. Paula Schrode and Udo Simon (Würzburg: Ergon, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Anna C. Korteweg and Gökce Yurdakul, 'Nationale Narrative: Eine Analyse von Konflikten um Zugehörigkeit', in *Kopftuchdebatten in Europa: Konflikte um Zugehörigkeit in nationalen Narrativen*, ed. Anna C. Korteweg and Gökce Yurdakul, *global local Islam* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Reyhan Şahin, *Die Bedeutung des muslimischen Kopftuchs. Eine kleidungssemiotische Untersuchung muslimischer Kopftuchträgerinnen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2014).

young women communicate a vast array of meanings through their modest clothing. This was not directly my focus, but provided significant background when observing covered women in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>28</sup>

#### 1.2.4 Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Balkans

Another body of work that was useful for my research was that which discussed Bosnia-Herzegovina, and to a lesser degree the Balkans at large, as an area where Muslims have long lived. This includes literature on the relationship between ethnicity, religion, and politics from different disciplines as well as anthropological research focused on Islam or Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Also crucial were some papers that explore specific facets of Islam in the field and finally, zooming out again, on Islam in the region. These will be described below.

Armina Omerika, in her edited volume *Muslimische Stimmen aus Bosnien Und Herzegowina*, brought together key texts on Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>29</sup> The chapters of *Muslimische Stimmen* span a range of concerns, some related to theology, while some explore other topics, such as the relationship between one's ethnic and political identity as Muslim or Bosniak and one's religious identity or practice as a Muslim believer.

Research centred around the relationship between ethnic and religious identity in Bosnia-Herzegovina formed a core part of the literature, and these are discussed in detail below. This relationship between ethnic and religious identity is important for my work, as most of the young Muslim women I spoke to expressed a strong boundary against using what they perceive as a religious belief as a political and ethnic descriptor. However, the authors listed below tend to not focus on individual believers or everyday practice.

Šaćir Filandra argued that the Muslim identity was first a cultural one, linked to the Ottoman presence in the region, and that since the Bosnian War, genocide

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<sup>28</sup> 'Covered' in English or 'bedeckt' in German is a emic expression used by Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, translated from the local 'pokrivena'.

<sup>29</sup> Armina Omerika, ed. *Muslimische Stimmen aus Bosnien und Herzegowina : die Entwicklung einer modernen islamischen Denktradition* vol. 6, Buchreihe der Georges-Anawati-Stiftung (Freiburg: Herder, 2013).

and thus victimhood have become the core of the identity.<sup>30</sup> While this may very well be the case for the Bosniak population at large, in my research amongst believers, victimhood did not play a major role in their Muslim-ness. Meanwhile, Dino Abazović focused on the political dimension being Muslim, particularly on processes of re-Islamisation of national, cultural, and political identities following the war.<sup>31</sup> For the women I spoke to, this divergence of Islam from religion to other spheres of society is something they reject and can partly explain their creation of boundaries between their way of practice and how they understand Islam and mainstream society.

Kerim Kudo looked at networks and concluded that Muslim/Bosniak is the only national identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina that is exclusively based on religion, and the ethno-nationalisation process is basically characterised by a strong politicisation of religion.<sup>32</sup> His research is valuable in showing the genesis of the ethno-religious identity building. Meanwhile, Xavier Bougarel teased out the dynamic processes undertaken by various actors in the arena of nationhood and Islam, taking a long-term view from the Austro-Hungarian time until the 2010s.<sup>33</sup>

Emphasising the key fifteen years from 1956–1971, Iva Lučić looked at political factors in Yugoslavia that contributed to the nation-ing of ‘Muslims’, rather than self-identification, and concluded that the motive of communality, of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a shared space, is actually an important factor in identity-making.<sup>34</sup> In a 2014 book chapter, Armina Omerika traced the relationship between Islamic institutions and society from 1918–1983, with a particular focus on the Young Muslims.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Šaćir Filandra, *Bošnjaci nakon socijalizma - o bošnjačkom identitetu u postjugoslavenskom dobu* (Sarajevo, Zagreb: Synopsis, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Dino Abazović, *Za naciju i boga* (Sarajevo: Magistrat, 2006); Ibid., *Bosanskohercegovački muslimani između sekularizacije i desekularizacije* (Zagreb: Synopsis, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Kerim Kudo, *Europäisierung und Islam in Bosnien-Herzegowina: Netzwerke und Identitätsdiskurse* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Xavier Bougarel, *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Surviving Empires*, Islam of the Global West (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Iva Lučić, *Im Namen der Nation: Der politische Aufwertungsprozess der Muslime im sozialistischen Jugoslawien (1956-1971)*, ed. Wolfgang Höpken Hannes Grandits, *Balkanologische Veröffentlichungen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018); See also: Malcolm, 196-212.

<sup>35</sup> Armina Omerika, *Islam in Bosnien-Herzegowina und die Netzwerke der Jungmuslime (1918-1983)*, ed. Wolfgang Höpken Hannes Grandits, Holm Sundhaussen, *Balkanologische Veröffentlichungen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014).

Anthropological research tends to be very focused on a specific field of inquiry, as outlined above about Bosnia-Herzegovina more generally. When the field at least partially overlaps with the field I am researching, these publications offer interesting insights to build on. Tone Bringa's above-mentioned *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way* provided an ethnographic study from the period before the last war.<sup>36</sup> Also written before the war was Cornelia Sorabji's unpublished dissertation, which I refer to in order to see some changes and continuities in Muslim communities of Sarajevo, although this is not the focus of my work.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, David Henig and Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska offer an overview of anthropological developments in the first decade after the war.<sup>38</sup>

Zora Kostadinova was doing in-depth anthropological fieldwork in Sarajevo at the same time as me; however, her research is focused on a specific Sufi site. Her first results have been published; a more comprehensive book is likely forthcoming.<sup>39</sup>

Studying an issue that is peripherally related to my subject, Darryl Li, an anthropologist and lawyer, has brought an important contribution by focusing on the relationship between foreign fighters and Bosnians during the last war.<sup>40</sup> As the orientation towards the global ummah is important to my research partners as well there is some overlap. Connected to Li in that he is also highly disapproving of US and Western European hegemony, Piro Rexhepi addresses Islam both in the Balkans and more broadly from a post-colonial, critical stance.<sup>41</sup>

Then there are several books and articles examining a specific facet relevant to my research, which I have drawn on for background information in some

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<sup>36</sup> Bringa.

<sup>37</sup> Cornelia Sorabji, 'Muslim identity and Islamic faith in Sarajevo' (PhD, University of Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>38</sup> David Henig and Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska, 'Recasting Anthropological Perspectives on Vernacular Islam in Southeast Europe-An Introduction', *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 22, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>39</sup> Zora Kostadinova, "'And When the Heart is Sick, the Whole Body is Sick" .Repairing the Person and the Urban Fabric through Everyday Sufi Ethics in Postwar Sarajevo', *Südosteuropa* 66, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>40</sup> Darryl Li, *The Universal Enemy: Jihad, Empire and the Challenge of Solidarity*, Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

<sup>41</sup> Piro Rexhepi, 'Unmapping Islam in Eastern Europe: Periodization and Muslim Subjectivities in the Balkans', in *Eastern Europe Unmapped: Beyond Borders and Peripheries*, ed. Irene Kacandes and Yuliya Komska (New York: Berghan, 2017).

(sub-) chapters. This includes research on Islamic education mosque reconstruction, history of conversion and on specific people.<sup>42</sup> Dževada Šuško offers an insider historical perspective on the formal Islamic Community.<sup>43</sup> Kerem Öktem and Ešref Kenan Rašidagić, together with Zora Hesová, provide insight on Turkish influences in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>44</sup>

Looking at the region more broadly, the aforementioned edited volume from 2015, *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans*, contains a contribution by Cecilie Endresen on Albania, which offers an interesting parallel view to the developments in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, Ina Merdjanova teases out trends in the whole region regarding Islam, including Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>46</sup> Particularly relevant for this work was the chapter on women and Islam.

By focusing on women, and women believers at that, my dissertation offers a new perspective on some of the issues outlined above. Through the richness of the data analysed, there is additional depth as well as a more comprehensive analysis of practice than has been offered so far. Looking at this local, European variation of Islam as a lived form of religion I offer relevant insights on what it means to be a good person for young Muslim women in Sarajevo and how choice is emphasised as a key category.

### 1.3 Structure

When figuring out what to include and what to leave out in this book, and how to structure the results of my fieldwork, I found myself balancing on a fine line

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<sup>42</sup> Ahmet Alibašić and Asim Zubčević, 'Islamic Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina', in *Islamische Erziehung in Europa: Islamic Education in Europe*, ed. Ednan Aslan (Wien: Böhlau, 2009); Azra Aksamija, '(Re)Constructing History: Post-Socialist Mosque Architecture in Bosnia-Herzegovina', in *Divided God and Intercultural Dialogue* ed. Tomislav Žigmanov (Ljubljana: Dijaški Dom Cankarija and KUD Pozitiv, 2008); Anton Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Andreas Ernst and Armina Galijas, 'Der New-Age-Imam', *Cicero*, no. 7 (2016).

<sup>43</sup> Dževada Šuško, 'A Model for Europe? History and Practice of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina', (2017), <https://www.kas.de/en/web/auslandsinformationen/artikel/detail/-/content/ein-modell-fuer-europa->, accessed 6.4.2020.

<sup>44</sup> Kerem Öktem, 'Global Diyanet and Multiple Networks: Turkey's New Presence in the Balkans', *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, no. 1 (2012); Ešref Kenan Rašidagić and Zora Hesova, 'Development of Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Western Balkans with Focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Croatian International Relations Review* 86 (2020).

<sup>45</sup> Cecilie Endresen, 'Faith, Fatherland or Both? Accommodationist and Neo-Fundamentalist Islamic Discourses in Albania', in *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity*, ed. Arolda Elbasani Olivier Roy (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Ina Merdjanova, *Rediscovering the Umma: Muslims in the Balkans between Nationalism and Transnationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

between too much and too little. Too much historical or cultural context and the text becomes boring, too little and it is challenging for readers to understand the unique cultural and religious landscape of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Too many quotes from the women I interviewed run the risk of becoming repetitive, too few and the work becomes abstract. To make this judgement, I kept the reader in mind—religious scientists. In general, I go into more detail with regard to specifically Bosnian or South Eastern European points than I do on those related to religion, as I trust that essential concerns of the latter discipline will already be clear to my target readership.

The second chapter of this dissertation after the Introduction, 'History and Context,' provides a historical and contextual framework for the work to follow. Here, Sarajevo is first presented as a city and a field of research, focusing on history. Then I go into the contemporary situation regarding different aspects in the country. I give an overview of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This is clearly just a sketch. I outline the role it plays as an ethno-political marker and go into Muslim customs, as well as the influence of Turkey and Arab states. I close this by outlining the institutions of Islam, primarily the Islamic Community. As a final section of the context, I go into Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of Europe, exploring practical and academic perspectives. Having the history and context as background is important to understand the specific analysis that is fleshed out in the empirical part of my work. That is, an understanding of the particularities of both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sarajevo specifically is essential to a full comprehension of my findings.

The third chapter, 'Theoretical frame,' accordingly presents the most relevant theoretical positions for my work. The concepts and terms are not discussed in detail; however, the most important debates are mentioned. Specifically, I present some other people's work on young Muslim Europeans and global/de-ethnised Islam, address Balkanism. and outline current debates on Bosnian Islam.

Before moving on to the empirical part of the analysis, the methodology of the research project is presented in the fourth chapter, 'Method'. After the rationale for the methods used are explained, I outline my field approach. This was mainly done through participation in various activities such as hiking and an

academic course on Islam, and through contacts in the diaspora and in Sarajevo. I then present in more detail the participatory observation and semi-structured interviews, going both into the authors whose methods I used and the practical approach. Finally, I briefly touch on other sources used and the Grounded Theory inspiration I use.

The evaluation of the empirical, qualitative research forms the core of the work and is presented in the fifth and most extensive chapter, 'Being Muslim'. In the first subsection, the sample is presented through a narrative description of each of the interviewees. Then their different influences from childhood and youth, such as school and parents, are analysed. Following this, the narratives of 'Becoming Muslim' are examined, including key moments and at what age which practice started playing a larger role in the interview partners' lives. In a classic ethnographic vein, a long sub-chapter on practice follows. Here, I first outline what different sources of religious knowledge are; these are mainly books and theologically trained contacts of the women, as well as some international experts. After this, I describe different practices of reading the Quran and the consumption (or not) of food and alcohol. The section on practice closes with an analysis of regular and irregular prayer. Then, I look at preferences around finding a life partner and friends, as well as ways in which Islam is practised in the workplace.

In the following section, I explore self-conceptions of women in Islam. One of the most often-discussed and most visible topics when talking about Muslim women is the practice of wearing hijab. I outline how both women that are covered and those that aren't see the headscarf. Following this, there is an exploration of how the people I spoke to see women in Islam.

Then, finally, I discuss how the women in my sample position themselves in context to their city, Sarajevo, to Europe, and to the wider Islamic ummah.

#### 1.4 Language

This thesis is written in English, in a German academic context, with research done partly in the local language in Sarajevo. Therefore, some choices had to be made both in terms of terminology used and quotes presented. For religious terms, I have used anglicised versions of the generally Arabic expressions. So,

I use *hijab* rather than *hidžab*, *jummah* rather than *džuma* and *ummah* rather than *ummet*. I use these with an understanding that these should be familiar to an interested audience and that I do not use local language for other words either. There are some exceptions, such as *ezan*, *handžar* and *mekteb*, which are explained in context and then used in the local language. An important untranslated word is *dobar čovjek*, which approximately means ‘good person’, but here, the original phrase contains a wealth more nuance than the English equivalent.

Interviews were conducted in various languages; for those quotes not recorded in English, the source excerpt is provided in smaller font directly below, to allow for readers that are proficient to access the original.

In addressing the self-positioning of twenty- to thirty-five-year-old Muslim working women and students in Sarajevo, particularly with regards to the value of free choice and being a *dobar čovjek*, and in showing how they live their faith in everyday life and what their religious practice looks like, I can build on existing work. This encompasses some research around Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, whereas I add by focusing on a wider range of believers, by being situated in an urban space, and by examining a range of practices and ideals in the day-to-day. I also aim at offering some new insights into parallels between Muslim populations in Western Europe and those in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Other literature I draw on, such as that on Bosnia-Herzegovina generally, European Muslims, and Islam in the region, is relevant for individual aspects or background but addresses different questions from the outset than my own work.

The general structure of content in this dissertation goes from providing information on the history and context of the region, followed by theory and methods, to allow the reader to better understand where I am coming from and how I will answer the questions outlined above. Then I present my empirical data, starting from childhood and youth and the narratives around becoming Muslim. After some ethical considerations raised in the field about what being Muslim really means, I then go into different aspects of practice in detail. This is followed by exploration around work and love and in another sub-section,

'being a woman', which includes the sub-section on hijab. In the last sub-chapter, I delve into positioning as Muslim with regards to Sarajevo, Europe, and the global ummah.

To empower the reader, particularly if they are unfamiliar with Bosnia-Herzegovina, to see the field in which the activities analysed based on empirical data take place, the next part focuses on history and context.

## 2 History & Context

This chapter provides background information to better understand my Muslim women subjects and the situation in which the research took place. It includes a first part about the history of Sarajevo and various socio-political factors. This is followed by an outline of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina and finally a section about the country as part of Europe. Some of these topics are challenging to address, as most aspects of history and some on religion and others are controversial in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Each sub-section, below, from the architecture of Sarajevo to Bosnia-Herzegovina's EU accession, can be told in different ways depending on whose perspective you cite. While I aim to use local scholarship, including the work of scholars from the former Yugoslavia and its diaspora, many of these works seem excessively biased (for example frequently mentioning 'Serb aggression').

The fact that history and other background information are under debate is particularly true for elements related to religion(s). There were two types of challenging occurrences in my research on religious-related background information. On the one hand, there are instances where my research conflicts with other scholarship, such as that regarding the influence of Turkey (see below). On the other, there are some points that seem quite straightforward, like whether it was possible for a woman to wear a hijab during Yugoslav socialism, that produced conflicting answers.

Another challenge of presenting history and context is the impossibility of delving into every detail of every issue that arose in the research. One example of a topic that I have chosen to not expound upon comprehensively is the changing relationship between the Party of Democratic Action or SDA (Stranka Demokratske Akcije), the primary 'Muslim' political party in Bosnia-

Herzegovina, and the Islamic Community (Islamska Zajednica or IZ) in the late 1990s. While this may be relevant to the subject matter of this dissertation, it is not within the scope of this work to discuss this in detail. In determining the scope of this work, I am also mindful of my discipline. To contribute to religious studies, is it relevant to consider the intricacies of the decision-making of socialist Yugoslav governance? Some debates that are central to other disciplines, such as political science, history, and even theology, I have deemed not relevant to this project. Instead, I have attempted to just focus on those aspects that are key for my field of inquiry, and with these caveats, I am referring to the research I have found most instructive.

In this chapter, I first outline the geography of Sarajevo and its history up to and including World War II. Then, I focus on the socialist period and describe post-socialism and the situation at the time of my research in the mid 2010s. Subsequently, there is a section on Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina and on Bosnia-Herzegovina as a part of Europe.

## 2.1 Sarajevo: an entangled history

The first consideration of this chapter is the history of Sarajevo, with a focus on the aspects deemed most relevant by the women I spoke to, including a description of the physicality of the city today and some socio-political data. Sarajevo lies at the end of the Miljacka River valley and is divided into Sarajevo proper and East Sarajevo, which is part of the entity Republika Srpska.<sup>47</sup> The capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina also in the former Yugoslavia, Sarajevo is a city in which seemingly contradictory phenomena tend to occur simultaneously. For example, its large Muslim population is a peculiarity in Europe, especially because most of Muslim inhabitants and their families were already living in the city before the middle of the twentieth century, rather than being predominantly a migrant population as in many places in Europe. Sarajevo shares its Ottoman past - more discussed below - with Belgrade and Skopje but, of course, also with Istanbul. It is therefore comparable with these cities in some senses, but

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<sup>47</sup> The other - Croatian and Bosniak - entity is the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Herzegovina.

often it also looks like Vienna, which also makes sense, due to its shared Habsburg, Austro-Hungarian past.

Describing Sarajevo as part of both 'the East' and 'the West' is a common and, some argue, overused trope.<sup>48</sup> However, this contrast comes to life in certain aspects of the physical city, and these are both noticed by visitors and pointed out by locals. While there is a degree of architectural and stylistic blending, there is a distinct overall appearance that varies in different parts of the city. For me personally and for many visitors, this mixture of aspects of culture that are seen as binary is part of Sarajevo's charm. At certain times of the year, the call for prayer and the church bells sound at the same time. Being audibly enveloped in different religions in such a stark way is quite unique, especially for Europe.

At the beginning of the city, at the east end where the valley begins, is the Ottoman Old Town, Baščaršija. In the many small alleys there are cute shops and traditional cafés as well as several mosques. The 'Eastern' flair of the area is not just due to the existing built heritage, but is actively fostered by operating businesses. Shisha bars have opened up in the last few years and there is a Turkish-German kebab shop and a restaurant serving falafel, as well as a carpet seller who imports goods from Iran. Thus, the existing buildings and structures are used as a backdrop for certain shops and services that are coded as 'oriental'.

Then, walking west along the river, Baščaršija abruptly ends, and the Ottoman era gives way to a pedestrian zone built in a Central European, Austro-Hungarian architectural style. The border between these neighbourhoods is made explicit by a visual marker called the 'Meeting Point of Cultures' with east- and west-facing arrows and even a matching website.<sup>49</sup> This urban section, with its Art Nouveau apartment buildings, the theatre, and other representative buildings, is the core of the Austro-Hungarian city.

Following this route along the bottom of the valley, the first of several shopping centres appears. This first one is called the BBI Centre. (Bank Bosnia-Herzegovina International). This modern building in the heart of post-war

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<sup>48</sup> Personal communication, 26.3.2020.

<sup>49</sup> "Sarajevo Meeting Point of Cultures." <http://smoc.ba/en/>, (accessed 23.3.2020).

Sarajevo is a major reference and meeting point. As a private business that upholds an interpretation of Islamic rules, no shop in the building may sell pork or alcohol, while gay and explicitly sexual websites are blocked on the free WiFi. As a private business, they can make their own rules, and there are plenty of other places in Sarajevo to drink alcohol, and some to buy pork. However, to me it is striking that one of the main commercial and social centres has rules that don't reflect the practice of most of the people in town.

The last of central areas of Sarajevo is Grbavica, where socialist-era apartment blocks reach into the sky from both sides of the riverbed, which was on the frontline during the recent war. Beyond these central neighbourhoods, there are extensive further residential and commercial areas. Other districts, mainly up in the steep hills that extend from both sides of the river, are full of smaller houses, where people know their neighbours and sometimes live quite separately from the bustling valley floor. As the valley widens, family-friendly and socialist block neighbourhoods spread out – e.g. Dobrinja, which was built for the 1984 Olympics and remains popular with young families – and lead to the airport and, beyond, to the municipality of Ilidža, with several private universities, historic thermal springs, and growing Arab tourism.<sup>50</sup>

The different phases of Sarajevo's history are quite visible in the architecture and spatiality of the city. This was pointed out to me as charming to visitors and residents alike. Visitors also tend to notice another aspect of history – the last war – in the city's frequently damaged architecture.

Another dominant factor of Sarajevo its portrayal as multi-ethnic. Sarajevo is presented as multi-religious in tourist materials, at scientific conferences, in the media, in art, and in politics.<sup>51</sup> Visitors are usually shown the four places of worship within walking distance of each other: the old synagogue, the largest mosque, a Catholic cathedral, and an Orthodox church.<sup>52</sup> Unlike most other cities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the sacred buildings were not destroyed during the last war. Proud reference is also made to the restaurant in the Ottoman

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<sup>50</sup> 'Bosnia's new visitors - Ottoman comfort - Arab tourists and investors are giving Bosnia a new shine', *The Economist* (2016), <https://www.economist.com/europe/2016/01/21/ottoman-comfort>, accessed 30.3.2020.

<sup>51</sup> For an essayistic exploration see: Dzevad Karahasan, *Sarajevo, Exodus of a City*, trans. Slobodan Drakulić (New York: Kodansha International, 1994).

<sup>52</sup> Jansen, 9.

part, which offers pork and wine, a symbol that the inhabitants consider their city to be multi-religious, open and liberal, but also that it is important that visitors perceive it that way. This tends to be not only the case in contexts explicitly addressed to visitors, but also in conversations, lectures, or media contributions that take place within Sarajevo society. I observed this repeatedly during my field stay, and it forms a relevant part of Sarajevans' identity.

While this is a noticeable reality, another reality is that the population of Sarajevo has been predominantly classified as ethnically Bosniak and thus Muslim since the end of the 1992 - 1995 war. While Sarajevo is the urban centre of Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is so mainly for Bosniaks. While some Bosnian Croats and to a lesser degree Bosnian Serbs still go to Sarajevo for university, activism, or business, for many, Zagreb and Belgrade, or even Split and Novi Sad, are more relevant frames of reference. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, ethnic and religious attributions are inextricably connected, which also tends to be evident in a person's name, but this association is not dependant on religious practice or belief. In other words, Serbian and Orthodox, Croatian and Catholic, and Muslim and Bosniak are interpreted as closely aligned pairs.<sup>53</sup> One's ethnic identity (e.g. Serbian), thus, also suggests a religious affiliation (e.g. Orthodox), though not necessarily practice or belief.

Sarajevo is also often described as having a specific spirit or soul, known as *duh* in the local language. With the partial emigration of a diverse, pre-war body of urban residents and the influx of many displaced persons from nearby rural areas of what is now the Republika Srpska, in addition to the solidification of ethnic identities, there is a strong discourse that this spirit has been lost. I heard this numerous times during my fieldwork. This narrative of the lost *duh* tends to blame the formerly rural population for this cultural change, not considering the reason that they fled to the city, as Andrea Teftedarija has convincingly analysed.<sup>54</sup> There were also negative ideas about both those that left the city

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<sup>53</sup> I received some pushback on equating Bosniaks with being Muslim (in the cultural sense) but couldn't identify other academics research with an alternative interpretation, so of Bosniaks not being Muslim and my fieldwork also points to this being a given. Personal communication, 26.3.2020.

<sup>54</sup> Field notes/personal communication, Andrea Teftedarija, 'Who killed Sarajevo Spirit? Structure, agency, nationalism and the case of Sarajevo' (Master's Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2007), 36. For more on the perception of population changes also see: Gruia

during the war and those that stayed during the siege, as Ivana Maček explored.<sup>55</sup> These contrasting and highly charged discourses highlight the extent to which the history of Sarajevo was highly relevant to my interview subjects.

### 2.1.1 Sarajevo before World War II

While this multi-religious and multi-ethnic idea of Sarajevo seems incongruous with today's reality, it has historic origins. To better understand contemporary Sarajevo, I will look into the past and describe some relevant milestones in the history of the city and the region, particularly as relevant to religion.

In medieval times, there was a plurality of religions in what is now Bosnia-Herzegovina. Then, for several hundred years, most of current Bosnia-Herzegovina was part of the Ottoman Empire. During this time, physical structures were erected that are iconic today, and many people converted to Islam. How the conversion to Islam happened and who converted is under debate, particularly as this part of history has been used to claim that present-day Muslims/Bosniaks are 'actually' Serbs or Croats or, on the other hand, that there is a distinction between 'ethnicities' based on history.<sup>56</sup> The idea that Bosnian Muslims and thus Bosniaks have a separate and long history is also maintained by the Bogumil theory. The Bogumils were a medieval Christian group that was neither Catholic nor Orthodox. Amongst Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the constructed memory of this movement as a distinct group is popular, particularly as there seem to be similarities in their practices to those prevalent in Bosnian Islam. According to this theory, the Bogumils converted en masse to Islam, thereby constituting an older historic group. While this theory has been widely considered, it has also been debunked.<sup>57</sup>

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Badescu, 'Dwelling in the Post-War City Urban Reconstruction and Home-Making in Sarajevo', *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest* 46, no. 4 (2015).

<sup>55</sup> Maček, 90-93.

<sup>56</sup> Minkov, 108; For a detailed discussion see: Fikret Adanir, 'The Formation of a 'Muslim' Nation in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Historiographic Discussion,' in *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography*, ed. Fikret Adanir and Suraiya Faroqhi (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

<sup>57</sup> Malcolm, 27-42; 61-64.

The question of what factors contributed to the rapid and wide-spread adoption of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina is controversial and still under debate.<sup>58</sup> Aspects that make it difficult to agree on the reasons for conversions are the lack of source material and how important the construction of religious history remains today. The interpretation of events 500 years ago has an impact on politics to this day, due to the role of religion in the contemporary system. Those who describe Muslims as 'Serbs who converted for financial gain' have other arguments than those who say that the group was previously distinct, as, for example, the Bogomil narrative maintains. Additionally, various regions and sections of the population may have had different reasons for conversion. For the aristocracy, a possible reason for conversion was the retention of social and economic privilege. For the rural population, lower taxes were a relevant reason to convert to the dominant religion of the empire, but the possibility of syncretism may also have had an impact, meaning that some traditional practices were maintained even after conversion. Various orders of Sufis and their *tekke* (lodges) were crucial during the establishment of Islam. They supported the Ottoman Empire, and there was more room for flexible interpretations of Islam within Sufism.

The influence of Sarajevo's role as a centre of the Ottoman Empire – a bustling city with inhabitants from many different places – is still highly visible today.<sup>59</sup> For example, the confluence of religious, ethnic, and political identity also began during the Ottoman period. The Ottoman *millet* system structured society along religious lines. While Bosnian Muslims were not seen as different to other Muslims during this time, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Jews were quite independent with regard to religion, education, and rule of law, so they had their own cultural religious and other institutions and the rules for them were different than Muslim subjects.<sup>60</sup> Religious affiliation was the core social criteria that influenced one's role in society and also formed the basis for holding public office in a proportional system of representation.<sup>61</sup> In imagining the history of

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<sup>58</sup> Miruna Troncota, 'Sarajevo – A Border City Caught between Its Multicultural Past, the Bosnian War and a European Future', *EuroTimes* 19 (2015): 5.

<sup>59</sup> What the size of the population actually was is hard to reconstruct due to different ways of measuring both the geographical reach and the people. Sundhaussen, 39-44.

<sup>60</sup> Merdjanova, 3; Sorabji, 26-27.

<sup>61</sup> Sundhaussen, 198.

Sarajevo as multi-religious and harmonious, it is also important to note that Sephardic Jews found a home there after the Reconquista in Spain and Portugal. This is the 'golden era' of the history of Sarajevo during the Ottoman period, and its end, in the memory of Sarajevans, is linked to the destruction caused by the troops of Eugen of Savoy in 1697.<sup>62</sup> My impression was that there is still some resentment towards Western Europeans about this.

There is constructed continuity between the Ottoman period and today. The expression *turci* (Turks) is still used to describe Muslims in the former Yugoslavia and in the wider region. While not always meant to insult, this expression aligning them with former rulers of the Ottoman Empire does declare Muslims as not really belonging, as different and as outsiders. To the present day, there is an ambivalent relationship between the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the heir of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey (more below).

After Sarajevo became part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1878, the religious makeup of the city changed. Some Muslims left, fearing repercussions or just seeing more opportunities in the heartland of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>63</sup> In the early days of Austrian rule, Muslims and the Orthodox experienced discrimination, as the Catholic population was favoured by a Catholic regime in terms of political influence.<sup>64</sup> However, compared to other formerly Ottoman parts of South Eastern Europe, Bosnia-Herzegovina is particular in how many Muslims actually stayed.<sup>65</sup>

The Austro-Hungarian period in Sarajevo saw the introduction of the first electric trams in the world, the construction of multi-storey apartment buildings, and the setting up of a hierarchical Muslim clergy and Islamic institution to represent all Bosnian Muslims, which exists to this day. The system was modelled on the Catholic Church, with religious specialists responsible for districts, areas, and ultimately the whole country.<sup>66</sup> And, as part of a multi-ethnic

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 105-108.

<sup>63</sup> How many Muslims left is controversial in the literature. For a detailed overview see: *ibid.*, 187-197.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 171; Robert J. Donia, *Sarajevo: A Biography* (London: Hurst & Company, 2006), 60-61.

<sup>65</sup> Sundhaussen, 187.

<sup>66</sup> "Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina - History." <https://english.islamskazajednica.ba/the-islamic-community/modules-menu/history>, (accessed 17.3.2020).

empire, Sarajevo also received an influx of Austrians, Hungarians and others, many of whom were Catholic. With the flight of some Muslims to the retreating Ottoman Empire, this led to some change in the land's religious characteristics.<sup>67</sup> There has been some academic debate in the last few years about whether Bosnia-Herzegovina should be seen as having constituted a colony of the Austro-Hungarian Empire or rather a peripheral part of it.<sup>68</sup> This question becomes particularly relevant when connected to academic debates of postcolonialism.

After the Austro-Hungarians, Sarajevo was ruled from Belgrade as part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, post-World-War I. Initially called the Kingdom of Croats, Serbs and Slovenes, it was renamed in 1929. This was the period in which a citizenry developed in the city, with social stratification becoming more permeable. In day-to-day life, the inhabitants of Sarajevo had a poorer quality of education, industry and infrastructure than under the Austro-Hungarians.<sup>69</sup> The administrative structure and constant changes of government were inefficient and led to discord amongst the population, including amongst groups of Muslims in Sarajevo about identity, belonging, religion and the role of women.<sup>70</sup>

During the Second World War, the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia was transformed into a patchwork of different power structures, including occupied, annexed and independent areas.<sup>71</sup> Sarajevo became part of the fascist Croatian puppet state, the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, or NDH). The war was fought between Serbian Chetniks, Yugoslav Partisans, and Croatian Ustasha in different times and spaces. On the ground, there were changing and messy alliances.<sup>72</sup> There are libraries to be filled with what occurred when and how during the Second World War, and these libraries might contain a vast variety of texts. Briefly, however, the Chetniks were mainly Serb nationalists with a royalist agenda. The Partisans had a communist

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<sup>67</sup> Sundhaussen, 192-195; Donia, 63-64.

<sup>68</sup> Giomi, 25-66.

<sup>69</sup> Sundhaussen, 258.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 256; 261-265.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>72</sup> Omerika, *Islam in Bosnien-Herzegowina und die Netzwerke der Jungmuslime (1918-1983)*, 50.

leadership, including later-president Tito, but were also joined by others in resistance, particularly later in the war. Global Allied support switched from the Chetniks to the Partisans during the war while the Ustasha were supported by Mussolini and Hitler.

The Ustasha tried to mobilise the Muslim population to become part of their brutal campaign. Ante Pavelić, head of the Ustasha movement, was only partially successful in convincing Muslims that they were Croats of Muslim faith. Muslim leadership was divided about relations with the NDH.<sup>73</sup> Famously, an Ustasha SS division, called the *handžar*, was formed, composed of Muslims from Yugoslavia.<sup>74</sup> The Ustasha were violent towards Serbs, Jews, and Roma; the concentration camp Jasenovac is known to this day for the brutality that occurred there.<sup>75</sup> In Sarajevo, German troops and locals also destroyed synagogues.<sup>76</sup> Tens of thousands of refugees fleeing Chetniks came to Sarajevo from Sandžak and eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina and the 'atrocities...became well known' in the city.<sup>77</sup> This influx of refugees, together with the murder and displacement of Jews and Roma, resulted in changes to the inhabitancy of Sarajevo.

Importantly, during socialist Yugoslavia, the memory of the war was focused on the partisans as saviours from these horrors and an imagined 'brotherhood and unity' that emerged as a result after World War II.<sup>78</sup> The fact that wartime and post-war conflicts, divisions, and trauma were not dealt with likely played some part in the later breakup of Yugoslavia and the feeling of being 'stuck' that exists in Bosnian society to this day.<sup>79</sup>

As explored in this section, different regimes left their traces in the physicality of the city and also changed the population, both in terms of residents and the social and religious influences of the times.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 47-48; Sundhaussen, 269.

<sup>74</sup> Omerika, *Islam in Bosnien-Herzegowina und die Netzwerke der Jungmuslime (1918-1983)*, 51-56.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 43; Sundhaussen, 271-272.

<sup>76</sup> Donia, 169.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 183-184.

<sup>78</sup> This was the slogan used to describe the desired relationship between different ethno-national groups during socialist Yugoslavia.

<sup>79</sup> Scoggins Berg, 'Prerequisite for Peace: An analysis of Bosnian-Serb historical national trauma' (paper presented at the Trauma, Memory and Healing in the Balkans and Beyond, Sarajevo, 12-14 July 2016).conference presentation

### 2.1.2 (Memories of) Socialism

Socialist Yugoslavia is remembered as a happy period by most of the people I spoke to in Sarajevo and in the Bosnian diaspora. As well as this memory, in this section I portray the role of religion, women, and the development of the 'Muslim' nation in socialist times. At the end, I briefly sketch some aspects of the war of 1992 – 1995.

Many celebrate the memory of Josip Broz Tito, the leading figure of the partisan resistance and long-time president of Yugoslavia, to this day. The socialist period of Yugoslavia is remembered largely as a time of peace and prosperity, when people of different religions visited each other for holidays and everyone enjoyed economic stability. This dominant narrative disregards many of the negative aspects of this regime, such as limited freedom of the press and a strong secret police.

In this time, the public display of religion was not encouraged. On the one hand, Yugoslavia's role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) included an emphasis on its Muslim population.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, Islam was 'seen as a residue of the "Turkish Yoke", and was considered particularly backward due to its "Oriental" and "Asiatic" roots'.<sup>81</sup> There is some diversity in how interview partners and other people recounted how religion could be practised in the socialist period. While some say that as a private matter, it was unrestrained, others say that being 'out' about being religious severely hampered one's career and social prospects.

While practising religion privately was allowed, a number of reforms reduced the influence of organised religious communities. This included abolishing religious classes in schools, the closing of religious educational institutions and the obligation of civil, rather than religious marriages.<sup>82</sup> Soon after the establishment of socialist Yugoslavia, in 1950, the wearing of full-face veils,

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<sup>80</sup> Sundhaussen, 302.

<sup>81</sup> Mesarič, 'Wearing Hijab in Sarajevo: Dress Practices and the Islamic Revival in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', 17.

<sup>82</sup> Sundhaussen, 292.

locally called *feredže* and *zar*, was banned.<sup>83</sup> This point is particularly relevant as it shows that at least at that point, face veils were being worn. Religious festivals were replaced, to a certain degree, by socialist alternatives such as New Year, with Grandfather Frost bringing presents, a celebration that fell between Catholic and Orthodox Christmas. Religion was pushed into the private sphere due to official secularisation, with attempts by the government to de-emphasise the category of religion as a marker.<sup>84</sup>

The position of women in the socialist period is also something to be examined. Although the 1974 Constitution stipulated gender equality, and women's contributions to socialist progress and development were publicly praised, patriarchal norms still prevailed on many levels.<sup>85</sup> Women's equality was a relevant part of socialist doctrine. Women had played a role in the partisan resistance and demanded a place in the halls of power. Unfortunately, seen from a feminist perspective such as I have, women were declared equal without the necessary social changes taking place.<sup>86</sup> So although women had the right to vote and work, with some becoming engineers, doctors, etc., well before this was commonplace in Western Europe or the United States, they also continued to shoulder the household and care work.

Furthermore, the official declaration of equality took some steam out of activism, as any feminist demands would mean declaring that the situation was not ideal as it was, and would thus be criticising the government.

In the memories of my interlocutors, women, including mothers, typically worked and were not religious during the socialist period. So, both in Muslim society as a whole, and for many of the women I spoke to individually, there is a generational difference with regard to religiosity.

Even for those who recount that practising Islam was problematic in Yugoslavia, the overwhelming perception of the socialist period is very positive. The health and education systems are praised by almost everyone, as well as

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<sup>83</sup> For a detailed analysis around unveiling see: Tea Hadžiristić, 'Unveiling Muslim Women in Socialist Yugoslavia: the Body between Socialism, Secularism, and Colonialism', *Religion & Gender* 7, no. 2 (2017).

<sup>84</sup> Sundhaussen, 293.

<sup>85</sup> Helms, 'Gendered Visions of the Bosnian Future: Women's Activism and Representation in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', 51.

<sup>86</sup> Bonfiglioli.

the peace and stability of the era. For Sarajevans specifically, the 1984 Winter Olympics forms the pinnacle of this romantic memory. Large structures still standing are connected to the event, and even in places not directly linked to the games, such as the train station, inhabitants who were there at the time wistfully recall how everything was bustling and in better shape.<sup>87</sup>

Another development that took place during socialism and is very significant to this day is the establishment of a 'Muslim' nation in Yugoslavia. As Iva Lučić has convincingly shown, there was a drive by the political leadership of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina to establish 'Muslims' as an ethnic and later on a national group.<sup>88</sup> Part of the identity of the Republic, and thus also of its capital Sarajevo, was built around the communality and distinction of Muslims, Serbs, and Croats.<sup>89</sup>

The war of 1992 - 1995 was a significant rupture for the people of Sarajevo. Whether they were in the city during the siege, which lasted for almost four years, elsewhere in the region, or somewhere completely different, it plays an important role both in one's personal history and memory of society. The space here is not sufficient to discuss different theories for why Yugoslavia disintegrated or to provide details about the war more generally.<sup>90</sup> However, for the current inhabitants of Sarajevo, my field site, a couple of factors are relevant. In the lead-up to the war, and particularly during it, ethno-religious identities became overarchingly important. From 1993, the term 'Bosniak' was used instead of Muslim with a capital 'M' to denote an ethnic category. Ethnic categories also became ever more salient compared to civic categories, such as being Bosnian, as an inhabitant of Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>91</sup>

Religious practice increased during the siege for several reasons. On the one hand, it is usual during intense crisis, such as war, for religious practice to increase, as people search for solace in otherworldly meaning. On the other,

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<sup>87</sup> Field notes 28.7.2016.

<sup>88</sup> Lučić, 274.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., in particular 107, 124, 288.

<sup>90</sup> For some discourses see: Sabrina P. Ramet, 'The Dissolution of Yugoslavia: Competing Narratives of Resentment and Blame', *Südosteuropa* 55, no. 1 (2007).

<sup>91</sup> Igor Stiks, "'Being Citizen the Bosnian Way'" Transformations of Citizenship and Political Identities in Bosnia-Herzegovina', in *From Peace to Shared Political Identities: Exploring Pathways in Contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina*, ed. Francis Cheneval; Sylvie Ramel (Bruxelles: Université de Genève/ULB, 2011). On the resistance of Sarajevans to this see: Maček, 32.

performing Muslim practices was a possible way to demonstrate belonging and possibly even access scarce resources, since particularly during the war Bosniak identity was closely aligned with Islam.

Internationally, Bosnia-Herzegovina was increasingly portrayed as a Muslim country. During the war there was some humanitarian, military, and political assistance from Muslim-majority countries to Bosnia-Herzegovina. For example, some financial support from Muslim-majority countries was secured and Bosnia-Herzegovina received some Mujaheddin fighters joining the conflict fresh from Afghanistan.<sup>92</sup> This portrayal also may have had an impact on how the residents are viewed to this day, though the image of Bosnia-Herzegovina as oriental is much older.

A further consequence of the war was that the composition of the inhabitants changed again. Most Serbs and Croats from Sarajevo left, as did many Jews. Those displaced from rural, eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina flocked to the city. The current makeup of Sarajevo is largely Bosniak today, and many inhabitants have more rural backgrounds as a result of this migration.<sup>93</sup> Estimates state that, in 1994, Sarajevo's population was composed of only a third of its pre-war residents.<sup>94</sup> Another influence on the city to this day is individual and/or collective trauma, a situation that is ongoing.<sup>95</sup>

This section has thus highlighted the memories of a great socialist period, which, however, for religious people, women and many others, was less sweepingly positive. Furthermore, during this time, including the war, the ethnic category of 'Muslim' and later 'Bosniak' solidified in Sarajevo. Having set the stage thus, now I move on to the post-socialist and -war time, which is roughly when the research took place.

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<sup>92</sup> Chris Hedges, 'Muslims From Afar Joining 'Holy War' in Bosnia', *The New York Times*, no. 5.12.1992 (1992), <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/05/world/muslims-from-afar-joining-holy-war-in-bosnia.html>, accessed 30.3.2020. For a nuanced discussion of the role and portrayal see: Li.

<sup>93</sup> Anders Stefansson, 'Urban Exile: Locals, Newcomers and the Cultural Transformation of Sarajevo', in *The New Bosnian Mosaic - Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-War Society*, ed. Elissa Helms Xavier Bougarel, Ger Duijzings (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>94</sup> Maček, 86.

<sup>95</sup> Hannah Comtesse et al., 'Long-term psychological distress of Bosnian war survivors: An 11-year follow-up of former displaced persons, returnees, and stayers', *BMC Psychiatry* 19, no. 1 (2019).

### 2.1.3 Post-socialism to the mid - 2010s

Sarajevo in the 2010s is a post-war, post-socialist, post-Yugoslav city. It is also a university town, a centre for arts and entertainment, and the administrative heart of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bosnia-Herzegovina is a now very complicated political and administrative construct, the details of which won't be outlined here.<sup>96</sup> As is the case everywhere in the Western Balkans, people are leaving, particularly the young, the educated, and those who have diaspora networks.<sup>97</sup> The general mood in Bosnia-Herzegovina is one characterised by hopelessness, with corruption omni-present and a general mistrust of public institutions.

Bosnia-Herzegovina has mainly been researched as a post-war country and is not often seen as a post-socialist site.<sup>98</sup> However, there are several aspects I can identify as belonging to a socialist heritage. For example, the parent generation of my research participants, around 50–70 years old in 2015, rarely practises religion publicly or at least did not do so until very recently. They also tend to hold certain ideas about women that align with the 'official' socialist party line, including the opinion that having women working in all types of jobs is normal and desirable.

It should also be noted that religion is often important in post-socialist situations.<sup>99</sup> The Dayton Peace Agreement put an end to the armed conflict in late 1995. While it was largely successful in stopping out-and-out warfare, 'Dayton' solidified and entrenched the results of religion-based ethnic cleansing. The current constitution, agreed as a temporary solution and an annex to the peace deal, is still in place more than twenty-five years later, entrenching ethno-religious differences. As such, the current governance structure enforces the divisions set, constructed, and implemented during the war.<sup>100</sup>

Sarajevo itself is still imagined as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious city, but damage has been done. Real income, adjusted for inflation, is lower than it was before

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<sup>96</sup> Sundhaussen, 341-349.

<sup>97</sup> Here referring to the former Yugoslavia without Slovenia, and additionally Albania.

<sup>98</sup> Henig and Bielenin-Lenczowska, 7.

<sup>99</sup> Douglas Rogers, 'Introductory Essay: The Anthropology of Religion after Socialism', *Religion, State and Society* 33, no. 1 (2005).

<sup>100</sup> Garcia and Kotzen, 28.

the war and the standard of living is less consistent than under socialism. Many buildings, both residential and commercial, as well as religious and cultural monuments were, destroyed during the war.<sup>101</sup> Although much has been rebuilt, individually and socially, the city remains scarred; culturally and emotionally there are still many ruins.<sup>102</sup> Because the end of socialism in Sarajevo is temporally linked to the war, the war is the overriding memory which is much more present than in other locations where the end of socialism did not come with war.<sup>103</sup>

## 2.2 Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina

This section discusses Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina particularly as an ethno-religious marker and as a cultural identity, as well as considers the influences of other Muslim countries and institutions of Islam. All of these are key to understanding the unique context of my research subjects and the particularity of Islam in this context.

The Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995 ended the active fighting of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. A key part of 'Dayton', as it is often called, is a constitution and complex power sharing structure established by an agreement between the different ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This includes a presidency with three members, as well as the ethnic allocation of seats at each level of administration. Less formally, this is even reproduced for the delegates to the Eurovision song contest. The presence of these structures reinforces ethnic division regularly, at all societal levels. An essential point to keep in mind is that ethnic groups are widely seen as congruent with religious affiliation and vice versa.

From studying other people's publications and my own research I draw the conclusion that there is not one 'Bosnian Islam'. As Andreja Mesarič states, 'This concept of "traditional" or "Bosnian" Islam, [is] conceived as a tolerant, benevolent, Europe-friendly Islam, compatible with Western values, and championed as a bastion against radical, extremist, fundamentalist Islam

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<sup>101</sup> Sundhaussen, 327-328.

<sup>102</sup> Belma Bećirbašić, 'Intervju: Šutnja o problematičnim tačkama prošlosti', (2019), <https://www.mreza-mira.net/vijesti/razno/sutnja-o-problematičnim-tačkama-prošlosti/>, accessed 24.3.2020.

<sup>103</sup> Andrew Gilbert, 'The past in parenthesis: (Non)post-socialism in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina', *Anthropology Today* 22, no. 4 (2006).

imported from the Arab Middle East'.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, the religious establishment of the Islamic Community tends to refer to a Bosnian or Bosniak 'tradition of Islam'.<sup>105</sup>

Instead of a singular 'Bosnian Islam', there is diversity in beliefs and practices within the group called 'Muslim' in Bosnia-Herzegovina. As well as secular Muslims, atheists, and agnostics, there are believers of different types and forms. Current demographic figures on religious practice in Bosnia-Herzegovina are hard to come by. There are several reasons for this. On the one hand, this data is considered sensitive.<sup>106</sup> On the other hand, the conflation of ethnic and religious identities makes it virtually impossible to choose 'no religion' in favour of a more civic identity. The ethnic and thus religious identity is marked on ID cards and linked to democratic participation. Being ethno-religiously marked is pretty much obligatory in both in social interactions and in administrative processes. In 2012, Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, drawing on a wider body of research, found that 25–35 per cent of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina were either regularly or periodically observant.<sup>107</sup>

Sarajevo plays a particular role in in the religious landscape of the former Yugoslavia. There are what Mesarič calls a 'diversity of Islamic spaces' in the city.<sup>108</sup> The Faculty of Islamic Studies at the University of Sarajevo, the Islamic Community, and several *madrassas*, which are part of the official institutionally organised Islam, are all located there.<sup>109</sup> There also are several popular Sufi *tekkes*, an Iranian cultural centre, which offers some Shia content, the Saudi-

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<sup>104</sup> Mesarič, 'Wearing Hijab in Sarajevo: Dress Practices and the Islamic Revival in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', 23. "This is a view shared by the Islamic religious establishment (see also Antunez 2009; Moe 2009) and by Bosnian as well as European government officials, along with a large proportion of the general population."

<sup>105</sup> Zora Hesová, "'Islamic Tradition': Questioning the Bosnian Model', *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 39, no. 5 (2019): 135.

<sup>106</sup> Rudolfo Toe, 'Disputes Delay Publication of Bosnia Census', *BalkanInsight*, no. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/disputes-delay-publication-of-bosnia-census-11-04-2015> (2015)

<sup>107</sup> Spahić-Šiljak, 151-152. She is referring to: Abazović 2009, Spahić-Šiljak 2010, Zorica Kuburić 2011 – Magazine Tolerancija <http://tolerancija.net/category/casopis-tolerancija>. 2011 (no longer available) Abazović; Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, *Women, Religion and Politics* (Sarajevo IMIC, CIPS, TPO, 2010). Anecdotal evidence from my fieldwork suggests a figure of around 15-20 % of "ethnic" Muslims practicing regularly.

<sup>108</sup> Mesarič, "'Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 582.

<sup>109</sup> "The Structural Organisation of the Islamic Community."

<http://www.rijaset.ba/english/index.php/modules-menu/the-str...> (accessed 8.7.2014).

financed King Fahd mosque and numerous unofficial study groups.<sup>110</sup> So, Sarajevo offers many different ways of interpreting Islam.

Another way to conceive of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina is in terms of its potency in shaping personal versus collective identity. This can be understood as an Islam with 'two faces', as analysed by Julianne Funk:

The personal aspect, or 'believer identity', is due to a person's decision, whereas the collective aspect, what could be called ethno-religious identity, is given at birth and is beyond the individual's power to substantively change. The latter is attributed by heritage, family and society whereas the former is individually chosen.<sup>111</sup>

The women I spoke to tend to follow the first of these views and strenuously distance themselves from the cultural face of Islam, particularly the ethnic identity separate from faith. However, as the ethnic and religious categories in Bosnia-Herzegovina have been closely connected for centuries, it is challenging if not impossible to untangle them. So, while I take the word of my interlocutors with regard to their own perception, academic rigor also demands contextualising the situation. For Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this includes how it is used as an ethnic marker, the role of Muslim customs, the influence of other Muslim countries, and the power of Islamic institutions.

### 2.2.1 Religion as ethno-political markers in Bosnia-Herzegovina

The tight entanglement of ethnic and religious identities in both Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as in Sarajevo specifically makes it challenging to speak about Muslims (or Catholics or Orthodox people) only as believers. In the region, any mention of religion automatically carries an ethnic, and thereby political/national component. Distinguishing between personal faith and ethno-religious expression - i.e. between public and private, religious and secular and believer versus non-believer - is not an accurate depiction of religious affiliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>112</sup>

As mentioned above, individual categorisation according to religious affiliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina goes back a long time. During the process that led to

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<sup>110</sup> During my fieldwork, I heard some buzz about supposedly Shia activities but these were difficult to verify.

<sup>111</sup> Funk, 206.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 205.

the declaration of 'Muslim' as a *narod* (nation) in a political/representative sense during socialism, people were aware of the problem that this category was a religious one.<sup>113</sup> Currently, there are three so-called constituent people in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. Citizens in Bosnia-Herzegovina are practically forced by their administration, through bureaucracy, to declare their belonging to one of the ethnic groups that are constituent people. Others - for example Jews and Roma - are excluded from many political roles as a result of not belonging to one of these three affiliations.<sup>114</sup>

These three ethno-religious categories are relational; it is hard to imagine any ethno-religious identity persisting without the existence of the others as points of comparison and contrast. This plays out in several ways. In the memory of the last war, the relationships between ethnic groups are often reflective of a perpetrator and victim dynamic.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, twenty-five years after the war, access to resource networks is largely organised around ethno-religious lines. Due to prevalent corruption and nepotism, these networks are crucial for receiving funding, finding employment, or wielding any political power.<sup>116</sup>

Today, these ethnic and national frames have been made ever more accessible and legitimate, both for individuals in the region and analysts alike. Rogers Brubaker coined the term 'groupism' for the phenomenon of using such groups as the primary, homogenous, and distinct units of consideration, both by internal actors and external researchers.<sup>117</sup> Such 'coding and framing practices are heavily influenced by prevailing interpretive frames.... [which] generates a "coding bias" in the ethnic direction'.<sup>118</sup> It is not only outsiders, but also

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<sup>113</sup> The concept of *narod* can't quite be represented in English. For a detailed discussion see: Tone Bringa, 'Nationality Categories, National Identification and Identity Formation in "Multinational" Bosnia', *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 11, no. 1 & 2 (1993): 84-85. However, as Marko Barišić pointed out, *narod* is a concept that has undergone and continues to undergo changes in meaning. Personal communication, 17.5.2020. Lučić, 122.

<sup>114</sup> This ethnicised political situation is also one of the reasons that Bosnia-Herzegovina's pre-accession process to the EU stalled.

<sup>115</sup> Helms, 'Bosnian Girl; Nationalism and innocence through images of women', 219.

<sup>116</sup> "INFORM - Closing the gap between formal and informal institutions in the Balkans." <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/research/funded-research-projects/inform/home.html>, (accessed 28.4.2020).

<sup>117</sup> Rogers Brubaker, 'Ethnicity Without Groups', *Archives européennes de sociologie. European journal of sociology* 43, no. 2 (2002).164

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, *Ethnicity without groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 174.

Bosnians who identify themselves as belonging to ethno-national communities, and these identifications became the 'chief protagonists' in the 1990s. However, just as there isn't one type of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina, ethnic identity is not necessarily the only, or even the most important social identity marker. Two young urban students in Mostar and Sarajevo who are grouped into different ethnicities, for example, likely share more in terms of values and worries than either of them does with an older rural person who shares their ethnicity.<sup>119</sup>

There has been debate about whether the 'Muslim' or Bosniak (political) identity has been Islamised or whether Islamic religious identity has been nationalised.<sup>120</sup> I agree with Kerim Kudo that using religions as part of ethno-political identities seem to weaken their religious contents. Religious symbolism demonstrating belonging to the ethnic community can be seen as more important than religiosity itself, when used in a political way.<sup>121</sup> In the case of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the relationship between the SDA (Stranka Demokratske Akcije, English: Party of Democratic Action), ethnic identity, and religion is complex and changing.<sup>122</sup> A dominant theme in this research is that, overall, the women in my sample rejected what they see as an illegitimate entwinement of religion and politics. Similarly, the women I interviewed were critical about connections to Islam that were seen as reduced to customs and culture, rather than faith, as explored in the next section.

### 2.2.2 Muslim customs: Cultural Muslims?

The distinction between customs and religion arose repeatedly in my research, and not just with regard to the family but also for society as a whole. 'The BiH paradigm of European Islam, which includes great diversity of belief and practices that peacefully co-exist, is best seen in two views: of Islam as 'an individual faith' (Fikret Karčić), and of Islam as 'a common culture, and

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<sup>119</sup> Other significant categories of identity include gender, returnee status or memories of war, in the sense of being directly affected by it. Jansen, Brković, and Čelebičić, 8-9.

<sup>120</sup> Filandra; Abazović.

<sup>121</sup> Kudo, 279.

<sup>122</sup> The SDA is the main political party associated with Bosniaks and the Islamic community. Bougarel.

civilization' (Enes Karić)<sup>123</sup>. My interlocutors see religion as more modern and individually oriented, towards a global ummah rather than oriented towards the family or nation. Accordingly, family or ethno-national customs are seen as traditional and are sometimes not so connected to Islam. These are views that my interlocutors tend to share with the Bosnian Muslim diaspora, as explored below.

Names are generally an easily recognised marker of cultural belonging or ethnicity. Most of the women I spoke to construct part of their identity by what they are not. While they also see themselves as not Arabs and not Serbs, the most important part for many of them is that they are not 'Muslims by name'. This refers to the many people who have a Muslim heritage and are Bosniak in the ethno-national sense but have not made the active choice to practise the faith. Categorisation by name into ethnic groups is socially pervasive and tends to happen instinctively for locals. I was confronted with this when I first travelled around the country as a tourist in 2011. A typical dialogue would go something like this:

Random Person (RP): So, why did you decide to visit Bosnia-Herzegovina?

Franziska Singer (FS): Oh, I had a boyfriend from here and he told me so many positive things that I really wanted to come here and see for myself.

RP: Oh, where about is he from?

FS: Sarajevo.<sup>124</sup>

RP: Umm, what is his name?

FS: Emir.

Depending on the random person I was talking to at the time, the conversations would then go in very different directions. It took me some time to figure out why all these people were so interested in my ex's details. Later I realised this was a way to categorise him and, by extension, me. When I first moved to Sarajevo, I tried not to follow this pattern. My resistance only lasted about six

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<sup>123</sup> Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*, 150; See also: Xavier Bougarel, 'Bosnian Islam as "European Islam": limits and shifts of a concept', in *Islam in Europe: Diversity, Identity and Influence*, ed. Aziz Al-Azmeh and Effie Fokas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>124</sup> Being from Sarajevo, particularly pre-war, does not give a clear indication of ethnicity.

weeks. During Yugoslav times, there was a trend to give children ethnoreligiously ambiguous or neutral names.<sup>125</sup> While many family names are also ethnically coded, the first names are typically a clearer indicator.<sup>126</sup>

Amongst Muslims who do not practise religion regularly, many still celebrate Muslim holidays with their families or use religious locations and symbolism for life events. This is also often presented as a shift from the parents' generation to their children for the women I interviewed, as this example from Emina shows:

When I was growing up, not many in my [family] were believers. It was more a cultural thing... [being Muslim] from one holiday to the next... They were believers, but they didn't really practise.

Kad sam odrastala moji nisu bili toliki vjernici, više onako kulturološki...od praznika do praznika...oni su bili vjernici, ali nisu baš praktikovali.<sup>127</sup>

The importance of practice as related to being a believer will be explained in more detail below. My interlocutors' negative perceptions of 'Muslims by name' might also have a class-based element, since in the socialist era, Muslim customs were more widespread in rural areas than in modern, urban spaces.<sup>128</sup> Practising such customs only, without formal analysis and perception of a distinct believer identity therefore, could be seen as less refined/civilised.

Having explained what is meant by 'Muslims by name' I will next present the influence of Turkey and Arab countries, as this influence is seen by local people and academics alike to shape Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina in a political and religious sense.

### 2.2.3 Turkish and Arab influences on Muslims in Sarajevo

When considering Islam in Sarajevo today, it is also relevant to mention the relevance and influences of other Muslim-majority areas in the world, even though it is impossible to be comprehensive, much less consider how these

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<sup>125</sup>Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*, 19/20.

<sup>126</sup> Sorabji, 36.

<sup>127</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:19:38.8 - 00:19:59.9.

<sup>128</sup> Sead S. Fetahagić, 'Islam in Socialism and Post-Socialism', in *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*, ed. Zilka Spahić-Šiljak (Sarajevo: Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies, University of Sarajevo, 2012), 115.

Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*, 115. Quoting Esad Ćimić (1970).

influences have varied over time and in diverse sectors of society. Turkey and various Arab countries are perceived to have an influence on Bosnian Muslims by international observers and some locals. To a lesser degree, other Muslim-majority countries, such as Malaysia and Iran, have also had somewhat of a financial and religious impact.

While I received many questions around the influence of Turkey when presenting my research at international conferences, Turkey was hardly mentioned at all during interviews and during my fieldwork in Sarajevo in general. One explanation for this silence is that it may be seen as so intrinsic to the everyday fabric of life in Bosnia-Herzegovina that it is not explicitly mentioned. The other, opposite one would be that it is just not as relevant as outsiders perceive. This stands in stark contrast to how often I heard people in Sarajevo speaking about Arabs.

Outside religious influences - reflected, for example, in educational courses offered, books published or the financing of mosque construction - is often seen as negative, particularly when it comes from Middle Eastern actors, such as Saudi Arabia or Iran. This is less the case when it comes to various Turkish sources, which are seen as closer to the local traditions.<sup>129</sup> As others have noticed, a binary construction exists between 'old' Bosnian Islam and 'new', supposedly imported traditions. Women's dress is one of the ways that this is most outwardly visible.<sup>130</sup> This includes the wearing of hijab more generally, and particularly the niqab.<sup>131</sup>

The (re-)construction of mosques is another rich field of symbolism regarding outside influence and competing visual languages. The architecture of such rebuild religious monuments tends to reflect the origin of the funding, with some introducing architectural forms or visual motifs that are not traditionally found in the region.<sup>132</sup> All mosques in Bosnia-Herzegovina must officially follow the

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<sup>129</sup> Halide Velioğlu, 'Fugitive or Cosmopolitan: The Bosniaks' Desire for Europe and Trouble with the Ottoman Past', in *Islam and Public Controversy in Europe*, ed. Nilüfer Göle (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 251.

<sup>130</sup> Mesarić, 'Wearing Hijab in Sarajevo: Dress Practices and the Islamic Revival in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', 23.

<sup>131</sup> Full-face covering is frequently cited as 'not ours'. Ibid., 'Muslim Women's Dress Practices in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Localizing Islam through Everyday Lived Practice', 109.

This is clearly a construction of cultural imagination as both old photographs and the existence of a Yugoslav law prohibiting face covering demonstrate.

<sup>132</sup> Aksamija, 124.

authority of the Islamic Community, but people in Sarajevo have voiced their concern that different Islamic content would be transmitted in the mosques (re-) built by international actors.<sup>133</sup> Turkish actors, who invested heavily in Bosnian and Herzegovinian mosque (re-)construction, have usually employed neo-Ottoman forms, which resonate with the Ottoman-era mosques typically found before the war and therefore tend to be appreciated more by the local population. Different players from Turkey also behave differently. While state agencies are more involved in the reconstruction of old structures, city partnerships are responsible for newly built mosques.<sup>134</sup>

For Bosniaks, Turkey can be seen as a protector nation, with a similar dynamic as Serbia feels for Serbs and Croatia for Croats. Turkey fosters this sense of connection by financing the construction of mosques, offering free Turkish language courses and stipends for students, as well as investing in businesses in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>135</sup> It is important to keep in mind that there are many different actors with various goals coming from Turkey to Bosnia-Herzegovina and that they do not necessarily cooperate.<sup>136</sup> This presence and the influence of these various Turkish actors is also evolving. For example, after the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, some attempts were made to close educational institutions in Sarajevo that were influenced by the Gülen movement, but these were only partially successful.<sup>137</sup>

One frequently-cited example of foreign funding is the King Fahd mosque and cultural centre financed with donations from Saudi Arabia. In addition to the large space for prayer in the mosque, the cultural centre offers free classes: English and Arabic language, computer programming, and other useful things. They also provide a basketball court and childcare during school holidays. The King Fahd mosque is strategically well placed for soft diplomacy, located in a population-dense, socialist-period neighbourhood that had little religious infrastructure previously. The cultural centre is elegant and spotless. The free

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<sup>133</sup> Personal communication, 28.6.2016.

<sup>134</sup> Öktem, 27; 44/45.

<sup>135</sup> Rodolfo Toe, 'More Bosnian Muslims Learn Turkish and Arabic', *Balkan Insight* (2016), <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/03/14/bosnian-students-fascinated-by-turkish-arabic-language-03-11-2016/>, accessed 30.3.2020.

<sup>136</sup> Öktem, 52.

<sup>137</sup> Rašidagić and Hesova. Erich Rathfelder. " Die Türkei und der Balkan: Erdoğan's langer Arm " <https://taz.de/Die-Tuerkei-und-der-Balkan/!5648055/>, (accessed 27.3.2020).

courses are popular, and visiting one does not immediately affect one's worldview or expose one to proselytising, as I personally experienced.<sup>138</sup> However, I did hear from some people that after a certain period of participation in sports or cultural offerings, there was some pressure to take part in religious study groups or other more overtly religious activities.<sup>139</sup>

While the narratives of Middle Eastern influences on Bosnian Muslims date back some time, perhaps connected to a view of Bosnia-Herzegovina as 'oriental', there has been an increased visibility of Arab involvement since the war and even more in the late 2010s. The most obvious areas of this influence are the construction of shopping malls, Arab tourism, and the (re-) construction of religious buildings.

The financial disparity between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Middle Eastern investors and visitors is significant, as both economic and religious aspects exist in the relationship. The inequality is also widened in the imagination; the fact that the Gulf states are more economically developed is felt keenly. The economic influence of Middle Eastern states has had an impact in the social sphere. Sarajevans who perceive themselves as urban and modern tend to meet and socialise at shopping centres. Thus, it is relevant that alcohol is not sold/served in the two biggest and most popular ones, Sarajevo City Centar and BBI Centar.

Bosnia-Herzegovina is also an increasingly popular tourist destination, particularly for visitors from Gulf States, whose clothing and appearance make them more visible than visitors from Western Europe. While Arab investment is welcome, there is much resentment at the capacity for Arabs to buy and build as extravagantly as they wish, as I was told frequently. This resentment has been, for example, directed at the destruction of a nature reserve in order to build a holiday village, or at Bosnian properties being sold to Arab visitors.

For Bosnian Muslims who self-identify as believers, this can be an additional layer in their relationship to Islam. For many Bosnian Muslim believers, the Arabian Peninsula—the birthplace of the prophet, the goal of the hajj pilgrimage

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<sup>138</sup> In Mostar, these kinds of courses are attended by different people, and thus are one interethnic space, as compared to the segregated state education system. Marko Barišić, Personal communication, 17.5.2020.

<sup>139</sup> Personal communication, 15.2.2015; personal communication, 13.8.2016.

and the place where core Islamic rules originate—is seen as somehow more Muslim than Southeastern Europe. Along with the emphasis that Islam goes beyond local interpretations, there is an aura of ‘more Muslim-ness’ that surrounds Arabs, I observed.

Another area of Arab influence pertains to how Islam is practised in Sarajevo. The increased presence of Arab visitors is often seen as negative; some Sarajevans distinctly describe them as ‘not our people’.<sup>140</sup> While the interview partners I spoke with stressed that there is only one Islam, several also pointed out that one’s tradition affects how Islam is practised. At least Islamic practitioners seem therefore to separate Arab culture, which is perceived as foreign and negative, from a constructed, shared religion, Islam. This aligns with the idea of a decultured Islam, which is often directed at my respondents’ parents’ generation, who are seen as heavily influenced by local culture and traditions. So the parents, as well as ‘foreign Arabs’ are viewed as practising Islam which is influenced by culture, and thus tainted. For non-practicing people, however, this unfamiliar, Arab Islam is a more fearful spectre than the tangible aspects of building mosques and shopping centres or offering language courses.

One of the fear-inducing urban myths is that Saudis/Arabs/Wahabis pay Bosnian women 50–100 Euro a month to wear hijab. This was repeated to me countless times when I mentioned my research topic in assorted settings, such as on the tram, to friends of friends, hiking, and in academic contexts. Sebastian Kurz, then the Austrian foreign minister, also perpetuated this story after a visit to the region, triggering a disclaimer from the Islamic Community.<sup>141</sup>

Fear that the local practices of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina, or the Balkans more generally, would be strongly and negatively influenced by outside powers is also present internationally. One can find a sensationalised fear in Western European and US media of a dangerous process of European Bosnians being radicalised. The real and visible traces of outside influences in shopping centres, tourists and religious structures are associated with a more ominous

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<sup>140</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:27:38 - 01:28:20.

<sup>141</sup> Igor Spaic and Isufi Preparim, 'Bosnia, Kosovo Dismiss Austrian Claim About 'Paid' Veils', *Balkan Insight* (2017), <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/08/23/austrian-foreign-minister-s-statement-met-with-criticism-in-bosnia-kosovo-08-23-2017/>, accessed 11.9.2018.

and intangible possibility that a different style of practice, generally associated with the Middle East, become more prevalent. I have heard this association and concern also voiced in some academic, mainly security studies, circles.<sup>142</sup> The women I spoke to and other local people in the field are aware of the international interpretation of these visible signs and referred to it implicitly and explicitly.

The academic Piro Rexhepi states that a distinction and hierarchy of 'suspect populations' is made of Muslims in the Balkans and Muslims outside. Salafi interpretations of Islam are seen as imported/foreign in South Eastern Europe even though a foremost ideological founder of the Salafist movement was the Albanian Islamic scholar Nasir-ud-Din Al-Albani (1914–1999).<sup>143</sup>

The majority of practitioners of fundamentalist Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina live a peaceful, if separated, life, for example in the villages of Gornja Maoca or Osve (although they are regularly beleaguered by journalists). This is not to deny that some residents of Bosnia-Herzegovina have been recruited to ISIS, the so-called Islamic State.<sup>144</sup> In 2016, so-called *paradžemat* mosques operating outside the Islamic Community's purview were closed down. These were also seen as being linked to Wahhabism, whereas the main argument against them from the Islamic Community was their illegality.<sup>145</sup> The government of Bosnia-Herzegovina also introduced a law against joining in foreign paramilitary forces in 2014, though as of 2015 there was no coherent prevention strategy.<sup>146</sup> Actors working against against violent extremism and radicalisation include the Ministry of Security, the International Organisation for Migration, the OSCE Mission and the United Nations Development Programme, as well as various embassies, civil society organisations and the Islamic Community.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Öktem, 28/29.

<sup>143</sup> Rexhepi, 52.

<sup>144</sup> Vlado Azinović and Muhamed Jusić, *The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent - Preliminary Report*, (Sarajevo: The Atlantic Initiative, 2015).

<sup>145</sup> Zdravko Ljubas, 'Islamska zajednica BiH protiv 'paradžemata', *dw.com* (2016), <https://www.dw.com/bs/islamska-zajednica-bih-protiv-parad%C5%BEemata/a-18980961>, accessed 15.4.2021.

<sup>146</sup> Azinović and Jusić, 48/49.

<sup>147</sup> Anida Dudić Damir Kapidžić, Veldinn Kadić, Sead Turčalo, *CONNKT Country Reports National Approaches to Extremism - Bosnia and Herzegovina*, (European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2020), 11-13.

There are also specific gender roles associated with Arabs. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, like in Western Europe and the US, Arab women are portrayed as subservient and suppressed, as is explored in more detail below. However, there are also stereotypes about men, such as those present in a story that went viral in June 2016, that Arab men were marrying Bosnian women although they already had wives in another country.<sup>148</sup> This matches the perception of Arab men as particularly sexual, which is also evident for example in Germany in some conversations where far right and feminism meet.<sup>149</sup>

As this section pointed out, there are different levels to the relationship between Turkey and Arabic countries, with Bosnia-Herzegovina as a county on the one hand and Bosnian Muslims as a group on the other. This includes economic investment, soft diplomacy, and tourism. Furthermore, there is some religious influence, which tends to loom larger in the fearful imaginations of local non-practitioners and external observers in Western Europe and the US than it does in the mind of Bosnian Muslims themselves.

#### 2.2.4 Islamic institutions

The level of Islam's bureaucratisation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, or rather for Bosniaks, is unusual from a global perspective. While more comprehensive and critical studies can be found elsewhere, the basic outlines of this institutionalisation should be mentioned here.<sup>150</sup> This is important as this institutional framework provides the backdrop and formal structure upon which Islam is practised in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Islamic Community (Islamska Zajednica, IZ) is an institution independent of the state, which decides on doctrine, appoints imams, and is responsible for religious education for Bosnian Muslims in- and outside Bosnia-Herzegovina. The defining features of the IZ have been substantially shaped by the origin as

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<sup>148</sup> Albina Sorguc, 'Arabs Marry Bosnian Women to Establish Parallel Families', *Balkan Insight* (2016), <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/06/06/arabs-marry-bosnian-women-to-establish-parallel-families-06-06-2016/>, accessed 17.4.2020.

<sup>149</sup> Jakob Augstein, 'Männer, Monster und Muslime', *Spiegel Online*, 2.11. 2015.

<sup>150</sup> Hesová; Piro Rexhepi, 'Imperial inventories, "illegal mosques" and institutionalized Islam: Coloniality and the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina', *History and Anthropology* (2019); Šeta.

a structure set up by the Habsburg rulers.<sup>151</sup> This institution relates fundamentally to common practices of Islam on the ground in Bosnia-Herzegovina. For example, local imams read sermons at Friday prayers that were drafted by the Islamic Community, while financial contributions to this institution grant one the right to (local) Muslim burial and wedding ceremonies. The IZ is quite traditional and male dominated, and the women I spoke to did not consider it to be very influential in their lives. Rather, certain persons were referred to, above all the local imam of the White Mosque, Sulejman Bugari, who moved to Montenegro in 2016.<sup>152</sup> However, there is some traditional space for women within the mainstream religious structures.<sup>153</sup> While there were some attempts to be more inclusive of women in the 2010s, this topic did not feature much in the interviews I conducted or in general conversations.

While traditionally the ties between the IZ and the SDA, the main Bosniak political party, were quite strong, these have been loosened as of 2003.<sup>154</sup> The Islamic Community and intellectuals connected to it have been mindful to refer to the Bosnian tradition of Islam, or Islamic tradition of the Bosniaks, rather than as something that could be construed as a political identity.<sup>155</sup>

The Islamic Community does profit from positioning Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina as an example of European Islam, however. For example, the last Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mustafa Cerić, published a widely acclaimed Declaration of European Muslims, where he explicitly speaks for the Muslims in Europe and also addresses them.<sup>156</sup> This position of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Europe will be explored in the next section.

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<sup>151</sup> Hesova.

<sup>152</sup> Ernst and Galijas; "Sulejman Bugari." <http://www.sulejmanbugari.com/biografija/>, (accessed 28.4.2019).

<sup>153</sup> Catharina Raudvere and Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, *Bosnian Muslim Women's Rituals - Bulas Singing, Reciting and Teaching in Sarajevo*, (University of Copenhagen 2016).

<sup>154</sup> Kudo, 263-294.

<sup>155</sup> Hesová.

<sup>156</sup> Mustafa Cerić, 'Deklaration Europäischer Muslime', (2006), [http://www.islamskazajednica.ba/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=45&](http://www.islamskazajednica.ba/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&), accessed 16.06.2017. Further analysis can also be found at: Velioğlu, 245-248.

### 2.3 Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of Europe<sup>157</sup>

Bosnia-Herzegovina is a member of a number of institutions that have 'Europe' in their name: UEFA, and therefore the European Football Championship, the Eurovision Song Contest, and the Council of Europe.<sup>158</sup> However, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as in other countries, 'Europe' is often used as a synonym for the European Union.<sup>159</sup> It is not always clear, therefore, what is meant, for example, when people in Bosnia-Herzegovina see themselves as not being part of Europe. Does the not-belonging refer to the European Union, with its clear administrative roles and boundaries, or rather the more amorphous cultural region and continent that is Europe?<sup>160</sup>

Local actors profiting from presenting Bosnia-Herzegovina as a place and example of European Islam, thus explicitly opposing the narrative that 'European' is synonymous with Christianity, include the Faculty of Islamic Studies and the Islamic Community.<sup>161</sup> From within the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Enes Karić conception of a Muslim and European identity is multidimensional, complex and hybrid. He is in favour of keeping up local traditional Muslim practices, something most of the women in my sample reject.<sup>162</sup> Others have argued that wartime evidence shows that Bosnian Muslims are not part of Europe: that since the greatest victims (quantitatively) in Bosnia-Herzegovina were Muslims, EU representatives must not have seen

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<sup>157</sup> Parts of this section have been previously published in German in: Franziska Singer, 'Islam, Europa und Balkan - Theoretische Diskussionen und ihre Wahrnehmung in Sarajevo', in *Imagination und Wirkungsmacht: Frauen · Männer · West · Ost*, ed. Veronika Zwing, Österreichisch-Siebenbürgische Kulturbeiträge (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitara Clujeana, 2017 ).

<sup>158</sup> Some relevant points about political positioning and the ESC by Catherine Baker can be found in: Danijel Majić and Krsto Lazarević, *Der ESC oder 12 Punkte für Jugoslawien*, podcast audio, Neues vom Ballaballa-Balkan, accessed 24.5.2021, 2021, <https://ballaballa-balkan.de/episode/der-esc-oder-12-punkte-fuer-jugoslawien>.

<sup>159</sup> Tanja Petrović, 'Introduction: Europeanization and the Balkans', in *Mirroring Europe : ideas of Europe and Europeanization in Balkan societies*, ed. Tanja Petrović, Balkan Studies Library (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 3.

<sup>160</sup> Here, I do not explore the debate around what 'Europe' actually is, as it is beyond my scope.

<sup>161</sup> Kudo, 285.

<sup>162</sup> Enes Karić, 'Bosnische Identität und europäische Identität', in *Muslimische Stimmen aus Bosnien und Herzegowina : die Entwicklung einer modernen islamischen Denktradition* ed. Armina Omerika (Freiburg: Herder, 2013), 200.

them as a real part of Europe, such that they deserved EU/European intervention.<sup>163</sup>

The idea that Bosnia-Herzegovina is special – as a country with a European Muslim population for centuries – is also taken up outside its borders. For example, at a well-funded ‘European Islamophobia Summit’, held in Sarajevo in 2016 and hosted by various Turkish organisations, speakers repeatedly mentioned that due to the events of the war and its position as a Muslim and European city, Sarajevo had a particularly high responsibility to be vigilant about Islamophobia.<sup>164</sup> In addition, various German-language media portrayed Bosnia-Herzegovina in general, and Sarajevo in particular, as Muslim and European, and thus, remarkable.<sup>165</sup> The same idea can be found both in media and amongst tourists and other visitors from the US.<sup>166</sup>

For many of the inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina with whom I spoke, ‘being European’ is about the physical location of the country. A common thread is that Bosnia-Herzegovina is geographically part of Europe and thus residents are European. So, from within, people respond to the question of if and how Bosnia-Herzegovina is part of Europe somewhat indifferently.

Xavier Bougarel discussed, specifically as ‘European Islam’ how ‘Islam [in Bosnia-Herzegovina can be] defined as an individual faith, as a common culture and as a discriminatory political ideology,’ represented by Fikret Karčić, Enes Karić and Adnan Jahić respectively.<sup>167</sup>

When discussing the relationship between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Europe, Maria Todorova’s concept ‘Balkanism’, which was influenced by Orientalism debates, is also relevant.<sup>168</sup> According to the Todorova, Balkanism is not only

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<sup>163</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 162-165.

<sup>164</sup> "Islamophobia Summit - Facebook Event."

<https://www.facebook.com/islomophobiasummit/>, (accessed 25.09.2017). Field notes 25.6.2016.

<sup>165</sup> Charlotte Wiedemann, 'Modell Sarajevo: Islam und Säkularismus vertragen sich. Wie das geht? Die Bosnier machen es uns vor.', *Zeit Online* (2012), <http://www.zeit.de/2012/46/Bosnien-Muslime>, accessed 8.11.2012; Nadia Pantel, 'Sarajevo, mon amour', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4.11. 2015.

<sup>166</sup> Riada Asimovic Akyol, 'Want to Cultivate a Liberal European Islam? Look to Bosnia.', *The Atlantic* (2019), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/01/bosnia-offers-model-liberal-european-islam/579529/>, accessed 13.1.2020. Personal communication.

<sup>167</sup> Bougarel, 'Bosnian Islam as "European Islam": limits and shifts of a concept', 100.

<sup>168</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978).

a specific form of Orientalism but rather shows how a geographical name can become a negative political term, for example, in the expression 'Balkanisation'.<sup>169</sup> She writes about how the Balkans is seen as a bridge or a crossroads, which, because of its in-between state, means it is also incomplete.

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My research has also confirmed the thesis of Milica Bakić-Hayden that there are 'nested Orientalisms'.<sup>171</sup> For example, Europeans see Asia as more 'different' than Eastern Europe; within Eastern Europe, however, there are further nuances and shades of differentiation.<sup>172</sup> The Balkans are the most Eastern within Europe, and in the former Yugoslavia there was a hierarchy based on whether a region belonged to the Habsburg or Ottoman Empire.<sup>173</sup> Apart from these regional classifications, which also changed in the course of history, according to Bakić-Hayden, there is also a gradation according to religion. Thus, Catholics are regarded as more Western than Orthodox people. Orthodox, as Christians, see themselves as belonging to the West more than Muslims. Muslims in the former Yugoslavia located the Orient outside Europe, for example with Arabs.<sup>174</sup> I could also repeatedly observe this view of Arabs as different, as representatives of the Orient and the Orientalisation that goes along with it, in Sarajevo.

It is important to note that in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as in other countries in Southeast Europe, the term 'Balkans' is not just negative. From at least 2012, likely earlier, it has also been used as a neutral or even positive self-nominator.<sup>175</sup> In any case, 'the Balkans' is seen ambivalently in Sarajevo, as both positive and negative, as both belonging to Europe and not belonging.

As is also the case more generally, in Bosnia-Herzegovina the term 'Europe' is often at first equated with the European Union. When referring to the European Union, Bosnia-Herzegovina is clearly excluded. The road to potentially joining

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<sup>169</sup> Maria Nikolaeva Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 18, 58ff.

<sup>171</sup> Bakić-Hayden.

<sup>172</sup> Aydin Babuna, 'National Identity, Islam and Politics in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina', *East European Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2006).

<sup>173</sup> Bakić-Hayden, 918.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 921ff.

<sup>175</sup> For example: "Creative History Balkans." <https://www.creativehistorybalkans.com/>, (accessed 18.5.2020); "Balkan Nightlife Graz. Faceook group." <https://www.facebook.com/groups/BalkanNightlifeGraz/>, (accessed 18.5.2020).

the European Union is a long and hard one for Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>176</sup> For many ordinary people, the thought of working in the EU or eventually even joining it is dearly wished for, but the political elite profit more from the current situation, where joining the EU is a far-off dream.

This chapter has sought to provide an overview of the most salient components of the history of Sarajevo and of the religious and cultural context in which it operates. First, I outlined the history of Sarajevo, with a particular focus on the parts that were deemed relevant by people I interacted with in the city, be it as interview partners or in a wider context. Then I outlined some aspects around Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina, including religions as ethno-religious categories, Muslim customs, Turkish and Arab influences, and finally the role of Islamic institutions. The points raised here are particularly important as aspects that the women at the centre of my study distance themselves from. As the last part of the context, I presented some of the ways in which Bosnia-Herzegovina is part of Europe. After outlining the more tangible context of history, religion, and society, I next present the theoretical context in which this research is situated.

### 3 Theoretical frame

With my study on the religious self-positioning of young Muslim women in Sarajevo, I not only want to enrich knowledge about Islam in Europe with an important facet, but also contribute to the differentiation of social, political, and religious debates about the relationship between Islam, gender, and modernity. I have therefore decided to zoom in on a field where for the enactment of discourses around the relationality of Islam and Europe, is brought into focus and provided a particularly rich view, young Muslim women in Sarajevo.

This is particularly evident for different social, political, and religious debates, both in academia and society more generally. I have chosen to focus on those that surfaced as most relevant to participants in the field, my field being the people I interacted with in Sarajevo.

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<sup>176</sup> Harun Cero, 'Politička obećanja: Gdje je BiH bila 2014, a gdje je sada', *Al Jazeera Balkans* (2018), <https://balkans.aljazeera.net teme/2018/9/28/politicka-obecanja-gdje-je-bih-bila-2014-gdje-je-sada>, accessed 6.5.2020.

This includes the debates around young Muslim Europeans and the imagined ideal of a global, de-ethnicised Islam, where I found parallels in Sarajevo to what has been analysed in other European cities. Another relevant string of debates that was reflected in my interviews were centred around the phenomenon of Balkanism, and, related to that, notions of Othering and Orientalism. These were not key, but there are some points where my research can add to these existing debates. Finally, there is some work I draw on around Bosnian Islam, though that is more empirical.

This study follows an emphatically empirical approach. I draw on theoretical perspectives that are helpful to understand and explain what I found in the field, or when my data contradicts explanations that are available elsewhere.

However, the main contribution of this research is that born of fieldwork conducted in Sarajevo, where I collected large amounts of data and critically analysed, structured, and presented it. My research is based on the principles of Grounded Theory, as this exploratory study seemed to me to require the greatest possible openness to my field site.<sup>177</sup> In my case, this meant that I entered my fieldwork and the analysis in a very open way and came to the topics discussed and theories used by what I heard and what I had my research partners found important to discuss. The core of my study is thus the empirical research, which can also be understood as contribution by anthropology of religion to the contemporary history of religion in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The study is theoretically framed by embedding the central question and the data in interdisciplinary research on Islam, gender, and religion in South Eastern Europe. The previous research that is particularly relevant as a theoretical frame is outlined below.

### 3.1 Young Muslim Europeans & de-ethnicised, global Islam

The content of my study draws upon existing research that has dealt young Muslims in other European countries. The phenomena described in this body

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<sup>177</sup> Katy Charmaz and Richard G. Mitchell, 'Grounded Theory in Ethnography', in *Handbook of Ethnography*, ed. A. Coffey P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, J.Lofland and L.Lofland (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2001); Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research* (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2006 (1967)); Katja Mruck and Günther Mey, 'Grounded Theory and Reflexivity', in *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*, ed. Anthony Brynt and Kathy Charmaz (London: Sage, 2007).

of literature tends to show many similarities to the practices and beliefs I observed in Sarajevo, including a focus on personal faith and choice, a stricter religious practice than their parents' generation, and a desire to find an Islam that is independent of local traditions. This new Islam can be imagined as a 'Global Ummah', a frame of reference beyond culture and tradition.

Young Western Muslims' strong emphasis on choice can also be seen as an individualized practice of Islam.<sup>178</sup> In the existing research, the strong emphasis on choice in relation to Muslim practice and belief is attributed to the diaspora context. For my ethnographic field of research, the Muslims in Sarajevo, this premise does not apply, as this is not about a diaspora situation. However, it can still be observed that Muslim women in Sarajevo practise an explicitly chosen, individual form of Islam.

From the rich field of authors working in the diasporic context, there are a few I build on particularly, as they analyse similar phenomena to what I found in Sarajevo. Nilüfer Göle's *The Daily Lives of Muslims: Islam and Public Confrontation in Contemporary Europe*, originally published in French in 2015, examines debates around Muslims' participation in the public sphere across Europe.<sup>179</sup> The aspects she analyses around individuation of belief and intergenerational differences were consistent with what I found in Sarajevo. Both in Göle's work and in mine, it is the explicit individualised form of religious life that is important in both groups.

In her work, *The Religious Identity of Young Muslim Women in Berlin: An Ethnographic Study*, Synnøve Bendixsen focuses on participants in a specific organisation, the 'Muslimische Jugend Deutschland'.<sup>180</sup> She also finds individualisation and a focus on choice, as well as a practice that seeks to be free from ethnic or national influences. Where her results differ from mine is around the importance of community and the explanation of the phenomena discovered through migration. This is particularly key as she also used the diaspora contexts as an explanation for her findings.

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<sup>178</sup> Further reading and debates can be found in Bendixsen, 8-13.

<sup>179</sup> Nilüfer Göle, *The Daily Lives of Muslims: Islam and Public Confrontation in Contemporary Europe* (London: Zed Books, 2017).

<sup>180</sup> Bendixsen.

Sigrid Nökel's *Die Töchter der Gastarbeiter und der Islam: Zur Soziologie alltagsweltlicher Anerkennungspolitiken - Eine Fallstudie* also looks at young Muslim women in Germany. In her research, Nökel finds a distancing from official Islamic structures and a focus on being a good person rather than following rules and regulations.<sup>181</sup> She also writes about the parents' generation's traditional way of practice and how this is seen as negative by her research participants. Olivier Roy's *Globalized Islam* is also often named in this context, particularly for his clear statement that individualisation and the 'reconstruction of what it means to be a good Muslim' are contingent on living in the diaspora, that is, in a largely non-Muslim society.<sup>182</sup> This observation that individualisation is dependent upon diaspora is also not true for several other countries and is untrue in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Muslims make up a significant portion of the population. Anecdotal evidence further suggests that this observation is also not true for several other countries with a Muslim majority; this, however, goes beyond the scope of this study.<sup>183</sup> Andreja Mesarič, whose work on Muslim women in Sarajevo I discuss in more detail below, does also connect to Bendixsen and Roy, but in the other direction, from research on the Western European diaspora; overall, academics do not seem to connect much to Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>184</sup>

### 3.2 Constructing the 'Other'? Orientalism and Balkanism

Another field I draw on is that connected to Othering and Balkanism, the latter of which is a notion of subjugation related to Orientalism. Of course, all this builds on Edward Said's *Orientalism*.<sup>185</sup> In his seminal work, Said pointed out how Europeans had constructed a split between the 'East', covering North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, and the 'West', encompassing Europe and later the US, and how this 'East' was seen as backward and requiring civilising through subjugation.

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<sup>181</sup> Nökel.

<sup>182</sup> Roy, 175.

<sup>183</sup> Including personal communication related to Islamabad and Ramallah.

<sup>184</sup> This likely changed over time as Olivier Roy is one of editors of an impactful book on the region. Olivier Roy and Arolda Elbasani, *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015).

<sup>185</sup> Said.

Taking the concept of Orientalism as a starting point and developing a distinct approach, Balkanism is concerned with how what is actually a geographical designation could become such a strongly negative, political description. Fundamental to an understanding of Balkanism is Maria Toderova's *Imagining the Balkans*, which discusses the idea of 'the Balkan' and has had tremendous influence in the fields of anthropology, history, and, to a lesser degree, political science.<sup>186</sup> Toderova posits a construction of the Balkans as masculine, as a bridge or crossroads, as incomplete because of being in-between, passing by. In a separate paper, I discuss, among other things, how young Muslim women in Sarajevo refer to the Balkan(s) as a concept.<sup>187</sup> The main result is that the term 'Balkan' is used in a narrower sense, referring mainly to former Yugoslavia, and, in both a negative way, as Toderova suggests, but also in a neutral or even positive sense.

In 'Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia', religious studies scholar Milica Bakić-Hayden notices a West-to-East, Habsburg-to-Ottoman, Catholic-to-Muslim gradation of Orientalism.<sup>188</sup> She finds that the further East a population is imagined, the more negatively it is perceived. For the field I am investigating, a key question within the concept of 'Nesting Orientalisms' is if and how a strong boundary is constructed by Muslim women in Sarajevo towards Arabs and others that are perceived as 'Eastern'.

I observed through my fieldwork that the idea of Islam as the 'Other' opposite Europe was only somewhat present in contemporary Sarajevo. Contrary to the fascination outsiders such as myself have with Sarajevo as a Muslim and European city, I found during my research that such a perception was not very strongly-held by residents of the city itself. Areas where the notion of Islam as the 'Other' did come up is when talking about travel – both to Western Europe and countries to the east – and in discussing typical narratives of Sarajevo as a place where East and West meet. The women I interviewed as well as other people I talked to in Sarajevo did not construct an opposition between Islam

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<sup>186</sup> Todorova.

<sup>187</sup> Singer.

<sup>188</sup> Bakić-Hayden.

and Europe. Considering that they generally consider themselves to be Muslim and European, this is hardly surprising.

Rather, I found that, overall, the (young) believers I spoke to saw a contrast between both themselves and their parents' generation, as well as between themselves and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina who have an ethno-political rather than faith-based identity.

When starting this project, I was interested in what I saw in Bosnia-Herzegovina in terms of traditional Ottoman and Central European architecture, and the people who seem to fit both preconceptions of what is considered Muslim and European. However, despite my initial interest in this category, in the course of my research, I was able to determine that 'being European' was not a relevant category for the women I interviewed. As a result, theoretical work around the Othering of Islam, for example that by Fatima El Tayeb and Talal Asad, will not be discussed in detail.<sup>189</sup> Instead, I decided to follow the much more open concept of Grounded Theory: I went into the field without fixed presuppositions in order to remain open in the research process. In this methodology, I work with the topics that are deemed relevant by my research partners, even if they are not those that initially drove my interest or generated my hypothesis.

In the construction of Islam as the 'Other' opposite both Europe and the 'West' more generally, Muslim women are frequently assigned a particular role as oppressed and in need of being saved. This theory has been extensively developed by Lila Abu Lughod.<sup>190</sup> This was a strong trope in the colonial time, and until today, legal battles about the right to wear hijab in certain professions and media images using the veil as a symbol of suppression and/otherness abound in Europe.<sup>191</sup> Several authors have concluded that the focus on the suppression on Muslim women is a strategy to distract from the inequality between men and women still rampant in the West.<sup>192</sup> During this study, I will

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<sup>189</sup> Asad; Fatima El Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, ed. Roderick A. Ferguson and Grace Kyungwon Hong, Difference Incorporated (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

<sup>190</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>191</sup> For colonial time: Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1967). For contemporary examples, see for teachers in Germany: 'Kopftuch als Karrierekiller', *dw.com* (2013), <http://www.dw.com/de/kopftuch-als-karrierekiller/a-17114724>, accessed 23.2.2015.

<sup>192</sup> For Germany, Gabriele Dietze, 'Okzidentalismuskritik: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Forschungsperspektivierung', in *Kritik des Okzidentalismus: Transdisziplinäre Beiträge zu*

show, somewhat connected to 'Othering', how intent the women I spoke to are on showing themselves as actors. My research has shown that young Muslim women in Sarajevo are very aware of this negative image, and are eager to dispel it when active in international networks. As is outlined below, this is particularly true for those wearing the veil, as they see themselves as more visible and with responsibility to represent their religion in a positive way.

Debates around Muslim women, often focusing on hijab, are present in many fields, from politics, theology, and sociology to religious studies and gender studies. The hijab is also strongly politicised in public debates. In academia, these issues can't be seen as separate from society. I refer to mainly to the work of those either focusing on European Muslims, as outlined above, or also examining case studies from Bosnia-Herzegovina, as outlined below. In both of these bodies of literature, hijab is mentioned. I do not, however, draw on the body of work that looks at women in Islam or the wearing of hijab through a theological lens, as this is neither relevant to answering my question nor my academic discipline.

### 3.3 Bosnian Islam: A long-standing variant of Islam in Europe

Writing about young Muslim women in Sarajevo, I naturally build on previous work on Muslims in Bosnia. The most widely known is Tone Bringa's *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*.<sup>193</sup> This classic anthropological tome is rich in data and offers deep insights, and I do refer to it. However, her research field differs from mine in several ways. She wrote about a rural setting, whereas the context in which I worked, Sarajevo, is very much urban. The type of religious practice she outlines is largely traditional, whereas the research participants I spoke to saw themselves as having a self-developed, individual type of practice. Furthermore, Bringa's research was conducted before the war, which clearly had a significant impact both on the individual and societal level.

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(Neo-)Orientalismus und Geschlecht, ed. Gabriele Dietze, Claudia Brunner, and Edith Wenzel, GenderCodes (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009). For the US: Abu-Lughod.

<sup>193</sup> Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*.

Cornelia Sorabji's *Muslim identity and Islamic faith in Sarajevo* was also researched before the war.<sup>194</sup> As her work was located in the same city, there are quite a few continuities that I refer to in specific sections, especially those looking at daily life and practice. In her other work, she picks up on some aspects from a post-war perspective; however, these points are largely not in focus for me.<sup>195</sup> The works of two authors in particular have a very similar angle to my research. These are Julianne Funk's 'Public Expressions of Bosnian Muslim Religiosity and Lived Faith: The Cases of Friday Prayer and Hijab' and several publications by Andreja Mesarič.<sup>196</sup> Both Funk and Mesarič have focused on women with a more obvious practice, as the reference to 'hijab' in their titles shows. While I cover a wider range of people, it is interesting to ask if many of the same narratives occur although the research participants in my study had a wider range of practice. These include the importance of personal choice, a negative view of ethno-political uses of religion, and the individualisation of faith-based rules and norms.

Another author who does not focus only on believers is Zilka Spahić-Šiljak. She looks more at women in leadership positions, for example in NGOs, and also brings in feminism.<sup>197</sup> I could build on some of her research, for example with regards to my informants' view of Middle Eastern Muslims and how secular feminists view hijabis. My research, however, is much more directed towards personal practice and positioning in everyday life, as opposed to the focus on feminism and socially active people.

Thus, through the use of the above theoretical positions and empirical data, I mainly build on research about European Muslims and about Bosnian Islam. Although I began the research with certain theoretical frameworks in mind, my

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<sup>194</sup> Sorabji.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 'Mixed Motives: Islam, Nationalism and Mevluds in an Unstable Yugoslavia', in *Muslim women's choices: religious belief and social reality*, ed. Camillia Fawzi El-Solh and Judy Mabro, Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women (Providence: Berg, 1994); Ibid., 'Bosnian Neighbourhoods Revisited: Tolerance, Commitment and Komšilik in Sarajevo', in *On the Margins of Religion*, ed. Frances Pine and João Pina-Cabral (New York: Berghan Books, 2008).

<sup>196</sup> Mesarič, 'Wearing Hijab in Sarajevo: Dress Practices and the Islamic Revival in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina'; Ibid., 'Muslim Women's Dress Practices in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Localizing Islam through Everyday Lived Practice'; Ibid., "Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina'; Funk.

<sup>197</sup> Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*.

use of the Grounded Theory approach allowed me to seize and expand upon the topics that were the most relevant and urgent in the ethnographic field. These included emerging ideas of a global, 'de-ethnicised' Islam, notions of Othering, Orientalism, and Balkanism, and particular frameworks relevant to Bosnian Islam itself. This combination of theory and practice allowed for a strongly open-ended perspective in order to be able to work out the specifics of the situation of Bosnian Muslims. These results could be applied and studied from a trans-national perspective. For example, interestingly, I found many similarities between my research partners – young women who self-identify as Muslim and live in Sarajevo – and Muslims in Berlin, Copenhagen, and Paris.<sup>198</sup> The findings from migration and diaspora research are a starting point to ask about differences and particularities in the development of the religious self-positioning of young Muslim women believers in a post-socialist urban setting, Sarajevo.

My primary concern is to ask about the significance of the individual developments of contemporary Islamic religiosity in a South Eastern European metropolis and thus to show a facet of modern Islamic religiosity in Europe that has been under-researched in study of religions so far. I do this by analysing how twenty- to thirty-five-year-old Muslim women who study or work practise their religion, how they live their faith from day to day and what role the value of being a good person and free choice play in their self-positioning, with Sarajevo as a field site.

## 4 Method

This is a qualitative study that uses mixed methods to gather data. Methods used include semi-structured interviews, participant observation during ethnographic fieldwork and, in a less comprehensive way, (social) media reading. My emphasis is on oral sources, an approach that Michael Pye has identified as being specific to methodological integration within *Religionswissenschaft* (study of religions).<sup>199</sup> Much of my methodological

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<sup>198</sup> As presented by Bendixsen. And Göle.

<sup>199</sup> Michael Pye, 'Methodological Integration in the Study of Religions', *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 17, no. 1 (1999): 204-205.

approach was also informed by input from my supervisor, Edith Franke.<sup>200</sup> A grounded-theory-based approach was then used to analyse the data and reach results.

Below, I outline my access to the field of research, the methodological specifics regarding participant observation, and my approach for interviews. After outlining additional data that was incorporated, I will finally discuss the grounded-theory-inspired approach I used.

#### 4.1 Accessing the field

My field of research is primarily Sarajevo, with some forays into the surrounding countryside and the internet. The fieldwork lasted around 24 months in total, with a first round of preliminary interviews conducted in May 2013. My main stay in Sarajevo was from January 2015 to September 2016, with another visit in December 2016 to January 2017. Contacts from the first visit as well as personal connections that existed previously and those developed in the field led to introductions to interview partners and being invited to activities. The initial personal contacts were gained through friends and colleagues from the Bosnian diaspora in Germany, Switzerland, and Australia.

Being recommended directly to people gave me the advantage of a positive, welcoming atmosphere; generally, contacts in the field were willing to help. A danger thereby, of course, lay in interview partners giving responses that they thought were expected or wished for; more on this can be found in the section on interviews. One particularly challenging interview to conduct was that with women wearing niqab (a face veil, revealing only the eyes). Looking for a wide range of women to talk to, I also wanted to include at least one wearing niqab. This proved difficult as, in the words of Leijla, who wore a niqab and did finally speak to me, there is a perception that 'our words get twisted' ('neku riječ protumači drugačije').<sup>201</sup> She also expressed that women with niqab are often

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<sup>200</sup> Edith Franke, 'Objektive Zahlen versus subjektive Eindrücke? Erfahrungen mit quantitativen und qualitativen Vorgehensweisen bei der Untersuchung veränderter religiöser Vorstellungen von Frauen', in *Frauen Leben Religion: Ein Handbuch empirischer Forschungsmethoden*, ed. Edith Franke, Gisela Matthiae, and Regina Sommer (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002), hier besonders 147-157.

<sup>201</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.01.2017, 1:00:29.1–1:01:29.1.

negatively portrayed in the media. Leijla agreed to speak to me after being approached by two different mutual acquaintances who vouched for me.

Three other areas were particularly important in getting access to the field in addition to the contacts that existed before starting my fieldwork. First of these was a local, monthly German-speaking meeting. Initially, I participated as I found it a good way to give back to the community – being a native German speaker, I could converse with people who wanted to practise their skills. Coming with ideas about how young Muslim women would behave, I did not expect to meet many in such an informal café setting. However, it became clear that some of those taking part would suit my sample of self-identifying believers or would have contacts with women who identified this way. As there was some change in participants every time, my habit of re-introducing the reason for my stay in Sarajevo also triggered conversations. This was also true of other settings, after hearing about my reason for being in Sarajevo, people often gave me their view on the topic of young Muslim women, Europe, or religion in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The second was the hiking group of Nahla, a faith-based women's organisation. During the spring, summer, and autumn months, hikes throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina were conducted every two to three weeks. Generally, there were around 30-50 hikers, mixed in gender, age, and religious affiliation but with a majority of Muslim women. These excursions provided an opportunity to speak to a number of people each time and also introduced me to the hiking community. As hiking is not very widespread in Bosnia-Herzegovina, being part of this group also created some shared experience and a basis for connection. Thirdly, from February to April 2016 I completed a post-graduate diploma course in Islamic studies at the Islamic faculty of the University of Sarajevo. Students in this course, which took place two times a week for three hours, tended to have a deeper interest in Islam but were not necessarily experts before beginning the course. Both the conversations in the class and breaks, as well as the people I met there, proved insightful.

A point I reflected on regularly was my position in the ethnographic field. There are certain hierarchical asymmetries, including that many people from Sarajevo want to move to Germany, or to the Schengen area more generally. As well as

having more opportunities in terms of mobility, I also am more economically advantaged compared to most of my interlocutors.

There were also some topics where I reflected on my position strongly, for example when my interview partners talked about imagined suppressed, forced, Arab women. This contrast between Arab and European women, as constructed by some of the women I spoke to, made me quite uncomfortable. I didn't want my interview partners, who I generally liked personally, to have Orientalist misconceptions, something I see as negative. 'Despite my own views on this topic, I encouraged my interlocutors to share their views on this topic and responded politely. The other topics, which did not surface in conversation much but where I also was discreet in my opinions, perhaps due to my own preconceptions, were around LGBT rights and sexual promiscuity. I have practising Muslim contacts in Sarajevo who identify as gay and bisexual, contacts who are swingers, who have one-night-stands via dating apps, and who are into BDSM. However, as these topics are generally not discussed openly amongst self-identified believers, I chose to follow the social conventions and likewise not actively bring up these themes myself.

Another point around my positionality there was the consideration of religion. As a non-Muslim, which is the majority in Europe, I must be careful in my interpretations.<sup>202</sup> I was categorised as a Western Christian, either Catholic or Protestant, in the field, both by my interview partners and other people I interacted with. Though I am not baptised, this assumption is culturally correct – I celebrate Christmas with my family, not Diwali, Bajram, or Yom Kippur. Without going into a detailed analysis of what 'culture' is and how cultural difference is constructed and expressed, I can state that there is a large overlap between how I am culturally and how culture is expressed in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Similarities include many interpersonal practices, like going to lunch, the cinema or on with some people, going to the mountains, as well as the value placed on reading and food and the frustration with bureaucracy. There are some differences, for example around the relationship with one's 'first neighbour', gendered patterns of brandy consumption, and how social dates

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<sup>202</sup> Samim Akgönül, 'Is there a Muslim minority in Europe?' (paper presented at the *Bosnisch, türkisch, deutsch oder ...Wege zu einem europäischen Islam?*, Hohenheim, 2013).

are arranged. However, with some adaptation I could navigate quite well.<sup>203</sup> Another person aspect I adapted was my style of dress, in order to be visually discreet when moving through the city. This included having my shoulders and knees covered as well as looser clothing and less weird, vintage and quirky items. Knowing the local language is beneficial to finding one's way around any context. For Sarajevo, I had begun twice weekly classes for a year at the university in Freiburg in order to prepare. After arriving, I took part in a two-week intensive 'winter school' followed by several weeks of group classes.<sup>204</sup> For the next year or so, I took individual classes, as well as diligently conducting self-managed study daily. Some friends were also particularly helpful in correcting me, explaining new words and supporting me in acquisition. After more or less learning the language, some people I came in contact with would guess I came from Slovenia or that I was part of the Bosnian diaspora, which made me very happy and a bit proud. In interviews or with other close contacts, I was open about my background in terms of nationality, family status, and religion.

As a researcher and person, I shared life in the field to a certain degree. This included some transcendental experiences, which gave me special access to the field in terms of creating connections. Both having this experience and sharing about it was advantageous in interactions, particularly with believers. A more detailed account of my activities can be found in the following participant observation segment.

#### 4.2 Participant observation

In my approach to fieldwork, I mainly follow those laid out by Roland Girtler and Ronald Hitzler. Both place a strong emphasis on the participation aspect of fieldwork and in bringing the whole person as a researcher into the field.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Of course both these similarities and differences are over-simplified and generalised. They are not part of the scientific analysis, but rather meant to provide an impression of my navigating fieldwork.

<sup>204</sup> The participation for me was co-financed by the Schroubek-Fonds, the goal of which is to promote engagement with the peoples and cultures of Eastern Europe and, in particular, to broaden knowledge of the cultural relations between this region and the German-speaking area. I am very grateful.

<sup>205</sup> Roland Girtler, *Methoden der Feldforschung*, 4th ed. (Wien: UTB Verlag, 2001). Ronald Hitzler and Paul Eisewicht, *Lebensweltanalytische Ethnographie: im Anschluss an Anne Horner*, ed. Nicole Burzan, Paul Eisewicht, and Ronald Hitzler, Standards standardisierter

Roland Girtler rejects interview guidelines, which is where I digress; more can be read on my interview techniques in the interview section below.<sup>206</sup> However, much of his approach is highly pragmatic and focuses on respect. He writes about the importance of accepting food and drink, that the researcher should seem approachable and not try to trick people, and that she should not lie, even though sometimes holding back a personal opinion can be helpful.<sup>207</sup> The point about food caused some challenges, as I am vegetarian; however, generally an alternative solution was found. The theme of holding back opinions expressed itself more in my interviews – some points I made notes to follow up on after the conversation, while some contentious ones, particularly about LGBT rights, I dropped. One of the main points of Girtler is to have long, free-flowing conversations that he calls ‘ero-epic conversations’.<sup>208</sup> In my work, I had natural, flowing conversations even though I had the topics I wanted to discuss at hand, also in non-interview settings, I employed some techniques of deep listening and general interest to really hear what the people I came into contact with were about.

In his Berlin *Methodentreffen* (methods meetings) workshops, in which I participated in 2014 and 2016, Hitzler spoke a lot about (physical, subjective) experience in the field and using this as data. Physical and subjective experience is also an approach outlined by Thomas Eberle as one variation of phenomenology, whereas he also refers to Ronald Hitzler and Anne Honer when specifically talking about social life-worlds<sup>209</sup>: the researcher is not ‘just’ observing and then noting these observations down, but he is actually having the experience. Through this, the experience is not mediated and reduced through recording, retelling or observing, but is direct.<sup>210</sup> For me, there were some situations where this was more pertinent than others. The first is the wearing of a hijab (head/hair covering) and other modest clothing. Generally, I

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und nichtstandardisierter Sozialforschung (Weiheim: Beltz Juventa, 2016). Hitzler (ibid. 46ff) actually pleads for ‘observing participation’ (*beobachtende Teilnahme*) rather than participant observation, as in striking a balance, participation should come first.

<sup>206</sup> Girtler, 157.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. For Girtler’s opinion on accepting food and drink, see page 84. His critique of trickery can be found on page 94, and his plea for honesty on page 122

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 147 ff.

<sup>209</sup> Thomas S. Eberle, ‘Phenomenology as a Research Method’, in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, ed. Uwe Flick (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014), 195 ff.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 198.

only wore a hijab when visiting a mosque; however, there were some situations where I met with some contacts in advance and I walked through town 'covered'. With regards to other modest clothing, the library where I used to work required a woman's shoulders and knees to be covered. This, together with often being prepared to adapt my clothing for a visit to a mosque, contributed to a more 'covered' style of dress than I would wear in Germany, much less Australia, my two home countries. Another contributing factor, I believe, was I spending time with women who dress according to their idea of modesty. Though in Sarajevo short skirts and skimpy tops can be seen, my perception of what is appropriate clothing also shifted during the time in the field.

Two other physical experiences I also shared to a certain degree were fasting and prayer. During Ramadan 2016, I fasted for two days, which, especially without the spiritual legitimisation, was very challenging. Along with many not-strictly-practising Muslims, I also did not drink alcohol during Ramadan in Sarajevo. Muslim prayer is also a physical experience, with its different bodily movements. I found it very powerful, particularly in a group setting.

I updated my field notes most days, covering my experiences, feelings, observations, and thoughts. They are a rich resource that I draw on as data.

During my stay in Sarajevo, I lived in an early twentieth-century apartment in the suburb of Marijin Dvor, close to the centre. As I was also working as a freelancer, I rented a place in two different co-working areas during different periods, as well as spent a lot of time at the Gazi Huzref-Bey Library (GHB) for academic work. The library is affiliated with the main mosque, so it tends to attract a religious crowd, but not exclusively. For transport, I mainly used a bicycle (which is rather unusual for Sarajevo); however, when using a tram or a bus, this also offered the opportunity for conversation.

I also took part in a number of more structured activities. This included a calligraphy course at the King Fahd cultural centre, which is funded by the government of Saudi Arabia, a *sufara* course (reading and writing Arabic, without understanding) at Nahla, Green Drinks – a meeting of people interested in sustainability – as well as various athletic activities. The richest area for research was in hiking, due to the duration of the activity and the possibility to

talk, but I also did zumba and yoga and went skiing, swing dancing, and swimming.

Hiking the so-called Marš Mira, the annual peace march, warrants particular mention. This three-day memorial hike, which takes place yearly before the anniversary of the beginning of the Srebrenica massacre (11 July) reverses the 'death march', the path people followed when fleeing from a United Nations-protected enclave, across Bosnian Serb-held territory, to the area held by the Bosnian army. As the war is never far from people's minds in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the ethnic and religious identities are inextricably entwined, my participation in this event gave me the space to hear about these issues in extended ways. I participated in this march twice, in 2015 and 2016.

Social interactions in Sarajevo are largely based on going out for coffee, something I also did on a near-daily basis with a range of friends, acquaintances and other contacts. Sometimes we also shared meals, either outside or in a home.

With regards to religious occasions, these can be separated into practices, such as prayer, and those events talking about Islam. As a woman interacting with women in the field, the religious practices I observed were more limited than those for men, as both the Friday prayers (jummah) and the prayers taking place on religious holidays such as bajram, also known as Eid, signifying the end of Ramadan, in a mosque are traditionally the domain of men in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, I did visit the Emperor's Mosque (Careva Džamija) in Sarajevo for Friday prayer, as it has a separate room for women to which the Friday sermon is live streamed. I also went to a Sufi *zikr*. A religious tradition that has a women-only iteration is the *mevlud* one of which I also visited, but it is not at the centre of this study.<sup>211</sup> Mainly older women and/or those from the family of the deceased who is remembered attend a *mevlud*.<sup>212</sup> During Ramadan, I had the opportunity to participate in several *iftar*, the evening meals that break the day's fast.

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<sup>211</sup> For a more in-depth look at women's practice and the *mevlud* see: Sorabji, Raudvere and Spahić-Šiljak.

<sup>212</sup> Sorabji, 115.

My post-graduate diploma in Islamic Studies played an in-between role between information gaining and field participation. On the one hand, it offered some purely academic instruction, and it also portrayed the 'official' interpretation of the Islamic Community. On the other, I got to meet some people who would be interested in participating in this kind of course. Several became friends, business partners or agreed to be interviewed for me research. The discussions that took place during lessons and in the breaks were fascinating. In the breaks, seeing the interactions between participants also provided some insights. I also visited multiple presentations and conferences, which gave an in-group perspective. These included lectures by popular preachers, a workshop on Islamic education in schools and a film presentation on women's traditional role as religious experts.<sup>213</sup>

#### 4.3 Semi-structured interviews<sup>214</sup>

##### 4.3.1 The interview process: Before, during, and after

A large part of my analysis is built on semi-structured interviews. I used mainly Roland Girtler's<sup>215</sup> and Andreas Witzel's<sup>216</sup> approaches (see below), with some inspiration from Uwe Flick.<sup>217</sup> I developed certain topics based on a preliminary literature review and preparatory conversations. My interview guide was continuously reviewed and adapted based on results as they emerged.<sup>218</sup>

Biographical data was collected via a short, written form, on which participants also gave their consent. After each interview, a note was made tracking the atmosphere, where the conversation took place, and other impressions. This also included whether I had the impression that responses were given frankly or targeted to me as an audience. While there is always some influence of the

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<sup>213</sup> These imams included Sulejman Bugari and Kenan Musić, while the film presentation was given by Raudvere and Spahić-Šiljak, see: Raudvere and Spahić-Šiljak.

<sup>214</sup> The raw data is submitted electronically as part of this dissertation, including an index with the pseudonyms of participants.

<sup>215</sup> Girtler.

<sup>216</sup> Andreas Witzel, 'Das problemzentrierte Interview', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1, no. 1 (2000).

<sup>217</sup> Uwe Flick, *Qualitative Sozialforschung : eine Einführung*, Vollst. überarb. und erw. Neuausg., 5. Aufl., Orig. -Ausg. ed. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 2012).

<sup>218</sup> Edith Franke, *Die Göttin neben dem Kreuz - Zur Entwicklung und Bedeutung weiblicher Gottesvorstellungen bei kirchlich-christlich und feministisch geprägten Frauen*, vol. 16, Religionswissenschaftliche Reihe (Marburg: diagonal-Verlag, 2002), 147-157.

interviewer on the conversation, this did vary, and I noticed some interview partners seemed to speak more openly than others. I also am aware of the risk that certain answers may have been given because my interview partners wanted to please. When reaching out to the woman wearing niqab, I noticed that I should reflect on the fact that I have the feeling that there are 'desired answers'. It was clear that some of my interview partners were more strongly affected by this, even saying things like 'is that what you wanted to hear?'. They likely thought, correctly, that I am pro-equality, pro-work, pro-Europe. Responding to their perceptions of my beliefs, their criticism may not have been so strongly verbalised in these areas.

The conversations, which took place in German, English or the local language,<sup>219</sup> took between one-and-a-half and five-and-a-half hours, although two of the longer ones were split into separate meetings. In terms of locations, most interviews were conducted in cafés, homes, and offices, all comfortable, accessible places. Our chats were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analysed. The questions were grouped into a number of topics, including family, Sarajevo, religious practice, views on Europe, politics, history, and international experience. In practice, the interviews took place as organic conversations, with the questions following from my side based on what the women brought up.

#### 4.3.2 Selecting the sample

In qualitative research, the selection of the sample is one of the important points that determines the outcome of the study. I employed theoretical sampling.<sup>220</sup> That means that, following a grounded theory approach, I kept interviewing women until I reached saturation in the issues that had developed as important, with a total of thirteen semi-structured interviews.

The base category when looking for interview partners was a woman, 20–35 years old, who self-identified as a believer, was either working or studying, and

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<sup>219</sup> Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin are linguistically one polycentric language, which has different names for political reasons. "Jezici i Nacionalizmi". <http://jezicinacionalizmi.com/>, (accessed 16.5.2017). English quotes are left in original, German and local ones are translated to English by the author.

<sup>220</sup> Günter Mey and Katja Mruck, 'Methodologie und Methodik der Grounded Theory', in *Forschungsmethoden der Psychologie: Zwischen naturwissenschaftlichem Experiment und sozialwissenschaftlicher Hermeneutik*, ed. Wilhelm Kempf and Marcus Kiefer (Berlin: Regener, 2009), 110. Charmaz and Mitchell, 168.

lived in Sarajevo. As with all qualitative work, this study is not representative. However, there is a broad range amongst women I spoke with, using the approach of minimal and maximal contrast.<sup>221</sup> At the time of the interview, all of my women participants were between 23 and 34 years old. Three wore hijabs, one wore a niqab and several didn't cover their hair but dressed with varying degrees of modestly (more can be found on this topic in the analysis). The sample also varied a lot with regards to other aspects of religious practice and religious education. Three come from religious families and five are originally from Sarajevo. Those not from Sarajevo, but are originally from different parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina, including one from Sandžak, a Muslim-majority enclave in Serbia, and another whose parents migrated from Montenegro during the years of Yugoslavia's existence. As ethnicity is hard to ignore in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I will also mention that one came from a mixed marriage – her mother is Serbian Orthodox. Only two of them have children; I attribute this to the challenge of mothers finding time to do an interview, given that one element of my sample was that the women should be also be working or studying. The sample developed throughout the fieldwork was based on what the first analysis showed, meaning I kept selecting for a range of difference without, of course, being representative.

I chose women as my subjects for two reasons. The main one is that Muslim women are a discursively powerful symbol, particularly if they wear a hijab.<sup>222</sup> The other was based on practical considerations, that as a woman myself, I have more access to women than men. I could approach them without being perceived as flirting or being approached by them in a sexual way, one-on-one meetings were not seen as suspect. I chose urban, educated women as my interview partners because my pre-conception was that they most contradict the idea of Muslim women as passive. This view could in itself be seen as problematic, I am well aware. The women are introduced in sketches in the following chapter.

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<sup>221</sup> Mey and Mruck, 112.

<sup>222</sup> Initially, I had planned to explore these debates more in my work, however my study showed that these were not so relevant in the field. For more, see, inter alia: Abu-Lughod. Amélie Barras, "Muslim women" marking debates on Islam', in *Debating Islam - Negotiating Religion, Europe, and the Self*, ed. Susanne Leuenberger Samuel M. Behloul, Andreas Tunger-Zanetti (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013); Korteweg and Yurdakul.

#### 4.4 Additional sources: Social media, newspaper articles, and experts

Though the bulk of my data builds on participant observation and interviews, as outlined above, I also used a range of other materials where appropriate. Social media were followed for background about life in Sarajevo and relevant issues for Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Newspaper articles were used in a limited way – mainly to demonstrate views about Bosnia-Herzegovina or women in Islam, though I also drew on local articles that demonstrated Arab influences, religious celebrations, or other relevant issues. Mainly this was done to back up in a published source what people had been speaking about. I also conducted interviews with some people who were not in my sample, who spoke not about their personal experience so much as their expertise. These were more or less formal and provided valuable input and perspective at different times in the research process. I also received valuable feedback and other input from scholars who work on aspects touching on my research.

I was also in touch with some members of civil society organizations dealing with women's issues in one way or another. Although they do not feature largely in my work, they include Nahla, CURE, Women for Women, and Žene Ženama. Nahla, at whose events I also conducted some of my fieldwork, is an explicitly Islam-based women's educational foundation.<sup>223</sup> CURE Foundation is a feminist activist organisation that promotes gender and sex equality.<sup>224</sup> Women for women is an international organisation supporting women.<sup>225</sup> Žene Ženama focuses on solving daily problems in complex male–female relations and various dimensions of empowerment and assistance to women in cross-border cooperation relations.<sup>226</sup> The conversations I had with members were not always officially representing the organisations.

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<sup>223</sup> "CEI Nahla." <http://www.nahla.ba/>, (accessed 27.3.2018).

<sup>224</sup> "Fondacija CURE." <http://www.fondacijacure.org/>, (accessed 4.4.2018).

<sup>225</sup> "Women for Women." <https://www.womenforwomen.org/>, (accessed 11.4.2018).

<sup>226</sup> "Žene Ženama ". <http://www.zenezenama.org/>, (accessed 11.4.2018).

#### 4.5 Grounded Theory Approach

Grounded Theory, first laid out by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967,<sup>227</sup> has developed many different branches and iterations; I will focus on how I used it. I have taken elements and used them to allow for theory to come out of the field, rather than approaching it with pre-defined notions to prove. As a method, this is a fruitful approach in discovering results that are not pre-conceived in the mind of the researcher before entering the field, but rather are new and develop from the research itself.

Building on Katy Charmaz and Richard G. Mitchell as well as Günther Mey and Katja Mruck,<sup>228</sup> my analysis took the following steps: in open coding, I closely read the first texts, which were mainly transcribed interviews, and coded certain passages. 'Coding' refers to recognising a certain topic, for example when a woman is speaking about 'covering' or 'scarf' I would code it as 'hijab'. Varying in length from a few words to a paragraph, these segments were either assigned codes that I thought described what was happening or that referenced something directly from the text. I did not, however, code what I thought should be there but rather let the data speak to me. As a next step, these codes were grouped together to build categories, which were then used to analyse and eventually reach a conclusion. Whenever something stood out or struck me as interesting, I wrote a memo on the topic, a short note capturing my ideas.<sup>229</sup> The processes of interviewing, transcribing, writing memos, coding, building categories, and analysing all took place in a parallel and circular fashion. Thus, my first results in analysis informed the sample selection, topics to address in interviews, and what to pay particular attention to while coding.

In the results, the data and analysis are presented together following different topics. Other data, such as field notes, social media posts, and newspaper articles were also coded and integrated into the analysis. As a technical tool, I worked with MAXQDA, a programme which helps to organise, code, and analyse data. Printouts with highlighting and annotation were also used for analogue work.

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<sup>227</sup> Glaser and Strauss.

<sup>228</sup> Mey and Mruck. Charmaz and Mitchell.

<sup>229</sup> Mey and Mruck, 113. Charmaz and Mitchell, 167. Johnny Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (London: SAGE 2009 ), 33.

#### 4.6 Introducing the sample

The following section presents brief descriptions of my informants, presented in no particular order. As following the parameters of this research, all of them are between the ages of twenty and thirty-five, live in Sarajevo, self-identify as Muslim believers, and are either working or studying. These sketches include demographic information on my thirteen informants, a bit of their histories, and more information on their presentation, hobbies, and interests, in order to aid in contextualizing their contributions to the research.

1. Amira, twenty-four years, student, no children  
Amira is a bubbly woman with a lot of energy. She is in the final stages of her economics degree at one of Sarajevo's private, Turkish-run universities. Her father passed away in the war of 1992–95, and she has no siblings. She started wearing a hijab as a youth while attending a religious high school and found it a bit disconcerting at first, when moving to Sarajevo, that most women at her university were not covered. She loves exploring the mountains and hills around the city and the wider region. She has plans to work and travel abroad and is interested in business, particularly as this relates to women.

2. Frenky, twenty-five years, student, no children  
Frenky has a strong sense of what is right and what is wrong. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in German at the University of Sarajevo. A smoker with short hair and a cool demeanour, she enjoys life and is considering becoming stricter in her religious practice when she is ready to give up more and has a settled life. Her family includes a few people who practise regularly, including an aunt she is close to. Her grandmother completed the hajj pilgrimage and wore a hijab, but was not an important person in Frenky's life. She sees religion as a personal issue and dislikes religiosity that is performed on social media or tries to convince others.

### 3. Belma, thirty-four years, professional, no children

Belma calls herself religious but thinks mainstream religious people do not accept her or consider her part of religious society. She works in the administration of the University of Sarajevo in an international role and is pursuing a PhD at a university in Croatia. Her group of friends is international and she is very active, both socially and professionally. Belma studied in Croatia and found no one there who was interested in her practice as a Muslim, such as celebrating religious holidays. In her family there is ethnic diversity and a mix of religious people and atheists. She herself is not covered and sees the hijab as a practical item of clothing for the Arab desert, not as essential to Islam.

### 4. Meliha, thirty-two years, teacher, no children

Meliha is herself a religious expert, having studied Islamic theology and now working as a teacher. Her hijab as well as her other clothes are very stylish. She currently has no partner and she is not interested in a relationship right now. While she would not exclude having non-Muslim-friends – morality being more important than religion in her view – she does not have any at the moment. She describes her family, who came to Sarajevo from a different part of Yugoslavia, as practising in a traditional way, and as always having been quite independent from the state, also during socialism. While she seemed to me somewhat reserved at first, she is certainly helpful and kind.

### 5. Arnesa, twenty-four years, PhD student, no children

Arnesa talks about God a lot. She works as a research assistant at the University of Sarajevo and is also doing a PhD there. Though she does not wear a hijab, she takes care to wear loose-fitting clothing, prays regularly, and dates a man who is also religious. She spends a lot of time with her many siblings and volunteers at a humanitarian organisation. Though she also sees religion as a private matter, she is happy to help people with their questions about Islam and sees herself as more

approachable than others wearing a hijab might be.

6. Emina, twenty-seven years, student, no children

Emina is smiley and open. She studied pharmaceuticals in Belgrade and moved to Sarajevo, which she loves dearly, to study for her final exams. She wears a hijab and feels a lot more comfortable in Sarajevo than Belgrade. She grew up in the Sandžak, a Muslim-majority enclave of what is now Serbia, with parents who are not particularly religious. While her best friend from university is not Muslim, she likes that Sarajevo has more of 'her people' and would prefer to stay.

7. Elma, twenty-nine years, professional, one child

Elma is relaxed and interested in many different issues, and was one of the few women who was working, had a child, and also had time to talk to me. She works as a consultant in a technical field and is quite successful professionally. Her husband spends most of the week outside the country, so she spends quite a bit of time with her parents, who are also religious. She is not covered and has non-religious as well as religious friends, but reads about Islam quite a lot and sees herself as combining the modern with the old. She also sees religious practice as something to be adapted to a specific time and place.

8. Aida, twenty-seven years, professional, no children

Aida is extroverted and also engaged with many activities, such as sports and travel. She is a high school teacher who loves the outdoors, her family, and Sarajevo. Single and without hijab in daily life, she practises regularly and feels a deep connection to Sarajevo's Ottoman history. Her family is traditionally Muslim and she likes to explore what she sees as the positive, peace-loving, and potentially multi-religious interpretations of Islam.

9. Ena, twenty-seven years, professional, no children

Ena is cordial and very self-reflective about her religious and other personal development. Through her degree and work as a psychologist she has learnt a lot about human behaviour, which she also applies to herself. Coming from a non-religious, mixed ethnic background from outside Sarajevo, she reached her understanding of what it is to be a Muslim at the time of the interview through literature, the internet, and personal contacts. She sees some episodes in her past as detracting her from the right path. At the time we met, Ena was not wearing a hijab, but wide, flowing clothes for modesty, which would not look out of place in an alternative vegan café in Berlin or London.

10. Amina, thirty-two years, professional, no children

Amina works as one of few women in a technical field. She is married without children and has a pet that occupies a large space in her heart. She comes from a family that celebrates holidays but does not practise regularly, although they had some religious experts in their family tree. It is important to her not to push her husband but simply to know that he has faith and that he is interested in religion. She formed her own opinion about being Muslim, which in some ways goes against the official opinions of the Islamic Community. She is not covered, though and likes to put on her hijab at home already, before going to the mosque, and she can imagine herself covering full-time someday in the future.

11. Alma, twenty-eight years, professional, no children

Alma is self-employed and works with her brother. She takes the time out of her (working) day to pray. Her fiancé also practises Islam regularly, as does her mother. Her father, who is from Sandžak, is not religious. While Alma does not yet wear a hijab, she sees it as a religious obligation and plans to cover herself before her wedding. She seems very willing to please. For example, she often gave me the answers she imagined I might want as an interviewer, she laughed a lot, and desired confirmation on whether what she said was 'good', which made it somewhat difficult for

me to grasp her.

12. Hasna, twenty-three years, student, no children

Hasna is a medical student who reflects actively on her identity. She is single and has many friends from other faiths with whom she likes to discuss religious questions. She is active in an interethnic and international youth camp, previously as an attendee, now as a supervisor. Her parents, though they grew up in religious families, do not practise much; she describes this fact as religion having 'skipped a generation'. She does not wear a hijab, though she does pray regularly.

13. Leijla, twenty-eight years, professional, three children

Leijla is bursting with energy and self-confidence. As a mother of three who wears a niqab, she found it challenging to find a job, so she started her own organisation, which now employs several people. Her family of origin is not very religious, but her husbands, which she appreciates a lot. She is uninterested in politics and sees herself represented by the party that caters to ethnic Bosniaks. She has little experience with other countries of the former Yugoslavia and is also not particularly motivated to discover them.

## 5 Spiritual, institutional, and social dimensions of coming into belief

After all these introductory and methodological considerations, this next, chapters will finally come to the main content of the research. What does being Muslim actually mean for young Muslim women in Sarajevo? Who are the women I interviewed? From where do they get their religious knowledge? And how do they practise their religion? How do they see work and love? What is their conception of being a (Muslim) woman, and, finally, how do they position themselves with regards to all sorts of different external influences?

As outlined already above, 'being Muslim' is used according to several different meanings in Bosnia-Herzegovina. On the one hand, there are those people who are customary, nominal, ethnic Muslims, or Muslims (only) by name. On the other hand, there are those who are explicitly pious, practising, or a believer. While these various descriptors do not cover exactly the same meaning, and there are intense debates about many of them, this is not a focus here.

It is also important to keep in mind that these categories of different ways of being Muslim are not clear-cut or recognisable from the outside. As is stressed repeatedly by the interlocutors and other people I spoke with in the field, seeing someone's faith and intention from the outside is impossible. So, while a person may not practise in a visible way, she could still self-identify as Muslim. Even though this acceptance and non-judgmental attitude is beautiful in theory, everyday life categorisations are indeed made according to external signs rather than possible internal processes. This tension between internal belief and outward expression was not brought up by my informants much. For the majority of the women I interviewed, two fundamental qualities that allowed someone to 'be' Muslim were choosing the religion for oneself, rather than being forced to do so, and being a good person rather than focusing on outward performance.

Arnesa makes a distinction between different groups of Muslims, the first being the 'Muslims by name', who also drink alcohol. Then she continues describing the others:

There is one group that is Muslim and they practise 100 per cent and hate those [Muslims by name]; well, they do not hate them, but look at them sideways. And there is a third group; they are like me: I practise everything. But to each his own, I think each is concerned with oneself.

Znači ima jedna skupina koja jesu muslimani i to praktiraju 100% i mrze ove ovamo, dobro, ne mrze ih nego ih gledaju poprijeko i ima treća skupina, ovakvi kao što sam ja, ja to sve praktiram ali svakome njegovo, mislim svako svojim se bavi.<sup>230</sup>

In my research, nearly all interlocutors fell into this third group, for whom not judging others if and how they practise is key. Each of them

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<sup>230</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:01:47.2–01:02:02.3.

considered it central to have chosen to be a *vjernica* (fem. believer). How to interpret spiritual doctrine and teachings, how to acquire religious knowledge, and how one lives Islam in everyday life was also frequently described as an individual journey. Even those women I interviewed who came from religious families presented a narrative of decision, of choice. It was often described as one moment, sometimes in crisis, in which they said to themselves 'Okay, I am going to do this'. This individualisation of one's religious journey was also reflected in the lack of importance my informants generally ascribed to institutions such as the official Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Connected to the idea of individuality and choice, there is also a strong topos of not being forced to practise. This idea – referred to for covering oneself with a hijab as well as other forms of practice – forms a central part of what it means to be Muslim.

Amina seems to see this as a modern, urban way of being when she says:

[In the past] society would pressure you to behave in certain ways, but now people have more opportunities [to decide] for themselves, ... people who are really covering themselves [with a hijab] and praying, they are really doing it because they came to the conclusion that they want to do that, so there is a difference. There is a difference when you are practising because it came from you. ... [T]here are those people who are pressured, those are in smaller communities, in villages and in rural areas.<sup>231</sup>

This phenomenon of distinctly choosing to practise, which Amina describes as 'wanting to do it' after a consideration process, is echoed by Andreja Mesarič, who refers to as a 'deliberate crafting of a particular kind of self' and points out how typical this is of Islamic revival everywhere.<sup>232</sup> She also refers to Synnøve Bendixsen, who stresses the individual and ongoing process of 'fashioning of the self'.<sup>233</sup>

Olivier Roy also writes that 'reconstruction of what it means to be a good Muslim [...] essentially rests on the individual'.<sup>234</sup> Importantly, he is

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<sup>231</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:14.1–00:00:14.2.

<sup>232</sup> Mesarič, "Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 586.

<sup>233</sup> Bendixsen, 22-24.

<sup>234</sup> Roy, 175.

referring to a non-Muslim society, so quite a different situation to that in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In the Bosnian context, Julianne Funk points out how the 'believer identity' is individually chosen, whereas the 'ethno-religious identity is [...] given at birth and is beyond the individual's power to substantively change. [It is] attributed by heritage, family and society'.<sup>235</sup> Since this focus on personal choice is present in research on Sarajevo Muslims from before the war as well, it does not appear to be connected to the rise in religious practice (or 'revival') during and after the war.<sup>236</sup>

A key aspect of identity of my interlocutors and an important reference point is their not being 'Muslims by name'. This act of distancing themselves from nominal Muslims often seemed even stronger than a similar distancing from Serbs or Croats or possibly even from very 'other Others', such as Arabs. My interlocutors' insistence upon this matter may thus have been intended to distance themselves from dominant Bosnian Muslim institutions, such as the Islamic Community and the SDA, the political party identified with Bosniak nationality/ethnicity. In this case, following their individual and personalised ways of religiosity and faith as part of the global, modern ummah may thereby set them apart from the majority population in their minds. This included setting themselves apart from the official politico-religious ties. While these women did see themselves as different than nominal Muslims, I did not find that they portrayed their environment of mainstream Muslims in Sarajevo necessarily as hostile.<sup>237</sup>

In public discourse in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I did not find a common acknowledgement that there was a spectrum of believers as well as nominal Muslims. Those of faith distanced themselves from the ethnic (Bosniak) interpretation of their identity, while secular Muslims tended to lump all believers together – salafis, ethno-religious nationalists, mystics,

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<sup>235</sup> Funk, 206.

<sup>236</sup> Sorabji, 'Muslim identity and Islamic faith in Sarajevo', 187.

<sup>237</sup> This was in notable contrast to the findings of Mesarič, "Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 585-586.

and 'normal' people. Others have also noted how the distinct 'faith community relatively easily incorporates people of mixed backgrounds, as well as non-Bosniak converts from Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere'.<sup>238</sup>

The fact that 'de-ethnised' Islam, so Islam free from ethnicity and tradition, is seen as desirable by young Muslims in Western Europe is sometimes explained by the diaspora situation.<sup>239</sup> However I also found amongst young Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina. While others have also noticed that this is part of a global phenomenon, it would be interesting to dive more into the similarities and contrasts.<sup>240</sup> Many studies, like this one, focus on case studies of specific geographical, social and temporal locations.

One point that is agreed on by my interlocutors is that being a good person is more important for Muslims than following all the formal requirements such as praying regularly or not drinking alcohol. When expressing key elements of being Muslim, all of the women profess a strong focus on being a *dobar čovjek*, a good person. Furthermore, the importance of continued learning is mentioned repeatedly. Fasting is also brought up as a requirement, but with acknowledgement of different types and that internal factors like contemplation and not gossiping are more important than not eating and drinking.

During my interviews, there were also varying notions about the importance of (not) wearing a hijab; most saw it as connected to more responsibility, partly due to the visibility, to be a good person and a good Muslim. Women wearing hijab are seen as representing Islam and thus needing to be very conscious of the image they present. Other elements of practice, such as praying regularly and fasting, play a significant role in the narrative of 'becoming Muslim' and 'being Muslim'. As for being perceived as Muslim by others, there was quite a difference between those who are covered and those who are not. Uncovered Muslim women

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 585.

<sup>239</sup> Bendixsen, 156.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 157.

referred more to instances related to food or drink with regard to their 'coming out' as religious.

In the next section, the interview partners are anonymously introduced via brief sketches, using their pseudonyms. Thereafter, their religious and spiritual influences in childhood and youth are described, as well as how each became Muslim. Then, there is a description of my informants' sources of religious knowledge. After that, the discussion that follows dives into a key point: the perceived discrepancy between outwardly practising and what it actually means to be a good Muslim. A large section looking at practice comes next. This includes reading the Quran, consumption patterns, and prayer. After looking at work and love, which covers dating, marriage, family and career, I then turn to women's self-conceptions, covering both hijab and women in Islam. To round this off, I finally present different ways in which young Muslim women in Sarajevo position themselves in their religious, and geographical contexts, with regard to Europe, institutions and towards Arabs and the global ummah.

### 5.1 Influences in childhood and youth

Upbringing is a likely factor in negotiating being Muslim in everyday life: this encompasses where and how one learns to be Muslim, as well as the influential people encountered during a young person's development. When talking about their childhood and youth, my interview partners brought up the topic of being able to choose faith for themselves and not being forced into religion again and again.

While being Muslim in Bosnia-Herzegovina is strongly tied to ethnic, cultural, and political identity, what I find more interesting is the presence of an entwined yet distinct personal faith. However, when referring to upbringing, it is generally difficult to make a distinction between Islam as faith and Islam as another identity factor. My research focuses on the idea of personal faith, since practising Muslim women I interviewed differentiated strongly between themselves as believers and others who are 'Muslim by name'. Looking at the factors that contributed to their becoming Muslim in the sense of personal faith or believing, I will focus

here on family, school, and other influential people as the most relevant. In addition, religious information from books and the internet has also been an important contributor in shaping religious positioning, which will be outlined below. By religious positioning, I refer to how religion is understood and practised.

As discussed in my chapter on Sarajevo, during socialist Yugoslavia the public display and practice of religion was frowned upon and curtailed.<sup>241</sup> Nonetheless, as is the case in Bosnian society more widely, my interlocutors very positively constructed their memories of the socialist period.<sup>242</sup> This is relevant as it covers the childhood period for some of the women, and for all, it is a time that shaped their parents.

#### 5.1.1 Key figures in early life

My sample is particularly varied in regard to if and how their parents and wider family are seen as religious and now much this tradition was passed on. The women I spoke to largely come from (traditionally) Muslim families, except for Ena, whose mother is Serbian Orthodox. However, their parents have not necessarily played a large role in teaching them about either religious faith or practice, though in some cases, they have. The influence of parents thus can't be generalised. When talking about their families' religiosity, the emphasis among all of the women was very much on practice, rather than faith. This corresponds to the Muslim idea that it is impossible to know the true relationship of another person with God. This corresponds with the strong emphasis on individual choice/non-compulsion in becoming religious that was repeatedly brought up by my interlocutors.

The existing range of practice amongst immediate family members does not necessarily correspond directly or fully to the women's range of practice. When referring to their families' practice, my interview partners described several key distinctions. A contrast was made between regular prayer, which was seen as the main indicator of Muslim practice, and

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<sup>241</sup> Šuško. 10.

<sup>242</sup> Milica Popović, 'La Yougonostalgie: La Yougoslavie au regard des derniers pionniers', *Études Balkaniques* 19-20 (2013-2014).

celebrating holidays and life-stage rituals, such as religious burials. The latter two were typically narrated more as of a part of traditional, ethnic, or cultural identity. The role that regular prayer plays in becoming Muslim and in practice is also discussed below. Faith or belief is seen as an independent yet connected issue to that of practice.

This contrast was made very clear by Frenky when speaking about her family:

As for my family in general, we are partly believers: we believe in God, we also celebrate holidays, but in general in my family there are maybe five people who really pray five times [per day], who also fast [during] Ramadan, and so on.

Was meine Familie generell betrifft, wir sind teilweise gläubig, wir glauben an Gott, wir feiern auch Feiertag, aber generell in meiner Familie, sind vielleicht fünf Menschen die wirklich fünf Mal beten, die auch Ramadan fasten und so.<sup>243</sup>

Here, Frenky makes a distinction between believing and observing holidays as compared with regular prayer and fasting. In her family, some practise more and others consider practice, at least visible practice, as not so significant.

Belma spoke about a conflict that took place in her grandparents' generation, in which one communist grandfather forbidding his wife – who came from a religious family – from practising:

My mother comes from a totally non-religious family; [her father] was a communist, and he married my grandmother, who came from a religious family, ... but my grandfather determined how life would be, and that's why my mother never heard anything about religion in her life. [My grandmother], tried to do ... some things like, for example, morning prayer ..., but that was really strictly forbidden by my grandfather, and there were conflicts, and this was also a patriarchal family, ... and it was just forbidden for her to do that.

Meine Mutter kommt aus einer total a-religiösen Familie, [ihr Vater] war Kommunist, und er hat meine Großmutter geheiratet, die aber aus einer, [...] religiösen Familie kam, aber der Großvater hat bestimmt wie das Leben wird, und deswegen hat meine Mutter gar nichts von der Religion mitbekommen in ihrem Leben. [Meine Großmutter], hat versucht [...] manche Sachen zu machen wie zum Beispiel Morgengebet [...], aber das wurde wirklich streng verboten von meinem Großvater, und da gab es Konflikte, und das war auch eine patriarchale Familie, [...] und es war einfach ein Verbot für sie, dass sie sowas macht.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 0:00:19.4 - 0:00:54.8.

<sup>244</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 1:10:33.3 - 1:13:55.1.

Of those who described their parents as practising Islam, very few of these explicitly practised before the war. Meliha mentioned receiving religious education at home and witnessing her parents' regular prayers:

My father prays, my mother prays, my brothers and sisters all pray, although they are all not covered. [...] In a traditional family where everyone prayed, where everyone believed, you simply grow up as a believer.

Mein Vater betet, meine Mutter betet, meine Geschwister beten alle, obwohl sie nicht alle bedeckt sind. [...] in einer traditionellen Familie wo alle gebetet haben, wo alle geglaubt haben, da wächst Du einfach auf als ein Gläubiger.<sup>245</sup>

Prayer for her is also a key indicator of faith, and she spoke about it is as key for growing up as a believer. She also didn't make a distinction between being traditionally Muslim and being a believer.

A specificity of Meliha's family – which may well have contributed to the fact that they also practised Islam during the socialist period – is that her father runs a small business and is thus rather independent of state sanctions. It strikes me here that she talks about her family as traditionally Muslim, which was actually often described in contrast to and different than being a true believer during my research.

Belma told me about how it would be important that her father be buried according to Muslim practice, and that it was important for her to practise so that she could fully take part in a future burial:

My parents will also die one day, and I don't want to be the one who can't take part in the funeral, [...] this is quite important to my father, though not to my mother. And my mother simply accepts that as a necessity of life that one [who] is Islamic, that is, that one is buried according to Islamic rules, because that is how it is in society.

Meine Eltern werden auch mal sterben, und ich will nicht die eine sein die dann nicht bei der Bestattung mitmachen kann, [...] meinem Vater dem ist das schon wichtig, meiner Mutter nicht. Und meine Mutter akzeptiert das einfach als eine Not des Lebens das jemand Islamisch ist, also das jemand nach islamischen Regeln bestattet wird, weil es so ist in der Gesellschaft.<sup>246</sup>

She went on to say that when she needed to participate in her uncle's funeral, she learnt how to pray from YouTube videos. Her mother, however, was not supportive when she started practising Islam:

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<sup>245</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 0:12:55.3 - 0:14:57.0.

<sup>246</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 1:58.01.7 - 2:01:44.1.

I fasted four days last year, [...] and then my mother complained that she didn't want to organise the meals according to the moment of fast breaking.

Ich habe vier Tage letztes Jahr gefastet, [...] und meine Mutter hat sich dann beschwert, dass sie dann die Mahlzeiten irgendwie nicht nach dem Punkt ordnen möchte wo das Fastenbrechen ist.<sup>247</sup>

Emina's parents, who live in Serbia, were concerned for her in her new religious practices:

I first started to pray, but I was afraid that it would not be accepted in my family. [Though] they accepted it later. And that was okay, but it was harder with the scarf. They were scared, 'why a headscarf in Belgrade' [?] [...] My family said, 'go ahead and pray and everything, but why the headscarf' [?]. They worried too much, their fear was about this way of life.

Prvo sam počela da klanjam ali bilo me je strah ono kako će i u mojoj porodici to da prihvate [...] i eto prihvatili su kasnije...I to je bilo oke, ali s maramom je bilo teže. plašili su se, zašto marama u Beogradu. [...] moja porodica, govorili su klanjaj ti i sve ali zašto marama...brinuli su se previše, njihov strah od takvog načina života,<sup>248</sup>

In Belgrade, a woman in a hijab is a bit unusual, and it is likely her parents were thinking about that aspect. They were not against her practising in private, but against her doing so in public.

Going against the individualistic grain, Emina expressed how important it is to learn from one's parents and to be part of a community. This is striking, as she herself does not come from a religiously practising family.

It is not bad to ask your own family to see something that we do not see, some intentions, wisdom, maturity. It can be great, including them in our religiosity. It is not [just] my life, my decision-making; we are social beings. You need a family, you need your community, and then it works well.

Nije loše da se raspitaju kod svoje porodice, da vide nešto što mi ne vidimo, neke namjere, mudrost – zrelost. To može super da dođe, uključivanje njihovo u našu religioznost. Nije to moj život, moje odlučivanje, mi smo socijalna bića, treba ti porodica treba ti zajednica i to onda funkcioniše dobro.<sup>249</sup>

This community seems to be something she wished for and that she also talked about finding and enjoying very much in Sarajevo.

For Frenky and for her supportive relatives, it was very important that the element of personal choice was maintained. She referred to her aunt, who

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<sup>247</sup> Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, 1:16:45.0 - 1:17:51.9.

<sup>248</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 0:22:05.7 - 0:25:54.6.

<sup>249</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 1:24:46.5 - 1:27:21.9.

did not push her, but rather has been present for Frenky but also gives her space:

She would not tell you to do that. If you want to do it on your own, that's great, but she would never have [forced] you to do it. Or if you ask her anything she also explains [...] There are some people with whom I can do this, [...] but there are really many who are extremely, I'll say 'religious', but I think that has absolutely nothing to do with religion.

Sie würde nicht sagen dass Du das machen sollst. Wenn Du das von Dir her machen willst ist es super, aber sie hätte Dir das nie auf [gezwungen]. Oder wenn Du sie irgendetwas fragst dann erklärt sie auch, [...] es gibt einige mit denen ich das machen kann, [...] aber es [gibt], wirklich viele die extrem, ich sag mal religiös, aber ich finde das hat gar nichts mit der Religion zu tun.<sup>250</sup>

This aunt is contrasted with those who act excessively, which, in Frenky's words, is not really about religion at all. The proper conduct was thus seen as leaving people to their own opportunities and ways to come to religion.

Leijla also learned a lot from her extended, pious family. When asked if she learnt from her parents, she responded:

Yes, yes. From my parents and even from my whole family, my mum's sisters, [and] uncles on both sides of the family. Everyone was very pious.

Da, da. Od roditelja i čak od cijele svoje da kažem dalje porodice, maminih sestara, amidža, dajdža. Svi su jako pobožni.<sup>251</sup>

And this was so, even though her parents only started regularly practising Islam after the war:

Well, I could say from around when I was six or seven they started practising. That means the majority of my life, yes.

Pa mogla bi reći da možda od neke moje šeste, sedme godine da su počeli praktikovati. Znači, većinski dio mog života da.<sup>252</sup>

Those who do have religious parents generally considered that they have learnt something of religious belief or practice from them. However, within my sample, it seems to make little difference in terms of interpretation, type of practice, etc. whether a specific person's parents were religious or not.

For most of the women I spoke to, there are marked generational changes between them, their parents, and their grandparents. Their parents' generation is from socialist Yugoslavia, where religious practice was not

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<sup>250</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 0:13:15.3 - 0:14:20.2.

<sup>251</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:15:42.2 - 0:16:09.9.

<sup>252</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:15:09.2 - 0:15:42.2.

possible to the same degree. Arnesa thinks that socialism was responsible for her parents' lack of practice.

I believe it is because of socialism and how they taught them; my parents did go to *mekteb* and so on when they were children, but they didn't practise that much.

Vjerovatno je to zbog socijalizma i tog kako su ih učili, ne znam, roditelji mi jesu išli u mekteb kad su bili djeca i to, ali nisu toliko prakticirali.<sup>253</sup>

So, even though they learnt certain things as children, it seems they did little with these learnings later.

Ena, whose mother comes from an Orthodox family, talks about her parents thus:

My dad grew up in communism, my mum grew up in communism and [...] they really believed in that system but, actually, my grandfather from my dad's side, [...] he didn't really accept my mum ever.[...] For my mum it [his non-acceptance] was about religion [...] because what happened is that after the war, dad become religious, [whereas my mum] stayed in that communism state, [with a focus on] brotherhood and [that] religion was not important, [but] that was one of the reasons why they separated: she could never accept this new stuff [him being religious]. For her, I think it was about religion, [and] for my grandfather it was probably about religion.<sup>254</sup>

Almost all the women in my sample come from culturally Muslim families. However, even in those families where the parents practise Islam, many only started to do so after the war, as with Leijla, above. In Arnesa's, she and her siblings started practising, which led to the parents starting to practise later on, after their children.

It was not [just] that the war ended so they entered Islam, and yet it was; we children started to accept Islam, first my older brother, then he taught me, and then I passed it on to my younger sisters, and so my parents came along with us. So, in essence, the children started to dedicate themselves more to God and so on.

Nisu ono, rat se završio pa su oni ušli u Islam, nego baš je bilo, mi smo djeca počeli prihvatiti Islam, prvo moj brat stariji, onda je on mene naučio i onda sam ja na mlađe sestre prenijela, i tako su i roditelji s nama krenuli, tako da je u biti od djece krenulo to da smo se više Bogu posvetili i tako.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:29:13.1 - 00:29:24.

<sup>254</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 1:50:00.4 - 1:57:05.3.

<sup>255</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 0:23:14.5 - 0:24:04.7.

The young women in my sample quite consistently described their grandparents, particularly grandmothers, as actively practising Islam.<sup>256</sup> There could be several reasons for this: it could be that being at an older life-stage stimulates (a search for) faith or simply that the grandparents' generation experienced a lack of being socialised into socialism to the same degree as their children. Of course, as a person has more grandparents (generally four) than parents, the chance is higher that at least one is religious.

Regardless of the reasons for this, grandparents, specifically grandmothers, are referenced as relevant influences because unlike parents precisely because they often are religious. Amina highlighted both the official role of a religious grandparent and the importance of personal practice and learning from a grandmother:

My great grandfather on my mother's side was a *hafiz*, and he was really respected in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and that kind of stuck to my family.<sup>257</sup>

Later she says:

My grandma on my mum's side was really religious and she was a really nice person, ... as close to Islam as possible, one of the most clear examples of [being a] Muslim woman; she really influenced me ... in being Muslim.<sup>258</sup>

Frenky mentioned that her grandmother was religious.

Well, to be honest about religion, [of my] grandparents, only my grandmother on my father's side [...] was [...] actually a believer, she prayed and so on, and she also went on the hajj [pilgrimage] before she died. And she is actually the only one from my immediate family who was a strict believer; the others are liberal.

Also um ehrlich zu sein, was die Religion, [der] Großeltern angeht, nur meine Oma väterlicherseits, [...], sie war [...] schon gläubig, sie hat gebetet und so, und sie war auch auf dem Hadsch bevor sie gestorben ist, und sie ist eigentlich die einzige, so aus meiner näheren Familie, die strenggläubig gewesen ist, die anderen sind so, liberal.<sup>259</sup>

Ena grew up in a family where there was a distinct difference between generations:

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<sup>256</sup> See also: Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*, 196-198.

<sup>257</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 0:18:26.8 - 0:22:36.8.

<sup>258</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 1:32:36.1 - 1:34:26.9.

<sup>259</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 0:36:23.0 - 0:36:53.9.

My grandmother, she was religious, she prayed like five times a day, she was really like that old traditional Muslim woman.<sup>260</sup> She was really sick at the end of her life, really, really sick, [with] cancer, and she couldn't pray in her last days. And she would cry because she couldn't pray, so you would really feel how much she feels it.<sup>261</sup> She was actually so soft and so tough at the same time and I never saw somebody [else] who was like that. [...] When I was with her [...] we never talked [about] religion. She would pray and I would just wait for her to pray and that was it. I never asked.<sup>262</sup>

Prayer here is the main marker of practice; Ena's grandmother did not speak with her about religion, but rather Ena observed her and was inspired by it.

Elma not only sees her grandmother as a good example, but has also sometimes talked about religious matters with her:

I also talk about a lot of things [...] with friends on Facebook who are religious or otherwise. If I have time, [I speak] with my grandma or with one of my other family members, but not often.

Viele Sachen rede ich auch [...] mit Freundinnen über Facebook, die religiös sind, oder sonst, wenn ich dazu Zeit habe mit meiner Oma oder mit jemanden von meinen anderen Familienmitgliedern, aber nicht oft.<sup>263</sup>

Religiously knowledgeable individuals, ranging from explicitly religious experts, such as an imam, to the family, as discussed above, or neighbours, can have a marked influence on religious socialisation. My research shows that these individuals seem to be significantly more relevant than one's visits to *mekteb* or religious classes in school. The influence of these individuals is likely to also have a strong impact on the woman's conception of what it means to be a Muslim. Influential people in my interlocutors' religious development were referred to by my interviewees as both knowledgeable of Islam and as examples of being a good person, or *dobar čovjek*.

Later in life, so more in the period that the interviews were conducted in, religious experts that are present on (social) media still are important. Their inputs are more likely consumed as a source of knowledge rather than through an exchange, are their role is covered in the section on religious information.

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<sup>260</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 1:40:37.2 - 1:42:23.9.

<sup>261</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 1:46:09.0 - 1:47:32.6.

<sup>262</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 1:47:32.6 - 1:50:00.4.

<sup>263</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 0:47:04.6 - 0:47:49.0.

Not everyone mentioned imams as influential, but when they did, they seemed more relevant as guides to my interlocutors' finding their own stance. Two instances particularly illustrate how imams are seen as encouraging one's own thought and decision-making capacities:

As a child, Aida was influenced by an imam:

We went to the mosque as little children, and there was one imam who was very strong, I must say, smart, educated, and he somehow taught us to never take one side of the story, but to question everything, to investigate as much as possible, to learn to never take one side of the story or just connect with one side and never trust someone without critical reflection. If we need to investigate more, examine things from multiple angles, or, for example, if we do not understand something we [should] try to put ourselves in the position of that person in order to understand more. I mean, these were somehow more life lessons than what is, now [seen as] as religious education.

Išli smo u džamiji kao mala djeca, i postojao je zaista jedan imam koji je bio jako jako, moram reći, pametan, jako obrazovan, školovan i on nas je nekako učio da nikad ne uzimamo jednu stranu priče nego da sve ispitamo, da što više istražujemo da učimo da se nikad ne vežemo samo za jednu stvar i da nikada ne vjerujemo nekome na prvu. Da moramo više istražiti, ispitati stvari, sagledati iz više uglova, ili na primjer, ako nešto ne razumijemo da se probamo staviti u poziciju te osobe kako bi je više razumjeli. Mislim to su bile nekako više životne lekcije nego što je bilo ono, sada kao religijsko vaspitanje.<sup>264</sup>

Another example comes from Amira and refers to the moment when she needed to decide whether to go to the *madrassa* and wear a hijab, a turning point which was for her the choice of one life over another. After Quran reading class in the mosque, she started to cry because she felt pressure from various people and different sides. The imam said:

don't listen to your mum, don't listen to your brother, don't listen to anyone. [...] Just think about it, what is something you want in your life? Take the advantages, take the disadvantages [...] Think about it.<sup>265</sup>

This exhortation is very much in sync with the specific and important emphasis in Bosnia-Herzegovina on personal choice specifically regarding religious practice and belief.

Other people besides family and imams also played an influential role in my interlocutors' development of Islamic faith. For example, Amira

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<sup>264</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 0:06:56.6 - 0:07:58.7.

<sup>265</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:16:39 - 00:18:20.

referred to a neighbour whose appearance created a positive association with wearing a hijab:

At that time, she was in her late 20s, and I was a kid.... This girl, ... was so elegant, so nice, smiling, she was the only person that I knew with a [head]scarf ... and I really wanted to be like her. And that – she – was the key point when I started liking the scarf.<sup>266</sup>

Ena speaks about how when she turned to knowledgeable people, her understanding became more robust than when it was only focused on research from the internet:

Basically, after year and a half, [...] I [...] rediscovered religion, [...] I [...] found some new people and I decided not to go on the internet anymore (laughs). That was the smartest [...] decision. I started to [...] to check [the] reality of the religion, [...], because I actually never went to the mosque before that. [...] It was only in my head and on the internet. Let's check the reality, let's ask some people who really do know stuff, is it like that, what it is. I realised I wanna pray. I have to go back a little bit.<sup>267</sup>

Ena recollected the process of making the decision to find out more about religion and to search for 'the reality' through asking experts. By contrast, she characterised the internet as a negative source of information, partly because what is available there is indiscriminate. She sees talking to people in her local community is as valid. This then is tightly connected to her starting to pray and going to the mosque, moving beyond theoretical ideas to local practice. This is interesting because usually one's own research of going and reading the Quran was seen as more valuable, as having a higher priority, by my sample. Here however, Ena characterised the community of those practising traditionally as being more 'real' compared to what she found on the internet.

Ena also spoke about how important it is to be in exchange with people who have formal knowledge of Islam:

I just need like a little time to have somebody who really knows about that stuff – to learn, [for them] to teach me. And social support like people around me that I meet in the mosque or something like that, people who finished school like the *madrassa* or the Faculty of Islamic Studies [...] who have some sort of knowledge. Those are people who really helped me [...] because I knew nothing so I can use everything someone gives me. But [...] I'm trying to be careful [equally] as much, you know, when I search for it.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:10:03 - 00:10:27.

<sup>267</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 00:20:23.03 - 00:25:25.03.

<sup>268</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 0:48:08.5 - 0:52:43.2.

When talking about the positive influence *mekteb* had on her, Hasna focuses on the teacher rather than the religious instruction directly:

I went to *mekteb*, which is like a school on the weekend in the mosque. [...] In mine [the teacher] is really crazy, [...] he is really modern. [It is special] to have somebody who is open minded, who likes everything, who enjoys [life], who is a human being, not somebody that is just [oriented in] one direction, only thinking about religion, saying 'no' to everything.<sup>269</sup>

So, even in following a religious expert, Hasna highlighted that he thinks for himself rather than being excessively focused on a way of practising.

Analysing who important people are when it comes influences in childhood and youth provided a mixed picture. The few women in the sample that come from families that did practise Islam did not have a markedly different interpretation and way of believing than those who grew up in (only) culturally Muslim households. In families, the grandparents, particularly grandmothers, are remembered by some as having had an impact on religious understanding. Other people that played a role are religiously educated acquaintances as well as, to a surprisingly minor degree, religious experts such as an imam. Moving from the private domain of family, neighbours and friends, in the next section I will examine the role (secular) schooling plays in religious development.

### 5.1.2 Secular school

Along with family, imams, and other influential people, school could be thought of as an important influence in religious socialisation. Even though the women in my sample emphasised personal development and individual interpretation over 'less important' formal religious education in or outside of school, I outline this influence here. Besides family, school is one of the most important influences we are subjected to when growing up.

The specifics of this influence vary with regard to where people grew up and what type of classes they received. In Yugoslavia from the 1970s onwards and until today, Muslim children often went to *mekteb*,

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<sup>269</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:17:22.0 - 00:18:17.5.

sometimes also referred to as Sunday school. *Mekteb* usually takes place in a mosque and is taught by an imam or a *muallima* (female religious teacher) with a focus on the practical side of religion, such as the correct form of prayer, as well as some religious knowledge. There is no data on the average number of students in attendance.<sup>270</sup> *Mekteb* will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

From the early 1990s, during the war, larger-scale Islamic religious education was introduced, first mainly in private or religious contexts and from 1994 into public schools.<sup>271</sup> As religious education is the responsibility of sub-national administrations, there is a lot of diversity to its implementation in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>272</sup> In some cantons, *kultura religija*, a non-denominational 'culture of religions' course, is offered, as well as tradition-specific courses. This general course focuses on social, civilizational, and other aspects of different religions, giving insight into different forms of belief and practice. The OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) initially financed this course to 'foster religious tolerance'.<sup>273</sup> Of the women interviewed, some had had Islamic education in school and others the *kultura religija* course.

For those women who spent at least some of their childhood and youth outside of Bosnia-Herzegovina, such as in Sandžak, the Muslim-majority region of Serbia, or in Germany, the situation was different. One woman attended *madrassa* full-time while growing up, while others visited classes there. Even though the details of their education differ, their reflections of the experiences are remarkably consistent with each other.

One of the most marked shared experiences among my interlocutors was that when they discussed their schooling, they all stated that the ethnic component was stronger than any faith-based experiential aspect of education. Both their own group and their classmates were described in ethnic rather than religious terms, and the women I interviewed unilaterally

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<sup>270</sup> Alibašić and Zubčević, 50-54.

<sup>271</sup> Štimac, 3, 101.

<sup>272</sup> Alibašić and Zubčević, 50.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 52; More information, including actors involved and content can be found in: Štimac, 3, 147-171.

expressed this to me as a negative characteristic of their schooling. During the war, when religious instruction was introduced at her school, Belma noticed that no Catholic instruction was offered to her Croatian friends. In solidarity, she refused the Islam classes offered by the *hodža* (preacher).<sup>274</sup> Emina, who grew up in Sandžak, has bad memories of celebrating things connected to ‘Serbian culture and tradition and for Christianity’ in school. Even though it was not obligatory, she believes that not joining would have branded her as a nationalist.<sup>275</sup> Even though Sandžak is a Muslim-majority enclave, it is located in Serbia and particularly during the early 90s, the time Emina is talking about, it was likely very much emphasised to be orthodox Christian. Meanwhile, Frenky told me how in primary school there was group pressure to identify as ‘Bosniak’.<sup>276</sup> Hasna went to a school specifically characterised as ‘Bosniak’ and learnt Arabic there, though she would have preferred to learn German.<sup>277</sup>

As such, while the convergence of ethnic and religious identities is common in Bosnia-Herzegovina, my interlocutors, women who self-identify as Muslim believers, took issue with this, particularly this when used in political ways. At school, the focus was on ethnic categories, rather than religious identity. These women’s changing identification, from ethnic to religious, as they grew older could have two potential sources. On the one hand, and more importantly for this study, most of the women I interviewed started actively practising and consciously becoming Muslim at some point in puberty, which was after most of their schooling. This will be explored in more detail later. On the other hand, this shift toward greater religiosity may also be characterised by broader, societal changes in this direction. Aida made this explicit:

So, it seems to me that after the war, this need for religion has really increased as a supplement to life, with some primordial strength and support, so that when everything was destroyed and when it was really a difficult situation, we had, I don’t know, classes

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<sup>274</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 2:07:39.0 - 2:10:30.0.

<sup>275</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 1\_02\_52.6-1:06:23.6.

<sup>276</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 0:00:19.4 - 0:00:54.8.

<sup>277</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:05:58.6 - 00:06:35.5.

for religion also at school, and we went to *mekteb* and it just came gradually somehow.

Tako da čini mi se da je da iza rata baš porasla ta potreba za religijom kao jednom dopunom u životu, nekom iskonskom snagom i podrškom tako da je i kada je sve bilo porušeno i kad je stvarno bila teška situacija, mi smo imali ne znam časove iz religije i u školi, i išli smo u mekteb i jednostavno je to postepeno nekako išlo.<sup>278</sup>

Amina spoke about how religious education increased in wartime when 'we started having extended classes in religious studies after Sunday school'.<sup>279</sup> Frenky referred to how uncomfortable she felt that religion was performed outright through greetings:

[In the] post-war period, [it] was really extreme. ... At school, children [and] teachers ... greeted [each other as] Muslims with the El Salam Aleikum; for me, as a child, why would you do that when you can simply say hello?

[In der] Nachkriegszeit, [war es] wirklich extrem, [...] in der Schule, Kinder, Lehrer, [...] die Muslime mit dem El Salam Aleikum begrüsst haben, für mich, als Kind, wieso sollte man das tun wenn man auch einfach Guten Tag sagen kann.<sup>280</sup>

Apart from the formal religious education taking place in religious classes in school or in a *mekteb*, children can also have an influence on the religious socialisation of their peers. Elma spoke about starting to fast after returning from Germany at the end of the war: 'Then I saw that others were doing that at school, and then I tried it too' ('da hab ich dann auch gesehen dass andere das machen in der Schule, und dann habe ich es auch versucht').<sup>281</sup> Ena mentioned a religious girl in school who tried to convince her: 'during Ramadan, [saying] "come on, and pray with us, not the prayer but just fast, just to see how it is, just for one day". But I just didn't feel like it'.<sup>282</sup>

As I will discuss in more detail in the section 'Becoming Muslim', for many the most important source of religious information was reading, both the Quran directly and other religious information. So, although there was some religious education through family and other important people, as outlined above, as well as through religious classes, these were not major

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<sup>278</sup> Interview, Aida, 10.5.2016, 0:22:48.8 - 0:24:31.9.

<sup>279</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 0:23:35.0 - 0:24:35.6.

<sup>280</sup> Interview, Frenky, 9.12.2015, 00:39:39.2 - 00:40:41.7.

<sup>281</sup> Interview, Elma, 11.5.2016, 00:31:14.7 - 00:33:11.2.

<sup>282</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 0:10:45.5 - 0:13:25.5.

sources of religious knowledge per se. Most of the women I spoke to placed a strong emphasis on their personal religious development, independent of religious institutions or people. However, to add to the experiences in childhood and youth, I will now outline what the women I spoke to said about *mekteb* and then *madrassa*, specialised religious schools.

### 5.1.3 Mekteb

As mentioned above, one of the main ways of transmitting religious information to the next generation during socialist Yugoslavia was *mekteb*. *Mekteb* is attended in childhood, at primary school level, taught by a religious expert, usually in or around mosques, and focuses on learning religious practice. Partially replacing *mekteb* as the location for religious education after the 1990s war, confessional religious education, as well as a course in religious studies, were added as topics at school. Of the thirteen women in the sample, around half attended *mekteb* and half did not, and it did not seem to play a large role in their religious development.<sup>283</sup>

*Mekteb* came up as an indicator of how much religious education someone had received, but only one woman highlighted the teacher as influential. This fits well with the characteristically individualised religiosity in Bosnia-Herzegovina that places a strong emphasis on personal decision-making. These women expressed no outright rejection of *mekteb*, while some regretted not having attended; however, *mekteb*'s focus on learning Islamic practices was not significant for changes in religiosity in my interpretation of the data. The way the women I spoke to practise and how they believe was generally shaped later in life, during adolescence and early adulthood.

Those who did not visit *mekteb* generally cited two reasons. Either their parents did not send them or there were no *mekteb* classes available, typically for those living in a foreign country. Ena related how her parents

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<sup>283</sup> Attended: Amira, Aida, Amina, Alma, Hasna and Leijla Didn't attend: Frenky, Belma, Meliha, Arnesa, Emina, Elma, and Ena.

gave her the choice, but her decision not to go meant she did not have any knowledge of Islam:

It was like, 'you choose [it] if you want to ... but we are not going to educate you with that', so I did not go to any sort of school for that like *mejtef* or *mekteb* or anything, because when I was in school I could [...] choose not to go to religious classes, so during those classes I would be free, I would not go, so I knew nothing about religion.<sup>284</sup>

Meliha was in Germany as a child and was too old for *mekteb* when she came back to Bosnia-Herzegovina:

I didn't go to *mekteb* as a small child .... In Germany there was only a Turkish mosque where I didn't know any Turkish and I didn't go there .... When I came back I was too old to go to *mekteb*.

Ich [bin] als kleines Kind [...] nicht zu *Mekteb* gegangen ... in Deutschland gab es nur in einer türkischen Moschee wo ich kein türkisch kannte und bin nicht hingegangen, [...]. Als ich zurückgekommen bin war ich zu alt um [zur] *Mekteb* zu gehen.<sup>285</sup>

Finally, there is another type of school: the *madrassa*.

#### 5.1.4 Madrassa

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, several types of *madrassas*, generally boarding schools specialised in religious education, exist for older children or youths. In the *madrassa*, one has access to core subjects such as maths and English, but also Islamic disciplines such as Arabic, *fiq* and *tafsir*.<sup>286</sup> Only a few women I spoke to attended a *madrassa*. When Amira initially considered whether to go to a *madrassa* or a regular high school, her mother's main concern was not religious:

She said to me, you choose [...] she didn't even care too much about the scarf, she cared about the school, and who would surround me. [...] So she said to me, [at] *madrassa* school [...] you have different rules, you can't really go out after a certain time, stuff like that. [...] She was like, [...] you do whatever you want to do, but my advice to you is: go to *madrassa*, and later on, if you don't like the scarf you can take it off.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 0:01:46.2-0:04:00.9

<sup>285</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, :00:32:34. - 00:34:13.

<sup>286</sup> Alibašić and Zubčević, 54.

<sup>287</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:12:16.0 - 00:13:47.5.

Here again, the strong focus is on making one's own decision rather than being forced.

Amina attended some classes at a *madrassa* that was founded during the war:

Well, I, at first, I learnt Arabic language at Sunday school and religion, and then I started attending some classes in *madrassa*, but this *madrassa* was founded while I was in primary school, when I was [then] in fourth grade.<sup>288</sup>

The intense Islamic education provided at a *madrassa* did constitute a formative influence on the women who attended. Having now examined a variety of influences during childhood and youth, from influential individuals to a wide variety of institutional schooling, the next section looks at the critical moment or period that marked the time of becoming a believer.

5.2 Becoming Muslim: Spiritual moments, awakenings, and initiating practice  
Amongst my sample, it was striking that the moment of becoming a Muslim believer so often was presented in a clear story, narrated as a turning point critical to personal development. Even when growing up in a culturally Muslim household, amongst my respondents, there was a period or specific moment of turning into a practising Muslim. For most women, this happened during their teens. Sometimes this was narrated as being triggered by an experience that was categorised as 'spiritual'. The story of some women focused, instead, on practice. Practices mentioned are mainly praying regularly and fasting, similarly to the salient categories determining whether the family was considered 'practising' or not. The decision or moment in which one started to wear hijab also came up, but this is largely discussed in more detail separately, in the section on hijab.

When talking about becoming a practising Muslim the emphasis was generally on the freedom to choose and on not being forced into religion by family or traditions. To have faith is seen as internal and to practise, which is visible on the outside requires a decision. This decision was largely seen as individual. Interestingly, this idea of constituting one's self through decision-making has

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<sup>288</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 023:11.2 - 0:23.35.0.

also been observed in diasporic contexts, such as that of young Muslim women in Germany.<sup>289</sup>

For those amongst my respondents that have report spiritual moments as a part of 'Becoming Muslim', such moments play a very important role. The spiritual experiences as recounted are particularly interesting because they constitute a specific moment, a demarcation between being culturally Muslim and a believer. As the boundary between being a cultural Muslim and a believer is invoked repeatedly, this experience or moment is important in the positioning of identity.

These perceived spiritual moments can occur in various ways. Here are two examples, from Amina and Ena. Amina narrates the following instance as taking place when her grandmother was passing away. She saw this moment as proof of God's existence:

I am still questioning those situations, but I was alone in my room and my grandma died [...] there were certain things that we are all told that will happen, [...] if I hadn't experienced that, I wouldn't say that it is true. [...] in Islam [...] good people get sherbet, [...] from angels. [...] they come and try to ease this person's passing, and that they drink that drink. My grandma had a stroke and she wasn't touching anything for forty days [...], and she was a vegetable, and at that moment she came to her senses. [...] she became really clear, she repeated all my prayers after me, drank the [something] and just passed away. [...] I was eighteen when that happened, and that proved me that my religion and things that Muhammed a.s. says, [...], that he never could have known [are now scientifically proven].<sup>290</sup>

The experience Amina had around the time that her grandmother passed away marked a moment of transition for her, when she started to believe that the Muhammed's teachings are based in fact.

Ena initially became interested in Islam through her boyfriend, although she later distanced herself from him. She also spoke about a specific transformative moment:

I met a guy. His father was a Serb, Orthodox Christian and his mother was Muslim, so we [...] had the similar story, but the difference was that he [...] had some sort of belief that there is God. And I met him on a party [...] and fell in love and it was, wow, what a love! [...] he did say [...] one time, [...] we were on a mountain [...], look what God created, and at that point, I saw it. I came home and read [the] Quran. [...] that is how it

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<sup>289</sup> Nökel, 116. See Nökel's work, also, for more in-depth theoretical considerations.

<sup>290</sup> Interview, Amina 1.1.2017, 0:41:44.3-0:45:12.6

started. That was like my [moment of birth]. I kind of have a life before Islam and after Islam [...]. I felt like a baby, I was twenty-one or twenty-two or something like that [...] all my belief system that I had before was just crashed. And I had to learn how to live again with these new things.<sup>291</sup>

She started reading the Quran by herself, rather than speaking to religious experts or practising members of her family. The experience that she categorised as spiritual led her directly to personal reflection with the sacred text, and anger at her largely non-religious upbringing. In these moments relayed by these two informants, there is in one case the passing of one's grandmother and in the other the experience of standing on a mountain with a lover and an ensuing exchange, both of which triggered an awakening moment.

How these transformative moments were described also was quite similar amongst the women. One common theme was how hard it is to put this change into words, as these quotes from Ena and Arnesa show. Specifically, Ena spoke about the spiritual sentiment as something challenging to describe:

The inner thing, [...] it's like some sort of transcendental experience. [...] Something that you can't really put in words. You just can't do it, you know, nobody can. You just know, [...] I just saw something that was beyond the eyes. [...] That was the first moment when I believed. So, you come to that point: Ok, there is God. I believed that there is God. For me, I use to say I'd know, you know, because now I know. I felt it.<sup>292</sup>

Meanwhile, the importance of praying also emerged as salient. Arnesa particularly narrated her spiritual experience as occurring during prayer. She described herself as listening to metal and having black fingernails, which she implies are markers for not being a Muslim believer, until her older brother took her to mosque one Ramadan. She didn't know what exactly to do, but she followed the words and actions of the others in the mosque, during which she had an experience she categorised as transcendental:

And what the people [did], I [did], and now there is one part when the *hodža* recites *fatiha*, there is one part where men and women can pronounce 'amen'. And they all say it out loud. I can't explain [...] to anybody how I felt. [...] they all said it at the same time, the mosque full of people [...], my legs literally went out from under me, some kind of feeling, I can't describe it, and then my brother was no longer important, because I realised that people are praying to something that I can't

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<sup>291</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 00:04:00.9-00:05:00.4

<sup>292</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 0:14:20.4-0:14:50.9.

describe at all. And when it all ended, I did not sleep that night, I sat down and read, read, read, I devoted myself more to reading about Islam and faith, and so I entered [into Islam].

Šta ljudi rade, radim i ja i ima sad jedan dio kad se uči, kad hodža prouči Fatihu, ima jedan dio kad muškarci, odnosno žene mogu izgovarati Amin. I oni svi naglas to izgovore. Ja to nikome ne mogu objasniti kakav je to meni osjećaj bio. I sad, ja sad klanjam i nisam ja znala da će doći ta riječ Amin i to je toliko meni, oni su svi izgovorili to u isto vrijeme, puna džamija ljudi i oni su svi izgovorili u isto vrijeme Amin, meni su se noge bukvalno odsjekle, nekakav osjećaj, ja to ne mogu opisati i onda više nije bio brat bitan jer sam shvatila da se ljudi klanjaju nečemu što ja ne znam uopšte šta je to. I onda kad je sve to završilo, tu noć nisam ja spavala ja sam sjela i čitala, čitala, čitala, više sam se posvetila čitanju o Islamu i vjeri i tako sam ušla [u Islam].<sup>293</sup>

This spiritual experience resulted in Arnesa looking for more information and educating herself. This then started a process during which she became practising, very similar to what Ena described above.

Though Arnesa had a spiritual experience during prayer which sparked off her belief, she also drew a distinction between this moment itself and what she saw as a longer process on the way to becoming fully practising:

It was a moment when I became aware that the purpose of life was not to live from day to day, eventually to die. [...] I, at that moment, immediately felt that I should devote myself a little more to faith, to explore, [...], I did not think at the time as I am now thinking, and I hope that in the future I will not think like what I'm thinking now, I'll make progress. But over time, a person receives a bit, [more] [...] and develops in a religious sense. So, it's not exactly right now, and tomorrow I'm a believer, but it's still time consuming. I mean, a man has to devote himself and think, to be alone, to take his cell phone and to call himself (laughs) to talk a little with himself and so. That comes over time.

Jest bio jedan momenat kada sam postala svjesna da smisao života samo nije živjeti iz dana u dan, na kraju umrijeti. [...] u tom trenutku odmah sam osjetila da se trebam posvetiti više malo vjeri, istraživati, [...] nisam ja razmišljala tada kao što sad razmišljam, i nadam se da u budućnosti neću razmišljati kao što sada razmišljam, da ću napredovati. Ali vremenom čovjek pomalo dobiva, [...] i razvija se u vjerskom smislu. Znači nije to baš, danas pa sutra sam vjernik nego je to ipak trajalo vremenski. Mislim, čovjek se treba posvetiti sebi i razmišljati, osamiti se, uzeti mobitel i nazvati sam sebe (laughs) pričati malo sam sa sobom i tako. To vremenom dođe.<sup>294</sup>

In other words, there is the transformational moment, but this is followed by a longer period during which faith develops. Interestingly, she doesn't talk just about practice taking time, but also about belief, which she categorises as gradually taking root in one's thoughts.

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<sup>293</sup> Interview, Arnesa 5.5.2016, 00:46:19 - 00:47:18.

<sup>294</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:48:42 – 00:49:41.

Meliha already was practising regularly at the time she had an intense experience she describes here, which also occurred during prayer at the mosque:

I went to the mosque in the Čaršija, we prayed *aksam* there, and I can't describe it with words [...], somehow it was a feeling of calm, of security, in the mosque that I thought if at some point, you had some doubts that you couldn't be a believer or something, at that moment it passed, although I just, [...] went to pray. I had no problems that I needed reassurance on or something, it was common for me to go to *aksam*, I remember this *aksam* like today, it was just like silk, like a dream.

[Ich] bin [...] in die Moschee gegangen in die Čaršija, da haben wir *Aksam* gebetet, und ich kann das Heute nicht mit Worten fassen, irgendwie war das so ein Gefühl von Ruhe, von Sicherheit, in der Moschee, wo ich mir gedacht habe, wenn Du irgendwann, irgendwelche Nachdenken hattest das Du nicht gläubig sein kannst oder so, in diesem Moment ist es vorbeigegangen, obwohl ich nur, [...] beten gegangen bin. Ich hatte ja keine Probleme das ich sage ich habe dort Beruhigung gefunden oder so, es war üblich, dass ich zum *Aksam* gehe, ich erinnere mich wie heute an diesen *Aksam*, er war genau wie aus Seide, aus dem Traum.<sup>295</sup>

In how Meliha described this experience of 'calm, of serenity', it becomes clear that this experience strengthened her faith. While she stated that she didn't need reassurance, she also describes how any doubts she might have had before were removed by this one spiritual moment.

While these women generally had some knowledge of Islam and a religious background, it was various kinds of spiritual experiences that really set them off on a path of regular practice. For Meliha, Arnesa, and Ena, it was a singular moment of clarity that sparked a new religiosity, belief, and practice. Frenky, meanwhile, didn't refer to one intense moment, but rather described finding something beyond the everyday in specific Islamic contexts:

When I used to go to music school I was in a choir that mainly sung Islamic songs, and you really feel that there is something there that you can't explain.

Als ich in die Musikschule gegangen bin war ich im Chor, der hauptsächlich islamische Lieder gesungen hat, und da spürt man schon dass da etwas ist, was man nicht erklären kann.<sup>296</sup>

At the time of our interviews, Frenky did not regularly practise Islam, yet she also used the language of something indescribable ('was man nicht erklären kann') when referring to her spiritual experience. The examples above that reference having spiritual experiences use similar terminology to describe them, namely that it is hard to put such moments into words. This is hardly

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<sup>295</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:36:43.4 - 00:37:35.3.

<sup>296</sup> Interview, Frenky, 9.12.2015, 00:53:08.4 - 00:53:21.0.

surprising when it comes to transcendental moments. The process of 'becoming Muslim' was overall described by my interlocutors as spiritual, as an internal process.

However, my fieldwork also indicated that, according to young Muslim women in Sarajevo, 'becoming Muslim' was also visible through one's practice, even though the internal relationship to God should not be judged from the outside. Practice is described as that which distinguishes those who are culturally Muslim from believers, so there is some tension between the value of 'not judging from the outside' and talking about oneself and others through linking faith and practice. For many I interviewed, the main practice is prayer. Regular prayer was also frequently described in interviews as an internal, personal development, and an individual choice. This is the case even though regular prayer can be visible outside and is seen critical if people talk about going to pray it too much, as several women in my sample stated.

Though most women described a decisive moment, 'becoming Muslim' in the sense of being a practicing believer is not done and dusted with one spiritual experience alone. Rather, a moment of spiritual awakening entails further development. This topic of duration, of time, is reminiscent of Ena's earlier statement that it requires time for belief to take hold. The process of developing practice and belief, naturally, is not static, and should not necessarily be understood as finished at the moment the interviews took place. For Emina, establishing a practice of praying regularly took some time:

For prayer, it took around a year. I knew that I would [pray regularly], but somehow, I couldn't, I knew that I would pray [eventually] but I couldn't start, it is not so easy, some people need less time, some more.

Za namaz, je trebalo oko godinu dana. Ja sam znala da hoću, ali ne mogu nekako, znala sam da hoću da klanjam ali ne mogu da počnem, nije baš lako, nekome treba kraće, nekom duže.<sup>297</sup>

This is one of the ways prayer is talked about, while others focus on the obligation or how prayer should come with ease. Alma described a moment in which she felt a need to start praying, as a Muslim, with both her internal process and encouragement by her mother coming into play. For her, the central point is that this was her own decision, the moment when she autonomously chose to start practising: 'I was fourteen years old and I decided

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<sup>297</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:54:38 - 00:57:17.

I must pray. Because I am Muslim and I must live according to that. [...] So, that was that moment.'<sup>298</sup> She goes on to say there was nothing specific that triggered that decision. Rather, it was a feeling of obligation coming from being Muslim. Although there is the obligation to pray stemming from the religious requirement, it is key for her that she is the one deciding when to start implementing it. Becoming aware of her Muslim-ness, she starts the practice of prayer out of her own motivation.

For Ena, there was a re-start that was also connected to 'facing reality', as she calls it, which was connected to praying and distancing herself from the partner who she discovered Islam with. Unlike for Alma, her mother was not supportive:

I wanted to practise religion but I didn't know how, [...] I started having problems with my mother because [...] she didn't accept [...] that I am religious now. And she [...] introduced me with some new [...] dimension of Islam, like it's easy, it's not that tough. [...] I was really strict, I took it all literally. And then I started from the beginning.<sup>299</sup>

For Ena, although she starts the quote by outlining that she had difficulties with her mother, she then, in dialogue with her mother, comes to a new understanding and a different, less literal way of practising.

Elmas way of talking about starting to practise is interesting because she made a clear distinction between having faith and practising. For her, the act of reading initiated regular prayer.

I was always a believer! [...] I [always] made an excuse for myself in the sense 'I don't have to pray today, why should I, I'm really exhausted' and then I read something where I see that you should have no excuse, and then I have a guilty conscience and then I think, 'ok, now I'm doing it' and then I didn't again. [...] I was always religious, so I always believed, but I always had phases where I was more involved and less.

Ich war immer gläubig! [...] ich [hab] immer eine Ausrede für mich dargestellt im Sinne 'Ich muss nicht Heute beten, wieso sollte ich, also so ich bin richtig erschöpft' und dann lese ich etwas wo ich sehe dass man keine Ausrede haben sollte, und dann habe ich [...] ein schlechtes Gewissen und dann denke ich, 'ok, jetzt mache ich es' und dann wieder nicht. [...] Ich war immer religiös, also immer gläubig, aber ich hatte immer Phasen wo ich mehr involviert war und weniger.<sup>300</sup>

For those in my sample that did engage in regular prayer, it was generally characterised as an absolutely key step in their path to becoming Muslim.

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<sup>298</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:12:41.07-00:13:10.01.

<sup>299</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 00:20:23.03-00:25:25.03

<sup>300</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:12:59 - 01:14:06.

Part of becoming a believer, in the sense that is differentiated from being a cultural, ethnic Muslim, is both in the spiritual experience and the practice of prayer, and to a lesser degree fasting. Along with prayer, fasting was the main body technique raised as an indicator of being Muslim by my interlocutors. It is not so much the not-eating and contemplation that are seen as crucial, but rather a period during which, through spiritual reflection, changes take place. Ramadan is a time that initiates changes in behaviour. Many people fast in Bosnia-Herzegovina, even those who are more culturally Muslim. Fasting during Ramadan is also practised by many people in Sarajevo who don't otherwise follow many rules and regulations of Islam or necessarily self-identify as believers.

For my informants, as well, Ramadan was often viewed as pivotal in their religious development. For Arnesa, the moment her brother took her to mosque during Ramadan was important, triggering a spiritual experience, as described above. For Ena, the first Ramadan she fasted was a turning point:

Ramadan came. It was, [...] it was October or [...], November when I declared okay, now I believe, [I] read the Quran and stuff and [...] next year in August Ramadan came and I really [...] felt like I needed to fast. It was like, I have to do it, I'm gonna die if I don't do it. It [...] really [...] came from the inside. And that Ramadan was something best [sic] that happened to me. [...] Just the process of fasting, [...] then I started to maybe thinking [sic] clearly (laughs). Maybe then some critical thinking was turned on [...]. Ramadan kind of changed some things for me. And after that Ramadan [...] I just started taking care of myself, really.<sup>301</sup>

So, on the one hand there is the spiritual experience which is key to becoming Muslim. Not every woman talked about this, but for those that did, it was a highly relevant factor. On the other hand, there are practices that were described as markers of becoming Muslim, mainly prayer. The two can be connected, for example when a spiritual experience is followed by the development of a more regular practice.

After the initial establishment of belief and practice, in becoming Muslim there is a deeper debate of what 'being Muslim' actually entails. Further below, I will outline different elements of knowledge, practice and positioning in everyday life. However, first up, I will analyse how there is much emphasis placed on

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<sup>301</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 00:20:23.03 - 00:25:25.03.

ethical behaviour and how young Muslim women in Sarajevo distinguish behaviour that is seen as actually important for being a good Muslim versus that seen as demonstrative, performative practice.

### 5.3 Gathering religious knowledge

The practice of religion amongst self-identified Muslims in Sarajevo is influenced by a number of factors. One of these is religious knowledge, mainly coming from their family, the internet and books. Where religious knowledge comes from specifically, I would claim plays an important role in identity formation, as values and norms, as well as the 'correct' form of behaviour are transported as part of the parcel.

In the field, I noticed that people acquire their religious information based partly upon where they position themselves in local and international discourses around what Islam is and how to practise. This positioning also is connected to how religious information and practice is questioned and, at an even more fundamental level, where answers are sought. This resonates with how Paula Schrode describes young Muslims in Germany: 'They actively make Islam theirs, instead of passively taking on what cultural traditions and authorities in their personal surroundings prescribe' ('Sie machen sich den Islam aktiv zu eigen, statt passiv zu übernehmen, was kulturelle Traditionen und Autoritäten im persönlichen Umfeld vorgeben').<sup>302</sup> So, this negotiation and questioning seems to be consistent with different geographical areas, and not dependant on being in the diaspora, not just from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Sigrid Nökel, who also works on a diaspora context, refers to how what one learns is a subjective choice, which results in viewing oneself as being ahead, seen as 'transcending the traditional'.<sup>303</sup> Following this analysis, what religious knowledge is acquired ties into both the individualised, choice-based conception of religiosity I found in Sarajevo, and the rejection of traditional forms of religious knowledge.

There are a number of different sources for religious knowledge. This is partly dependant on the numerous different influences on religious understanding of

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<sup>302</sup> Schrode, 104.

<sup>303</sup> Nökel, 237.

Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, from background and education to access to mainstream and alternative teachings and whether they live in the city or countryside.<sup>304</sup> The information sources that were mentioned most often were one's parents, the Islamic Community, the internet, and books. If one's parents have some religious education, they served as the main source of basic and practical information, such as how to pray correctly. The internet and books are what were generally referred to for more complex issues. The official Islamic Community (Islamska Zajednica, or IZ) was also seen as one possible source of knowledge or interpretations of what Islam is and how it should be practised, albeit not the main one for my informants. Even though the Islamic Community constitutes an official authority, as elsewhere in the world, there is not one interpretation of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for practitioners. The local imam or other representatives of the Islamic Community were not mentioned much by my interview partners, particularly by those that are formally or informally educated and look for information on their own. The internet, of course, is large, and there was a specific engagement with authors, scholars, and sources that are deemed reputable. They come from all over the world, although due to language restrictions, publications in English are more popular than in other, less understood languages. Some people also refer to the Quran directly for religious knowledge.

This looking for information on the internet or in books happens without them positioning themselves against the Islamic Community or asking for reform, but rather a development in parallel. Even those that do refer to the Islamic Community do so via the relevant internet-pages as one source of many, rather than having a local imam or other religious expert as the main guidance.

Meliha, who studied at the Faculty of Islamic Studies and is very knowledgeable of religious issues, gets her guidance for different aspects from different sources. This reflects the general trend. She discusses sermons with her friends, reflecting on the IZ but also developing her opinion through these conversations. Asked if they discuss content promoted by the IZ, she answers:

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<sup>304</sup> Bartulović, 291.

Yes! Sermon. So that's what we talk about, what we heard in the sermons if it was good or...

*Ja! Predigt. Also darüber reden wir, und was wir auf den Predigten gehört haben, also ob das gut war oder...*<sup>305</sup>

So, while the official line of the IZ is one source of knowledge, it is far from the only one, and it is one that is often discussed critically. It likely also plays a role as, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, women traditionally don't attend Friday prayers and there are limited other possibilities to get involved in the IZ. So, while men can get their weekly dose of religious guidance somewhat automatically, women need to seek it out more actively. Both my fieldwork and other studies show that mosque attendance and thus possibly the connection to the Islamic Community are higher amongst older women.<sup>306</sup>

It may be a challenge for the institutions that the women, who are more equal in other areas, also work, and are educated, are hungry for spiritual and intellectual food, and not satisfied with only prescribed practice. While not actively protesting against the existing structures, they are negotiating their religious role outside the institutions. This also connects to the freedom that is associated with Europe, as the freedom to choose an interpretation of Islam and what sources of knowledge are used cut to the core of what being a Muslim means. They take a role as actors by seeking information. Many women I spoke to placed an emphasis on thinking for themselves and getting information from different sources, some of which are evaluated below.

Amina talks about examining teachings critically in dialogue with Christians from the United States:

I even went to their Bible study groups, and they really welcomed another opinion. [...] there were not so many questions that I had an answer to; [...] you need to spread your horizons. Because I am more scientifically oriented and stuff I need to have proof, I can't blindly follow something, so everything back in my religion is 'why' [...] I need to have my ratio, so it is always 'why'. If I think that Muhammed said something, I would always look [up the context] why and when.<sup>307</sup>

This independence and critical thinking also is important for Emina, who responds to the question of who influenced her:

No one, even positively or negatively; I was pretty much myself, and I'm

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<sup>305</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:14:15.2 - 00:14:26.5.

<sup>306</sup> Šeta, 141.

<sup>307</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:04.8 - 00:00:05.0

only a person who puts everything in my life, questioning and analysing everything, sometimes [...] too much, I do not know how healthy it is for a person to be [...] self-critical and all...

Nije niko, čak ni pozitivno ni negativno, baš sam poprilično bila sama, a inače sam osoba koja sve u životu dovodi u pitanje, sve ispitujem i analiziram, nekad i previše, ne znam koliko je to zdravo za jednog čovjeka, da budeš i samokritičan i sve...<sup>308</sup>

Meliha makes special reference to women's need to deal with religion in a scientific sense after it had been, as she calls it, forbidden under communism:

Because in Egypt you have had that for a long time, that women raise their voice, in Morocco, I think it is also, how can I say, not arrived but starting up well, like Fatima Mernissi and others that have their own fatwas only for women and their own departments that are only for women. This has already happened in Islamic countries. Here it did not happen because religion was, [...] forbidden, earlier, that is, in communism, and later the women got together and started, [...] to believe, and then not just simple faith but have dealt with faith as a science, so I believe that this is a natural phase that can come now.

Weil in Ägypten hat man das schon längere Zeit, dass die Frauen Ihre Stimme hochheben, in Marokko finde ich das ist auch schon, wie soll ich sagen, nicht angekommen aber gut hochgekommen, also Fatima Mernissi und andere die eigene fetwas nur für Frauen und eigene Abteilungen nur für Frauen sind. Das ist schon in islamischen Ländern passiert. Hier ist es nicht passiert weil die Religion, [...] verboten war, [...] im Kommunismus, und später bis sich die Frauen zusammengefunden haben und angefangen haben, [...] zu glauben, und dann nicht nur das einfache Glauben, sondern mit Glauben als Wissenschaft auseinandergesetzt haben, deswegen glaube ich dass das eine natürliche Phase ist, die jetzt noch kommen werden kann.<sup>309</sup>

When talking about becoming Muslim and being Muslim, there are some (though fewer) women who simply take the interpretation that is offered to them. This can be from within the Islamic Community or something they look for outside. Others are really into thinking critically for themselves. For example, Amina talks about how there needs to be people that question, that lead, and others that just follow, whereas Alma does not invest much energy in questioning the mainstream view. This impacts how they practise, what is important to them in a partner, friends, and other social contacts, and what being Muslim means to them. This is a moment where I also need to be careful as a researcher, as, rooted in my own value system, I have more affection for those who question and think critically.<sup>310</sup> Whether things are questioned or not is also connected to the type of religious knowledge, as basic tenets tend to be less controversial.

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<sup>308</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:53:48.9 - 00:54:26.6

<sup>309</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:04:06.6 - 01:04:57.5.

<sup>310</sup> Fieldnotes 2.1.2017.

There also is a developmental aspect to when which things are accessed. When talking about religious information, Amira reflects on different phases that she went through: 'It is like you overcome those basic things like how you pray with this, or how you do that or...or what am I doing, I am researching different directions in Islam'.<sup>311</sup> When speaking to her in 2018, she mentioned that her interpretations and the things she looks for had changed again. So, there is a difference both with regard to what kind of knowledge is looked for and where women are in their process, though these two factors are also connected. Now, I will outline three important sources for religious knowledge in more detail: the family, the internet, and books.

### 5.3.1 Learning from social circles

Family members, people in the neighbourhood, or friends are a more important source of religious information than religious experts, at least than religious experts in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Above, I outlined the influences in childhood and youth, including the role of family members. The internet is even more important as a source of knowledge, particularly for more complex issues and those that go beyond the instructions around the correct way to pray or similar. The most trusted source are books by known authors. Most women use the available knowledge in an additive way, complementing each other, depending on what they are looking for.

Alma is typical in that there is a difference between what she has learned from her mother, which are practical aspects such as how to perform prayer, and more in-depth religious information, for which she goes to the internet.

'[I get religious information] from my mum generally [...] When I was very small child she was teaching me how to pray, how to read [...] in Arabic'.<sup>312</sup>

Amina also talks about her family, her mother here specifically not reading books and thus having less of an understanding:

[She] never educated herself about some larger spheres of Islam, or having read books or something, it was mostly what she was educated

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<sup>311</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015 00:46:26.3 - 00:46:32.2.

<sup>312</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 0:12:07.2 - 0:12:21.2.

through family and primary school and Sunday school, but not something that took her on higher levels of Islam.<sup>313</sup>

So, she makes a hierarchy here between what her mother learnt through her family and institutions and what would be possible through reading. Although she doesn't state this explicitly, this also implies that her mother can't pass on those 'larger spheres of Islam' to her. Thus, what comes from the family usually relates to practical aspects of religion, rather than complex theology.

For some people, even though the parents have the practical knowledge, they are not willing to share it. This is unsurprising, given that many in the parents' generation don't practice, or only started practising later in life. Belma learnt how to practise the mechanics of religion, how to pray, and how to tie her headscarf correctly from the internet, because her parents didn't teach her. '[My father] has a familiarity with Islam but he doesn't advocate for it in his life'. ('[Mein Vater] hat diese Kenntnisse über Islam aber vertritt das nicht in seinem Leben.')<sup>314</sup>

Later, Belma continues to explain why she had to turn to YouTube to learn a few of the basics of Islamic practice:

I had to see it from the pragmatic side [...] I had to, I wanted to [...] learn how to somehow do some prayers, I just couldn't learn that from my parents. Because my mother can't do it and my father wouldn't want to teach me, and I checked the internet, on YouTube, how for example you do this morning prayer.

Ich musste von der pragmatischen Seite [...] ich musste, ich wollte [...] erstmal lernen wie man manche Gebete irgendwie macht, das konnte ich einfach nicht von meinen Eltern lernen. Weil meine Mutter kann das nicht und mein Vater würde mir das nicht beibringen wollen, und ich habe im Internet, auf YouTube gekuckt, wie man zum Beispiel zu diesem Morgengebet, was man da machen sollte.<sup>315</sup>

For others, it is from family that they learn in different ways. Frenky, specifically points out how great it is that her aunt, who is knowledgeable, doesn't impose on her and says: 'You could really talk to her.' ('Mit Ihr konnte man wirklich reden')<sup>316</sup>

A lot of knowledge for Meliha, particularly about practice, was passed on by her family, who is Muslim:

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<sup>313</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:02.4 - 00:00:02.4.

<sup>314</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 01:12:30.2 - 01:12:37.6.

<sup>315</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 01:34:01.1 - 01:34:40.8.

<sup>316</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 00:13:43.0 - 00:14:20.1.

We are a very traditionally Muslim family, and most of what I learnt here [at the faculty for Islamic Studies] I already had at home; we've been practising the religion for a long time, so it wasn't anything new, just some things I learnt in details, overall I knew [it].

Wir sind eine sehr traditionell muslimische Familie, und das meist was ich hier [an der Fakultät für Islamwissenschaft] gelernt habe hatte ich schon, zu Hause, wir praktizieren die Religion schon lange, also es war nichts Neues, also nur irgendwelche Sachen habe ich im Detail gelernt, die ich, wie soll ich sagen, im Großen und Ganzen kannte hier [ich es].<sup>317</sup>

So, even what she studies at the institute for Islamic Studies doesn't add to her pre-existing knowledge from the family background, which is very unusual, as most others see family as a source of basic practical knowledge, not theology.

Related to the value of choice and freedom is the idea of building religious knowledge as part of one's personal spiritual development. Aida started by learning from her parents and now gets guidance from religious experts, not so much in direct conversation but through listening to lectures on the internet. For her, it is very important to form her own opinion, likely going by the view that Islam can answer all questions:

When I was young, I talked a lot with my parents and the elders from the family, and whenever there were some questions, they answered these questions. Now that I'm an adult, I'm looking for answers to these questions myself. As I have already said, there are plenty of lectures by Islamic scholars...

Pa kao manja sam dosta razgovarala sa roditeljima i sa starijim iz porodice, i uvijek kad su bila neka pitanja oni su mi odgovarali na ta pitanja. Sada kad sam odraslija sada sama tražim odgovore na ta pitanja. Kao što sam već rekla, postoji dosta i predavanja islamskih učenjaka....<sup>318</sup>

Hasna's family is not so educated in Islam, she asks around, getting information from other people:

In my family, religion is more or less based on, I don't know, feeling rather than some concrete knowledge [...] I ask some friends or some neighbours, because I live in a neighbourhood full of people who are imams or women who know more about it, so I rather ask them or something like that. Because in my street you have so many people that are really into religion or that are imams, or their family is, and actually so many mosques, and I think I can always just go to pray and ask somebody, it is quite simple.<sup>319</sup>

So, she doesn't read and/or assess critically, but rather relies on people who she sees as knowledgeable due to their connection to the learned religion. Ena

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<sup>317</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:14:36.2 - 00:14:56.9

<sup>318</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 0:25:45.3-0:26:15.6

<sup>319</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:14:29.6-00:15:30.7

learnt from books and people, and it is important to her to feel like she has support:

I did have the [basic] textbooks, [and I] learned from that [...] Then I decided to go to the Faculty of Islamic studies [...] and then I realised, okay, I need some more basic stuff, you know. I just need [...] to have somebody who really knows [...] to teach me. And social support [...] people around me that I meet in mosque [...] people who did finish [...] *madrassa* or Faculty for Islamic Studies, whoever I meet that have some sort of knowledge. Those are people who really helped me like, because I knew nothing, so everything you give me I can use it. But I am being, I'm trying to be careful as much, you know, when I search for it. I never really went to like a mosque or something like that, to some imam to ask him but I feel like I can do it at any time also. Like I did, last Ramadan in this mosque actually and I came to this person and I asked him, okay, do I have to give *zekat* now and he explained it to me. So, you know I always, I had to learn to ask, to ask for support.<sup>320</sup>

With the exception of Meliha, families mainly are relevant with regard to practical issues and not as a reference point for growth or complex questions. These are often tackled by researching online.

### 5.3.2 Mining the internet

The internet is the very important source and place of exchange, particularly for those 'leaders' who find their own interpretation.<sup>321</sup> As the internet is vast and contains many different kinds of information, users develop different strategies to assess what they will take on. Parameters used are if something seems 'normal', is from a pre-known scholar, or 'makes sense'. This section will first outline my interlocutors' general view of information on the internet, followed by how they select information. It was generally seen as particularly attractive that on the internet, people can choose themselves what to take on, which fits well with the generally high value in Bosnia placed on choice. For example, Belma doesn't often ask other people for information because of the additional instructions they may give her, which means finding information on the internet is more attractive:

All the people that I could maybe ask are a lot more religious than I wish it for myself, and that's why I don't want to ask those people. So, I only learn what I think is enough for me, and that is why I went to YouTube

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<sup>320</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 0:48:08.5-0:52:43.2

<sup>321</sup> For a study linking Islamic feminism and online spaces see: Anna Piela, *Muslim Women Online: Faith and Identity in Virtual Space*, Islamic Studies Series (London: Routledge, 2012).

and got some information there. I prefer that to asking someone, because then it is part of the parcel, 'ok, but you want to do this, do that as well', and I don't want that.

Alle Leute die ich vielleicht fragen könnte sind viel mehr religiös als ich es für mich wüsste, und deshalb will ich solche Leute nicht fragen. Also ich lerne nur das was ich denke, dass für mich reicht, und deswegen bin ich auf YouTube gegangen und hab mich da informiert, das ist mir lieber als jemanden zu fragen, weil da kommt im Paket auch, "ok, aber Du willst das machen, mach das auch" und das will ich nicht.<sup>322</sup>

However, she is also very critical about much of the content she could find on the internet:

To be able to attend [at my uncle's funeral] I had to learn how to do that, and then I went to YouTube [...]. And that was somehow all that I thought that they should or could teach me, because I think the internet is full of nonsense, also in terms of religion. And [on] Facebook, there are portals, with such Islamic texts, which I feel [...] are nonsense. So, some sheiks who lived 500 years ago, and that somehow you learn a message from a story.

Um [beim Begräbnis meines Onkels] mitmachen zu können musste ich lernen, wie das geht, und dann bin ich zu Youtube gegangen [...]. Und das war irgendwie alles was ich dachte das man mir beibringen müsste oder könnte, weil ich denke das Internet ist voller Schwachsinn, auch was Religion betrifft. Und [auf] Facebook, es gibt Portale, mit so islamischen Texten, die ich [...] als Schwachsinn empfinde. Also irgendwelche Scheiks, die von 500 Jahren gelebt haben, und dass man irgendwie eine Message aus einer Geschichte [lernen].<sup>323</sup>

The importance of evaluating different guidance is demonstrated by Ena in re-telling her journey. Like Belma, she couldn't get her religious education from her parents, so she turned to the internet. However, possibly because she was younger, she didn't assess the information she found, with what she describes as dire consequences:

It was like this. [...] [A]t the beginning [...] it came from fear. [...] the practice, the belief, everything. I entered Islam in a way that I wouldn't recommend for anybody. Literally, because when you don't know stuff, you are eas[ily] manipulated. [...] I started learning from [the] internet, which was a big, big mistake because [...] I [saw] some information [...] and I didn't really use my critical thinking [...]. At that point I would hold on to anything because really, you know, I had nothing at that point. [...] I went to some extreme stuff, [...]. Everything was just, 'okay, now we are going to do it like this. Because this is the right thing', and it didn't work, of course. (Laughs). [...] But basically, I had some [...] psychological issues after a year [...] everything just crashed, I had to go to doctors and I said like 'okay, I need help, I do need', that is why psychology helped me, because I realised, 'okay I have problems, I need to sort the thing out'.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 02:02:01.0 - 02:02:34.9.

<sup>323</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 01:34:59.7- 1:27:18.9

<sup>324</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 0:17:02.7-0:20:35.3.

And then I started from the beginning. [...] I [...] rediscovered religion, but I had to break up with the boyfriend, I have found some new people and I decided not to go on the internet anymore (laughs). That was the smartest, really, decision.<sup>325</sup>

The decision not to go on the internet for information anymore seems radical, and others use methods that allowed them to retrieve information while also being conscious of what is found.

Arnesa makes a distinction between religious questions relating to life, which she answers with reflection, and what she calls practical ones. For the latter, she checks the internet or asks learned people.

It depends what the question is: if it is [an] everyday life question where I have a problem, I talk to dear Allah, I ask Him for help [...], but if something practical such as prayer has started in the mosque, I am late, and how should I continue to pray with them to where they have reached. Stuff like that, I look for on the internet, or I ask someone who is learned in this. So, where technical matters are concerned, then I'm looking for an answer on the internet, although there are all kinds of answers, but I take care, [...] what's relevant to me.

Zavisi kakvo je pitanje to, ako je životno pitanje u kojem sam ja problemu, razgovaram sa dragim Allahom, od Njega tražim pomoć [...], ali ako je nešto praktično tipa počeo namaz u džamiji ja kasnim i sad kako trebam nastaviti klanjati s njima, dokle su oni došli, e takve stvari tražim na internetu ili pitam nekoga ko je učen u tome. Znači, kad su tehničke stvari u pitanju onda tražim na internetu odgovor, mada i tu ima svakakvih odgovora ali čuvam se, [...] ono što je relevantno za mene.<sup>326</sup>

Emina also doesn't have other people as her source: 'I started to practise my faith only from books and from the internet' ('Ja sam maltene pocela praktikovati vjeru samo onako iz knjiga i sa interneta').<sup>327</sup>

Although with the IZ there is an official structure in place with a website, the local imams and courses at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, this is not where the women I spoke to mainly get their knowledge. Rather, sources found online as well as printed material inform them. Of course, there are many different things available on the internet, and it varies what kind of pages are deemed trustworthy. Elma, as well as talking to friends and family, draws on pages she calls 'normal':

I also talk about lot of things with my friend Selma, or with friends via Facebook who are religious, or else when I have time with my grandma or with some other family members, but not often. If we see each other or something. And also, when it comes to learning or reading just from

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<sup>325</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 0:20:35.3-0:25:25.3.

<sup>326</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:33:42.4 - 00:34:24.5.

<sup>327</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:29:40.4 - 00:30:04.7.

the internet, it depends on which pages I find, so not all pages, but something that is normal.

Viele Sachen rede ich auch mit meiner Freundin Selma, oder mit Freundinnen über Facebook, die religiös sind, oder sonst, wenn ich dazu Zeit habe mit meiner Oma oder mit jemanden von meinen anderen Familienmitgliedern, aber nicht oft. Wenn wir uns sehen oder so. Und auch was das Lernen angeht oder lesen, einfach auch von dem Internet, es hängt davon ab welche Seiten ich finde, also nicht alle Seiten, sondern etwas was normal ist.<sup>328</sup>

So Elma is selective and critical in what information she draws on from the world wide web, choosing those that are close to her own interpretation of Islam. By 'normal', she refers to views which are similar to her own and not 'extreme' in any direction.

For Islamic law and rulings Meliha checks the internet for what the Islamic Community officially has decreed but also those of other religious experts:

So, for the *fatwas* or *fiqh* I check the internet, [the] Islamic Community has its own website where they have [...] questions and answers. [...] I look at that first, and then I look at all the other *fatwas* that are not [...] issued by the Islamic Community, but [by people] that have studied in Saudi Arabia, or wherever.

Also über die Fetwas oder Fiq da schaue ich Internet nach, [die] Islamische Gemeinschaft hat Ihre eigene Website wo sie [...] Ihre Fragen und Antworten haben, [...] das kucke ich mir als erstes an, und dann kucke ich mir alle anderen Fetwas, die nicht die Islam-Gemeinschaft [...] ausgesprochen hat, sondern, [von Leuten die] in Saudi-Arabien gelernt [haben], oder ich weiß nicht wo.<sup>329</sup>

Emina has solved her confusion and the challenge of finding so much different information by comparing the things she finds with the Quran and the Sunnah, thus forming her own opinion:

I always asked myself how I managed to get out of the ocean of information needs to get that one I think it's kind of a good way, somehow I learned one thing and I found another opinion, the third, and it confused me, but I managed to find some right way, I would look what other people were watching, reading different opinions, and then [...], on the basis of some personal things and feelings, determined what they wanted, based on some evidence of the Quran and Sunnah.

Pitala sam se uvijek kako sam uspjela iz mora informacija da izvučem taj neki mislim da je donekle dobar put, nekako učila sam jedno pa nadam drugo mišljenje, treće, pa me to zbunjivalo, ali uspjela sam da nadam neki pravi put, pogledala bih sta su ostali ljudi gledali, čitala različita mišljenja, i onda [...] na osnovu nekih ličnih stvari i osjećala odredim sta hoću, na osnovu nekih dokaza Kur'an i Sunnet.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:47:04.6 - 00:47:48.9

<sup>329</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:19:12.9 - 00:19:48.1.

<sup>330</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:57:59.9 - 00:59:03.4.

For Amina, reading the Quran allows her to break through the noise of everything on the internet– though, as mentioned, she sees it directly as true and doesn't see it as contextual:

I mostly try to go to the origins. To books of Hadith and Quran, and I am trying to read as much as I can for my own. Because you have many things on the internet, as any other subject, not all of them are true, and I really need, you know, to know and dig deeper so I find what it is that the prophet said.<sup>331</sup>

For Leijla, the internet is also important, but mainly to find information from people she already knows, or who she can find information about:

So, I'm not in favour of following something if I do not know the person [posting it], their knowledge, their education, their biography for example. If I know their biography, [...] where they finished that school. If I know, and if I have already convinced myself of some of the things that they said, I was convinced that they are true, I follow such people because there are very many people who mislead and then I do not want to bring myself to some confusion.

Tako da nisam neki pristalica da ispitujem nešto tako da ako osobu ne znam, njeno znanje, njeno školovanje, njenu biografiju da kažem. Ako znam njenu biografiju [...] gdje je završio tu školu. Ako znam i ako sam se uvjerila već u neke stvari koje je on govorio, uvjerila se da su istinite, takve osobe slijedim jer je jako jako puno ljudi koji pogrešno upućuju i onda ne želim da samu sebe dovedem u neke nedoumice<sup>332</sup>

Following individuals rather than institutions is a common strategy. While the educational backgrounds do play a role in whether religious experts are seen as a person worth following or not, there are some popular preachers who are mentioned repeatedly. This includes people from Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as those from abroad.

Aida stands out in referring to scholars from the Faculty of Islamic Studies. It is important to note that one lecturer she refers to by name, Sulejman Bugari, was shortly thereafter moved to Podgorica, with rumours that he had become too popular amongst the young people and too controversial in his speeches.<sup>333</sup>

[At] the Faculty of Islamic Studies, so some people who are *hafizi*, who are learned people, hold lectures on various topics and what is great is their approach to it. I do not know if you've ever been to Sulejman Bugari's lecture perhaps?

Fakultetu islamskih nauka, znači neki ljudi koji su hafizi, koji su učeni ljudi, drže predavanja na razne teme i ono što je meni super jeste njihov pristup tome. Ne znam da li si bila ikad na predavanju Sulejmana Bugarija možda?<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:07.4 - 00:00:07.4

<sup>332</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:20:53.6 – 0:21:32.4.

<sup>333</sup> Fieldnotes, 28.8.2016.

<sup>334</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 0:26:5.6-0:26:38.0

Belma also refers to a specific religious expert whose Facebook she follows:

In Facebook I saw, there is this Muslim priest, the *hodža*, who works here in Sarajevo, in Breka, in a mosque, and he posts interesting texts on his Facebook [His name is] Muhammed Velić.

Im Facebook habe ich schon gesehen, es gibt diesen Muslimischen Pfarrer, den Hodscha, der arbeitet hier in Sarajevo, in Breka, in einer Moschee, und er postet interessante Texte, auf seinem Facebook. [Er heisst] Muhammed Velić.<sup>335</sup>

Emina outlines how she chooses whom to follow:

I am thankful to God because I recognised what was right, God always guided me, but I did encounter a lot of different lots of kinds of specific situations. As soon as I feel some negativity, I do not know. I followed those who are recognised in Sarajevo, who are active in Islamic communities, as soon as I see some of their interpretations as incorrect, I avoid them.

Zahvalna sam bogu jer sam prepoznala pravo, uvijek me Bog vodio, ali obično sam nailazila na svašta. Čim osjetim neku negativnost, ne znam.. Pratila sam koji su priznati u Sarajevu, koji su aktivni u islamskim zajednicama, čim mislim da je nešto neispravno ja izbjegnem to.<sup>336</sup>

As well as choosing some local experts to follow, mainly via the internet, global preachers also play a role. The one that was mentioned repeatedly by name is Nouman Ali Khan.

Emina says she doesn't follow people who are necessarily accredited by Bosnian institutions, but rather those that have popular appeal:

I am following people who follow the broad masses, the people who are safe, who are the imams, who are known, like Nouman Ali Khan.

Između glavnom pratim ljude koje prati šira masa, ljudi koji su sigurni, koji su imami, koji znaju, kao Nouman Ali Khan.<sup>337</sup>

Amira, who describes herself as having a 'strong base' of religious knowledge, also sometimes listens to Nouman Ali Khan.<sup>338</sup>

So, once they are older and particularly beyond practical questions, the women I spoke to described how they would pick and choose who they follow and thus actively position themselves in what conversations they listen to. Along with following lectures online and navigating different websites, reading books is an important source of religious understanding. This will be looked at in the next section, before examining reading the Quran.

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<sup>335</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 01:34:59.7 - 01:37:18.7.

<sup>336</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:30:28.4 - 00:31:17.8.

<sup>337</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:31:17.9 - 00:31:48.7.

<sup>338</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:45:25.4 - 00:45:59.7.

### 5.3.3 Consulting books

While the internet is important, published books are seen as more serious and reputable sources of knowledge. Amina emphasises the how important it is to read books to form one's own interpretation, saying that people who can't form their own opinion are also not able to differentiate between customs and religion:

[Some people] know the basics, they believe that there is God, but they just don't know the rules, they don't read about Islam or anything, they just know through hearsay. They just know what they hear on TV, people tell them what they hear on TV, they are not really into exploring the religion, reading books and stuff [...] they don't know how to pray, they don't know the rules, what is good and what is bad, you know, they don't have their opinions.<sup>339</sup>

So, she puts the difference in behaviour down to the lack of knowledge rather than any choice. She also emphasises how knowledge from books helps to form opinions and to make ethical decisions.

Emina also talks about what she finds in books:

I began to look for the meaning of life, then I read a lot, listened to lecturers on the internet and then I thought, I felt that I could not function, I needed some goal, I found calmness in my faith and in that sense of life.

Počela sam tražiti smisao života, tad sam puno čitala, slušala predavače na internetu i onda sam razmišljala, osjetila sam da ne mogu da funkcionišem, trebao mi je neki cilj, nalazila sam smiraj samo u vjeri i u tom nekom smislu života.<sup>340</sup>

Lejila has a number of influences, including hearing lectures from people more educated in Islam. But she prefers to read up on it.

Reading more and listening more to these lectures and more conversations with some people who are more educated, to say more Islamic, somehow, they have those spheres that fascinated me, but first of all, I think it was that I always loved reading to calm myself down. So, I really like when someone says something to me to prove it, so that I can convince myself, that I know that I read it. Because it is much better for me to say that I read something than that I heard something.

I čitanja više i više slušanja znači tih predavanja i više razgovora sa nekim ljudima koji su da kažem više škole imaju, više su obrazovani, da kažem više su islamski, nekako imaju te sfere koje su mene zadivile ali prvenstveno mislim da je to bilo moje samo ubjeđenje kroz, volim dosta da čitam da bi sama sebe smirila. Znači, jako volim kad mi neko nešto kaže da ja to pronađem, da ja se s tim uvjerim, tačno da znam da ja sam to pročitala. Jer je po meni je jako bolje kad kažem da sam nešto pročitala nego nešto čula.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:12.4 - 00:00:12.6.

<sup>340</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:50:52.9 - 00:51:28.3.

<sup>341</sup> Interview, Lejila, 24.1.2017, 0:26:33.3 - 0:26:33.0.

She elaborates on that:

Well, primarily from books. Other things are from more learned people, so people who have PhDs in certain areas, whether Hadith, Tefsir, Akaid, or other Islamic sciences, so they are a lot more schooled than me. Of course, [...] I listen to people who cite their sources. And who give it to you, give you information on where you can look if you do not trust that person about those words, then you take it and check it out. So, most are books, the Quran, other books and people who are PhDs, or I do not know, even more.

Pa prvenstveno iz knjiga. Druge stvari jesu od učenijih ljudi, znači ljudi koji su doktori nauka iz određenih oblasti, bilo to Hadisa, Tefsira, Akaida ili drugih islamskih znanosti koji su završili znači puno puno više škole od mene. Naravno [...] slušam ljude koji navedu dokaze odakle su nešto preuzeli. I to ti daje, daje ti jednu informaciju gdje možeš da provjeriš ako sam ne vjeruješ tom čovjeku na te riječi, onda uzmeš i provjeriš. Tako da većina jesu knjige, Kur'an, druge knjige i osobe koje su doktori nauka ili ne znam, čak i više nešto.<sup>342</sup>

Amina talks about the places she acquired religious books:

So, I bought it in Sarajevo, I never came back from Sarajevo without books, I went to the Belgrade fair where there were publishers from Novi Pazar and I bought Islamic books and everything...I read so much.

Pa to sam kupovala u Sarajevu, nikad se nisam vraćala iz Sarajeva bez knjiga, išla sam i na sajam u Beogradu gdje budu izdavači iz Novog Pazara i tu sam kupovala, islamske knjige i sve...bas sam puno čitala.<sup>343</sup>

This also shows again the importance of Sarajevo as a reference point for south-Slavic speaking Muslims to get information and other religious guidance.

Arnesa, when talking about her coming to Islam, references reading as a key component of becoming Muslim. Here she is referring to coming home after a spiritual experience at the mosque for the first time:

When [the prayer] ended, that night I did not sleep. I sat down and read, read, read, I devoted myself more to reading about Islam and faith, and so I entered [into religion]. In fact, no one forced me, but I just had a moment in my life when I became aware, well, how small you are when you just develop yourself and don't lean on the one that created you.

Onda kad je sve to završilo, tu noć nisam ja spavala ja sam sjela i čitala, čitala, čitala, više sam se posvetila čitanju o Islamu i vjeri i tako sam ušla. U biti to nije bilo ono mene su forsirali nego mi se jednostavno desio trenutak u životu kad si sam postao svjestan pa halo, koliko si mali i da se ti uzdižeš i ne oslanjaš na nekoga ko te stvorio.<sup>344</sup>

Reading is key as self-directed, individual exploration. It fits thus very well to the individualised religion focused on choice. Amina also talks about the importance of studying, particularly for women, but how men obstruct that:

[Islam is] giving [women] the opportunity to express themselves, to have equal position in marriage, in society, and to be paid equally, to have the

<sup>342</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:29:26.5 - 0:20:33.1.

<sup>343</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:32:23.6 - 00:32:54.8.

<sup>344</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:48:13.4 - 00:48:36.3.

same access to things as men. [...] I am really sad to say that Muslim men don't [follow] that part of Islam, and they don't educate women, they try to haul them away from the books so they won't know their rights, and they are controlling them through fear of God, and that is not something that Islam promotes, and I am really sorry that that part of Islam is really neglected, because women have those rights.<sup>345</sup>

So, in her interpretation, men hinder women with regards to the true interpretation of Islam that is feminist and protects women's rights. She also sees reading books as key in finding own views.

For non-IZ experts, Meliha makes sure to check their background and also prefers to doublecheck in a book:

When I look for something in the Internet I always have to remember the author, and if I can't find him it is not relevant for me at all, and if I find the author then I look for his biography, usually that exists in the internet, but the best is if I can look it up in a book somewhere that has, how should I say, been published.

Wenn ich im Internet irgendetwas suche muss ich mir immer den Autor merken, und wenn ich ihn nicht finde ist es für mich überhaupt nicht relevant, und wenn ich den Autor finde dann suche ich seine Biographie, meistens gibt's die im Internet, aber am besten ist es wenn ich so noch irgendwo nachschlagen kann in einem Buch was, wie soll ich sagen, rausgekommen ist.<sup>346</sup>

Books thus work together with information found on the internet and learned people to provide information on the way that Islam should be practised, particularly for questions that are seen as too complex for family to answer. As the book that is key to Islam, the next section will outline how reading the Quran forms both a practice and a source of knowledge for the field I analyse.

## 6 Ethics and being a '*dobar čovjek*'

The women in my sample reiterated frequently how 'good behaviour' is more important than explicitly religious acts, and how what makes a person a good Muslim also makes them a good person – a *dobar čovjek*. There was also a thread of continuously affirming that it is impossible to know another person's religious experience from the outside. This is connected to their faith being described as distinct from, and an antidote to, current ethno-political uses of religion.

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<sup>345</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 1:40:10.0 - 1:42:00.1.

<sup>346</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:20:48.5 - 00:21:10.7.

While religious practice was generally seen as positive, there was also a strongly negative view of when it is overtly demonstrative. The difference in how practices are seen – as being done with the wrong motivation or reflecting an inner faith – is in the performance. The same act, done with declaration to the outside audience, is seen as less genuine than if performed discreetly.

In this sense, there is an overlap in my subjects' feelings regarding performative practice and in how Andreja Mesarič describes her interlocutors positioning themselves vis-à-vis 'Muslims by name'; however, the women in my sample seem to encompass a wider range of practice than those studied by Mesarič.<sup>347</sup> Mesarič focuses on women at the more pious end of the spectrum of religious practice. Zora Kostadinova, in her research in Sarajevo focusing on Sufis, comes to *adab* as key, which she described as 'correctly living faith' leading to 'improved everyday relationships, and harmony in the everyday with the other'.<sup>348</sup> Olivier Roy finds the focus on individual choice and ethics as something specific to Western Muslims.<sup>349</sup> So the assessment of Roy does not hold with regards to the analysis of Mesarič and Kostadinova, whose results are reproduced in my findings, as the following quotes show.

As first example, Arnesa picks out the advantages of practising, and how important it is not to perform:

There is nothing inside, but they have learnt it, don't do it that way and that is it. [...] All this alcohol, fasting [for] Ramadan, performing the five daily prayers, [...] the Quran is a guide to people. The same way that you get the computer's instructions on how to use it, so people get guidance on how to use themselves, so how do you set yourself up in life. These [practices], [...] are just means to help you come closer to dear Allah. If you fast during Ramadan to tell others, 'I am fasting today', that's the problem. [...] Islam means teaching, obedience, and that should be the meaning.

Nema je unutra nego njega su naučili, nemoj to tako i gotovo. [...] i sve ovo alkohol, postiti Ramazan, klanjati pet dnevnih namaza, [...] Kur'an je znači uputa ljudima. Isto kako dobiješ za kompjuter upute kako se koristi, tako su ljudi dobili upustvo kako da sami sebe koriste, znači kako da ti se postaviš u životu. Te stvari, [...], to su samo sredstva da tebi pomognu da se približiš dragom Allahu. Ako ti postiš Ramazan da bi ti rekao drugima, 'Ja postim danas', to je problem. [...] Islam znači predavanje, pokornost, i to treba da bude smisao.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Mesarič, "'Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 586.

<sup>348</sup> Kostadinova, 78-80.

<sup>349</sup> Roy, 181-193..

<sup>350</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:04:09.4 - 01:05:58.1.

She mentions specific practices here that can be done either for an audience or with an internal motivation. I found this to be a widespread view, within which there were several key points. Firstly, there was the idea that it is impossible to see into others' souls to know their beliefs and motivation. Secondly, using religion for political or other outside ends is not good, and, thirdly, the most relevant issue to being a 'good person' is how people act beyond performing religious duties.

The pious women I spoke to also distinguished themselves from wider society. As they perceived it, in Sarajevo in general and among the less religious, performance is more important than one's internal attitude.

Hasna explains this phenomenon as follows:

Religion shouldn't be about the way [it] look[s]; it is about the way you live and the way you think...people actually think there is more to the way you look than the way you are actually thinking and doing things.<sup>351</sup>

Thus, these women distinguish themselves from traditional ways of practising Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina and see the relevance in the ethics rather than the dogma of being Muslim. This is similar to, though somewhat distinct from, what Olivier Roy has observed for Muslims in Western Europe. Though he also stresses what a large role values play, he sees faith as the most important aspect and also links it to fundamentalism.<sup>352</sup>

Aida places emphasis upon how little outward appearance matters:

So, somebody can be a good Muslim without these, let's say, physical indicators that they are a Muslim, if it can be called that, in both men and women.

Znači neko može biti dobar musliman a da nema tih, hajmo reći, fizičkih pokazatelja da je musliman ako se to može tako nazvati, i kod muškarca i kod žene.<sup>353</sup>

This also is a call to not judge people by their outside appearance, whereas the way she formulates it indicates that she is referring to hijab and possibly beard as markers. Hijab for women and a specific type of beard for men are the typical ways that adherence can be shown on the outside. This shows that the appearance, for many, becomes part of the practice. This is in marked difference to how Nilüfer Göle characterises social etiquette and 'good

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<sup>351</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 01:00:42.7 - 01:00:57.8

<sup>352</sup> Roy, 181.

<sup>353</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 00:19:51.2 - 00:20:05.6.

manners' for the European Muslims she studies, where beard and veil are key, along with practice to 'make faith manifest in the community'.<sup>354</sup>

In the next section, I will explore the prevalent idea that acting well is good, and key to being a good Muslim. Then I will look more into the importance of the idea that it is impossible to know others' faith. Finally, I will bring together examples of how it is seen as negative when there is excessive performative demonstration of practice. There is some tension between the value of not judging others because of the impossibility of seeing into their soul and of nonetheless viewing some behaviour as 'bad', especially when it is too performative, and other types of behaviour as 'good'. I will start with the latter.

### 6.1 Acting well is good

The same points about behaviour come up again and again as a central part of having faith, of being a 'real Muslim'. These are distinct from religious practice. What it means to behave well is generally described as being kind, generous, and following the law, for example, not being corrupt. Olivier Roy finds patience, self-restraint, soft speaking, compassion, and modesty as the key values for (fundamentalist) Muslims, mainly in the West, that he studies.<sup>355</sup> Thus, there is a similarity in terms of placing ethics rather than dogma at the centre of what being a good Muslim means, but what these ethics are differs. In Sarajevo, this behaviour often comes up in contrast to behaviour which is seen as not good, with the caveat that it is impossible to know what is going on in people's hearts and souls.

These ethical ideals fit in broadly with the societal values present in Bosnia-Herzegovina more generally of being a 'good person' – '*pravi*' or '*dobar čovjek*'.<sup>356</sup> This moral category includes aspects like not being corrupt, being friendly, and being truthful. While it is seen as separate from formal religious practice, there is some connection. Those that present as more religious through their practice – be it prayer or covering their hair – are also expected to behave in a way that is morally sound. This implicitly and sometimes explicitly

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<sup>354</sup> Göle, 215.

<sup>355</sup> Roy, 191.

<sup>356</sup> For a more detailed analysis see the forthcoming (2022) publication of Marko Barišić focusing on Catholics in central Bosnia-Herzegovina.

covers a range of qualities and behaviour that is not codified through religious provision.

During my fieldwork, several people commented that I was also a 'real Muslim', a 'proper Muslim' or 'actually a Muslim'. This is clearly meant as a compliment and was received as such; furthermore, it demonstrates the extent to which behaviour, rather than ethnic or familial background, counted in my informants' eyes.<sup>357</sup>

Sigrid Nökel noticed something similar for Germany, where there is also not so much a focus on going to mosque a lot, but rather in bringing Islamic principles into everyday life, forming an ethical whole. However, she analyses this mainly as bringing different areas of life in line with Islamic principles.<sup>358</sup> Synnøve K.N. Bendixsen refers to the 'crafting of religious self' and defines it as '[t]o craft oneself as a pious or Good Muslim implies a set of techniques of body-mind practices, norms and ideals through which distinctive Selves should gain a particular kind of agency'.<sup>359</sup>

This is a difference from how the women in my field narrated their ethics, who have less of a focus on specifically religious practices. Here are some ways in which my respondents spoke about 'being good'.

Ena makes a point against dividing people by religion and thus, in the local context, by ethnicity; this 'being good' is key to being a good Muslim:

The Quran always says be good to people, be good to people. Be good to [all] people, it doesn't say 'be good to Muslims'.<sup>360</sup>

Amina brings some examples of what being good encompasses for her:

What I would emphasise about my religion, is [...] to be nice to other people. First thing I [...] do on *bajram* [Ramadan] is visit my first neighbours [...] and [...] if someone needs to sit down in public transportation or something like that, I like to do that, so my religion is completely [an] approach to life, not just praying. It's [...] everything I do, every aspect.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> It feels uncomfortable posting this here, however I feel like it very clearly shows the distinction that is made between 'nominal Muslims' and what an imagined 'real Muslim' does.

<sup>358</sup> Nökel, 67.

<sup>359</sup> Bendixsen, 24.

<sup>360</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 1:53:06.7 – 1:57:09.3.

<sup>361</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00: 48: 00.2 - 00: 48: 31.1.

This is also the approach that Mesarič, referring to Roy, describes from her research, and she identifies this approach to life and religion as typical for Islamic revivalist movements.<sup>362</sup>

Frenky says that it is negative when people practise in some form but their behaviour doesn't match. She repeatedly emphasised that what was really important to religiosity is something beyond visible practice, even to the extent that she says this may be universal, across religions.

So that exists here that teens are really doing that, praying [...], that men are going to the mosque and stuff like that, but then you are, and sorry to say it like that, but a real asshole, that, somehow, does not go together, [I] reckon. [I expect from people of] whatever religion, that they are somehow so calm that they have an aura [around them], I can't describe it in words, but I have met such people, of any religion, who are somehow so peaceful.

Also das gibt es hier, dass Jugendliche das wirklich sehr machen, sie beten... dass Männer sie gehen halt in die Moschee und solche Sachen aber dann kommst Du und bist, entschuldige bitte den Ausdruck, aber ein wahres Arschloch, dass geht irgendwie nicht nicht miteinander, meine [ich]. [Ich erwarte von Leuten] welche[r] Religion auch immer, dass sie irgendwie so ruhig drauf sind, dass sie eine Aura von sich [geben], das kann ich nicht mit Worten beschreiben, aber ich hab solche Leute getroffen, jeglicher Religion, die sind irgendwie so peaceful.<sup>363</sup>

So, for her, real faith is something that is visible on the outside, but not through explicitly Muslim behaviour like going to mosque, but rather through being a good person and in possession of some sort of charisma. Although this is ranked as more important, she still expects from covered and other explicitly religious people that they behave 'well'. She repeatedly separated the practice on the one hand, particularly fasting and regularly going to the mosque, which she associated with performance, in contrast to 'good' behaviour in everyday life.

Aida talks about it like this:

But it is important, in the end, to be a good person, a good human, and to make an effort to create the best story out of your life, to say so. So, I can say that I feel that I belong to the community in the most normal way, not only as a Muslim, let's say in that Muslim frame within which I am present, but generally as a citizen of the state and beyond.

Ali bitno je u koncu svega biti dobra osoba, dobar čovjek, i truditi se da od svog života napraviš što bolju priču, da tako to stavim. Tako da mogu reći da se osjećam da najnormalnije pripadam zajednici, ne samo kao musliman hajmo reći u tom muslimanskom okviru u kojem se krećem, nego generalno kao stanovnik države pa i

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<sup>362</sup> Mesarič, "Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 586-587.

<sup>363</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 00: 56: 53.4 - 00: 57: 30.4.

šire.<sup>364</sup>

She further explores theologically this aspect of different religions:

Sometimes, even more important is how we deal with people [...] and I think that regardless of religion, if a person is indeed religious, if he follows the postulates that the faith sets forth, he would have no problems in the world. I mean, nowhere it is written, even we Muslims claim that, despite being Muslim, that God created more religions, so people would encounter one another, to explore, to socialise, to learn about these differences, and He said something like: when Judgement Day comes, I will inform you of the things in which you have disagreed. So, it's just given that way. If God wanted everyone to be Muslim, or to be all Christians, that would be very easy, no?

Nekad čak je bitnije način kako se ophodimo prema ljudima, [...], i ja mislim da bez obzira koja je religija u pitanju, ako je čovjek religiozan zaista, ako se drži postulata koje mu vjera nalaže da ne bi imao nikakvih problema na svijetu. Mislim nigdje ne piše, evo i mi muslimani stvarno to tvrdimo bez obzira što smo muslimani, da je Bog dao više religija da bi ljudi jedni drugima prilazili, da bi istraživali da bi se družili, učili o tim različitostima i On je rekao kao: kada dođe sudnji dan, obavijestiću vas o stvarima u kojima ste se razilazili. Znači jednostavno to i jeste dato tako. Da je Bog htio da svi budu muslimani, ili da svi budu kršćani to bi vrlo lako bilo moguće, je li?<sup>365</sup>

Aida's ruminations reveal the heart of what Islam, for her, is 'really about' in contrast to the show, the things that are being performed. Frenky stresses that this is not something specifically Bosnian or implicitly, specifically Muslim:

What I have seen then, in different people, [this aura] I expect that from religious people. That they somehow know what life means [...] that you do not say somehow, 'yes, I'm religious', [...] and then you do something that does not fit, but I think [...] that there are such people all over the world, I do not think that's a typical Bosnian thing.

Das was ich dann gesehen habe bei unterschiedlichen Menschen [diese Aura] erwarte ich das von religiösen Menschen. Dass sie irgendwie wissen was leben [...] dass Du nicht irgendwie sagst ja ich bin religiös, [...], und dann machst Du irgendwas was nicht damit zusammenpasst, aber ich denke [...] dass es so auf der ganzen Welt solche Menschen gibt, ich denke jetzt nicht dass das etwas typisch bosnisches ist.<sup>366</sup>

Arnesa also talks about contrasting prayer and good behaviour more generally:

What is important is, there are people, I tell you, there are people who declare themselves to be Muslims, there are different categories, those who consider themselves Muslim, pray and everything, 'I am a Muslim and Selam Alejkum', but by their actions they don't show it. It is not just faith – I pray five times a day and I worship Allah, but there is a lot [more to it]; a Muslim is a social person, he should, through his actions, behaviour and treatment of other people, show that he is a Muslim. For you, when you see the Muslim, he shines with beauty. On the other hand, you have people [claiming] 'I am a Muslim, I am this, I am that' but then they do not follow rules [and regulations], and then there is no result [of the claim].

<sup>364</sup>Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 00:21:33.0 - 00:22:03.8.

<sup>365</sup>Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 00:00:59.75 - 00:00:00.75

<sup>366</sup>Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 00:57:54.8 - 00:58:34.1.

To što je važno, ima ljudi, sad vam kažem, ima ljudi koji se izjašnjavaju kao muslimani, ima različitih kategorija, ima onih koji sebe smatraju, klanjaju sve, 'Ja sam musliman i Selam Alejk', ali svojim djelima ne pokazuje to. Nije samo vjera - ja klanjam pet namaza dnevno i ja se klanjam Allahu, nego ima puno...Musliman je socijalna osoba, on treba da svojim djelima, ponašanjem, ophođenjem s drugim ljudima, sve to treba da pokaže da je Musliman. Jer vi kad vidite muslimana, on sija ljepotom. Dok s druge strane imate ljude 'Jesam musliman, jesam ovo, ono' al ne radi po propisima i onda nema rezultata u tome.<sup>367</sup>

So, there is a certain missionary aspect, of portraying Islam in a positive way to make it attractive to others. And, although she speaks about behaviour that is not just religious, she also, somewhat conversely, speaks about following the rules.

Hasna talks about how her perception has changed over time with regards to the importance of regular prayer:

When I miss [a prayer] I am not feeling as bad as I maybe would a few years ago, because I can see it is not the point literally, praying it is the practical part but actually living your life the way you would when you are praying [is relevant].<sup>368</sup>

She continues:

I mean being as modest as you can, [as] honest as you can, [...] and actually doing good things. [...] I tend to spend my time in community service, I mean, as much as I can, so I actually don't feel bad for my missed prayers. I can do it any time.<sup>369</sup>

She clearly separates contribution to the community from the more formal religious practice of prayer, and interprets the service to the greater good as more valuable than the required practice. So, even though regular prayer acts as a marker of being a believer, for Hasna the actions that show she is a good Muslim are more generally positive, such as serving the community.

Arnesa makes the explicit distinction between 'Muslims by name' and those behaving according to Muslim principles. She also makes a connection to the war.

Someone is born with that name and they call themselves Muslim because of the name, and that is the worst. Because I know many more people, who [...] don't have Muslim names, don't call themselves Muslim but live Islamic principles much more than someone that has a Muslim name. So, it's more a matter of people not understanding, the war was how it was, on an ethnic basis, and it does not have to [...] [be that way]. Probably a lot of people associate it, name and surname, she is a Muslim, but nevertheless a man should give his actions, that is really

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<sup>367</sup>Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00: 15: 19.9 - 00: 16: 01.0.

<sup>368</sup>Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:42:48.4 - 00:43:08.3.

<sup>369</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:43:11.2 - 00:44:00.8.

faith.

To se neko rodio s takvim imenom i on sebe zbog imena proziva muslimanom, a to je najgore. Jer ja znam puno više ljudi koji, [...]nemaju muslimanska imena, ne prozivaju se muslimanima, ali puno više žive principe Islama nego neko ko ima muslimansko ime. Tako da je to više stvar što ljudi ne razumijevaju, što je rat bio takav kakav je bio, na etničkoj osnovi, i ne treba uopšte [...]. Vjerovatno puno ljudi to povezuje, ime i prezime, ona je muslimanka, ali ipak čovjek treba dati svoja djela, to je vjera.<sup>370</sup>

There also is an element of presenting Islam as an attractive option to the outside, to people that are not yet Muslim in the sense of being practitioners. And she links the good behaviour to showing real faith, faith thus not being an internal feeling removed from the world but manifest in actions. Being a good person also had an element of being a missionary, both towards people from a Muslim background and others, as Leijla says:

I somehow feel better when I am around such religious people, but on the other hand there is a positive side when I am not, then I try to present the faith to the person that is not [religious] in the most beautiful way possible [...] in order to make them interested in investigating that faith by themselves.

Nekako ja se bolje osjećam kad sam u krugu tako religioznih ljudi ali s druge strane ima pozitivna strana kada nisam, onda pokušavam na najljepši mogući način da predstavim tu vjeru toj osobi koja nije. Da bi pobliže je privukla svojim načinom ophođenja, svojim gestovima, da bi je zainteresovala da sama istražuje tu vjeru.<sup>371</sup>

Leijla then brings this notion right back to the Prophet Muhammed and thus gives the most direct theological explanation of the importance of 'being good' when talking about how she raises her son:

The Holy Prophet, who was to say the best man by many manners, which today's culture proves, the mere treatment of/behaviour towards other people, other faiths, neighbours, friends, relatives...up to, I don't know, spheres where we should help others, and such things. I raise him through that [concept], and again [...] through the prism of faith.

Poslanika savs., koji je bio da kažem najbolji čovjek po mnogim manirima koje dokazuje i kultura sada znači i ophođenje, samo ophođenje prema drugim ljudima, drugim vjerama, komšijama, prijateljima, rodbini do, ne znam, sfera gdje treba drugima pomagati i tako te stvari. Odgajam ga kroz to, uz to opet kažem kroz prizmu vjere.<sup>372</sup>

For her, being a Muslim means the best possible in all areas of life:

So, as I present my faith, you, as someone, you or someone else when you look at the faith should see me as schooled, and cultured, educated, and the best mother, and the best housewife, wife, colleague, neighbour, and everything. This means that one sees in me what Islam is.

Znači, ono kako ja predstavim vjeru, ti kao neko, ti ili neko drugi kad po smatra vjeru treba da vidi u meni, i školovanu, i kulturnu, i obrazovanu, i najbolju majku, i najbolju domaćicu, suprugu, kolegicu, komšinicu i sve. Znači da u meni vidi ono što je Islam.<sup>373</sup>

<sup>370</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:07:30.3 - 00:07:50.6.

<sup>371</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:21:32.4 – 0:22:17.3.

<sup>372</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:13: 51.6 – 0:15:09.2.

<sup>373</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:22:37.0 – 0:22:59.2.

Presenting herself as both visibly Muslim and excellent in different spheres is a way of promoting Islam as attractive. Amina is also explicit in her wish to spread her faith, though she talks about the values rather than the more formalised religious practice:

If you are showing yourself to the outside world as a Muslim, someone will approach and take your religion. And it is a main thought in all religions to spread the word and to gather as many members as possible. I really believe that Islam is the right religion, but I would really like to spread those aspects of humanity, being kind to your neighbours, spreading the knowledge, spreading the kindness instead of, you know, pushing someone with a greeting or a beard.<sup>374</sup>

These quotes made me think quite a lot about my positionality in the field, as in how I was being addressed as someone that has shown interest in Islam and should be shown a positive side. As a scholar in religious studies, I don't see my role in questioning what my interview partners 'really' believe, but it does leave me with a strange feeling in my stomach, wondering if people were being friendly to me out of wanting to convert me.

Amina also talks about good behaviour specifically directed at people that come from a Muslim background and don't practise:

Because I strongly believe that I need to be an example of my religion to make people like it, because of my own inner beliefs and practices, [...] so someone would approach [me] and be interested in my religion. I have come to the conclusion that if you are doing it violently somehow, not strong violence but trying to rub [the nose of people into religion], particularly if they moved away from your religion [and] they are trying to move back, and they somehow feel bad, because they are not practising, so [if you push it] you get people to block [you] out, and to hate religion.<sup>375</sup>

Belma also sees the importance of not just behaving well because religion demands it, but inherently, that this is a positive thing:

This 'learn, learn, and learn', that really makes sense for me, even if there is no life after this one, I think that can't be bad (laughs). The universe really, that the universe really grows when we think positively. When we don't behave positively because we expect a reward for it, but because it is some inner desire of ours because something happens because of it, that means that we do something good for the world.

Dieses „Lernen lernen und lernen“ das hat für mich schon Sinn, auch wenn kein Leben nach diesem existiert, ich denke das kann nicht schlecht sein (lacht). Das Universum wirklich, dass das Universum wirklich wächst, wenn wir positiv denken. Wenn wir aus dem Grund wirklich positiv handeln, wenn wir nicht positiv handeln, weil wir eine

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<sup>374</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 0:29:28.9 - 0:34:58.7.

<sup>375</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 0:09:20.6-0:12:44.4

Belohnung dafür erwarten, sondern weil es ein innerer Bedarf von uns ist weil dadurch irgendwas passiert, dass heisst weil wir dadurch der Welt etwas Gutes tun.<sup>376</sup>

Several points have become clear. Being a 'good person' was seen as more relevant for being a good Muslim than strictly following practice. For some, this even went so far as to suggest that people can be good Muslims who are not, formally, Muslims. There is also a missionary element in that showing good behaviour is assumed to attract people to Islam that are either not Muslims or not practising Muslims. Next, I will explore the idea that the inner workings of someone's soul is impossible to see.

## 6.2 The impossibility of seeing another person's faith

A point that is iterated over and over again is that it is impossible to see other peoples' faith. So, even while denouncing showiness and what is perceived as inauthenticity, it was important to respondents to declare that they could not actually know, from observation, the nature of someone's relationship to God.<sup>377</sup> Included in this is an amount of looking inwards, of emphasising the personal rather than the practice. However, it is crucial to note that, paradoxically, judgement does come into this again through decrying the performance itself.

Amina talks about the importance of not judging others like this:

I like that old sense of religion, [...] I like that spiritual and accepting other people, that kind of religion that just grows autonomy, so I like that you shouldn't judge other people for their beliefs, you should accept people, you need to be more focused on your religion and your own inner self-growth, [...] it is animal somehow, being competitive.<sup>378</sup>

The negative view of showiness is linked here to being less developed, not even quite human. On the other hand, she also describes this inward-focused and accepting style as 'old', though it is highly unlikely she is referring to traditional practice, as she is very negative of that in other contexts.

Elma also makes it specific that the frequency and type of practice shouldn't be judged:

I don't know how to say it in German, you shouldn't [...] judge anyone. Just because you go to the mosque more often doesn't mean you are a better

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<sup>376</sup>Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 02:04:44.0 - 02:05:42.3.

<sup>377</sup> This is also noted for Berlin by: Bendixsen, 161/162.

<sup>378</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 0:18:26.8 – 0:22:36.8.

human than someone that doesn't go to mosque at all, the way you practise is also often a topic, [...] when the Wahabis come into the mosque, the normies don't like that at all, [...] they practise prayer differently.

[...] ich weiß nicht wie man das auch Deutsch sagt, don't judge someone [...] Ja, urteilen, [...] es muss nicht heißen, wenn Du öfter in die Moschee gehst das Du ein besserer Mensch bist als jemand der überhaupt gar nicht in die Moschee geht [...] die Art wie man es praktiziert ist auch richtig oft ein Thema, [...] wenn die Wehabias in die Moschee kommen, die Normalos also die mögen das überhaupt gar nicht, [...] die praktizieren das Beten anders.<sup>379</sup>

Here it is very clear again that Elma is against judging how other people practise both in regard to being less intense, as symbolised by the frequency, and more intense, as is the case for Wahabis. Though her focus is again on the acceptance of divergence from the 'norm'. This is particularly interesting because the value of 'being normal' is very important to Elma; she mentions it frequently. What 'being normal' encompasses for Muslim believers in Sarajevo would be a very interesting topic for further research, which cannot be explored in detail here.

Alma also talks about prayer:

I think it should be private thing, you know. I cannot blame anyone because he doesn't pray, you know. It is between him and God, not between me and him, I don't have anything [to do] with that. So I think it should be private, really.<sup>380</sup>

Her focus is not so much on decrying people who are public in their practice, in this case prayer, but on noticing how other people practise. So even if someone does perform in public, as it is a private issue, this should not be the basis for judgement. The onus is on the person noticing, and potentially judging, what exactly another person's practice entails, rather than those being public about it.

Arnesa places an emphasis on personal choice, and also about how it is not up to outside people to judge.

Even though he has the right to choose, when someone makes a mistake [...] his soul will eventually repent. So, I do not need to be the person who will judge him for something, so where such topics are concerned, we either don't comment or I just shortly say 'It's not right, but do what you want' and such things.

I pored toga što ima pravo izbora, kad neko se ogriješi, [...] duša njemu će se sama na kraju pokajat' za to. Tako da ja ne trebam biti osoba koja će njega osudit' za nešto, tako da kad su takve teme u pitanju to ili ne komentarišemo, ili samo kratko kažem 'Nije ti to baš uredu ali radi šta hoćeš' i takve stvari.<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:31:51.2 - 01:33:02.0.

<sup>380</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.207, 00:30:20.9 - 00:30:40.5.

<sup>381</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:04:32.3 - 00:04:51.4.

Elma also sees the discrepancy between how she sees it, the provocation of outwardly-directed performance of religious acts and how God would see into the inside motivations. Through pointing out the futility, she indirectly criticised their behaviour.

Because I know that there are people who [say Salam Aleikum] only out of provocation, so just because maybe someone is not religious, or maybe a different nationality, [...] just because they think they are better Muslims than others [...], although actually only God knows ... because of that, nobody can say that, actually someone can be a better person[...] who is not at all in the religion, only good as a person can actually be a lot better than you, who might go to the mosque every day, [...] so I just do not understand why people do that [...], if they think something bad in the heart. So, the [thoughts] that can't be kept secret, in the sense of God, because God actually knows what is in your heart. And you can do whatever you want, he knows what you think you and what you feel.

Weil ich weiß eigentlich das es Menschen gibt die [...] nur aus Provokation [Selam Aleikum sagen], also nur weil vielleicht jemand nicht religiös ist, oder vielleicht eine andere Nationalität, das hängt auch davon ab, oder...nur einfach weil die denken dass sie bessere Muslime sind als die anderen, also es gibt auch solche Menschen, obwohl das eigentlich nur der Gott weiß..deswegen, das kann niemand sagen, es kann auch jemand ein besserer Mensch sein, [...] der überhaupt gar nicht in der Religion ist, der nur als Mensch gut ist, kann auch eigentlich viel besser sein als Du, der vielleicht jeden Tag in die Moschee geht, [...] ich verstehe einfach nicht warum Menschen das machen, [...] wenn sie im Herzen etwas Schlimmes denken. Also die [Gedanken] das kann man nicht geheim halten, im Sinne von Gott, denn Gott weiß eigentlich was in Deinem Herzen ist. Und Du kannst machen was immer Du willst, er weiß was Du denkst Du und was Du fühlst.<sup>382</sup>

There is some ambivalence here, about on the one hand seeing a value in not judging, and on the other seeing behaviour as important. Two values that are held as important are in tension.

Arnesa talks about the relationship to what is expressed and what the true meaning is in the following way:

The point is my feeling, the reason I fast. We practically do not talk about it, we do not talk about the other, 'Haha, he does not fast', but it is quite the opposite, if someone fasts, then yes, do praise him, at least that what I do.

Poenta je mog osjećaja, razlog zbog kojeg ja postim. Praktično ne pričamo o tome, ne ogovaramo druge 'Haha on ne posti' već je baš suprotno, ako neko posti pohvali ga se, bar je u mom slučaju tako.<sup>383</sup>

So, she mentions the importance of encouraging behaviour that is in accordance to Muslim rules, but not to mocking someone who diverges.

Emina talks about assessing people based on their acts and aura rather than outside markers:

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<sup>382</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:31:51.2 - 01:33:02.0.

<sup>383</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:11:05.2 - 00:11:19.3.

Well, I do not divide people by their secondary identities, but rather based on their aura, when they radiate what they really are, their primary identity, what they are without nationality, according to their thoughts and deeds, I feel somehow with every person when I get to know their aura, I immediately like or dislike them, regardless of their religion. Pa ja uglavnom ljude ne dijelim po sekundarnim identitetima, više nekako onako njegovu auru, čime on zrači, kakav je on stvarno, njegov primarni identitet, ono što je on bez nacionalnosti, prema njegovim mislima i djelima, nekako osjetim, kad svakog čovjeka upoznam osjetim njegovu auru pa mi se on odmah sviđa ili ne sviđa, bez obzira na njegovu religiju.<sup>384</sup>

These examples demonstrate that it is seen as negative to judge people on their behaviour, although some informants are also full of judgement for people they perceive as judging others, which should also be seen as not so good. While judging others for their behaviour is seen as undesirable, the counterpart, being overly demonstrative with practice, is also seen as something to be frowned upon.

### 6.3 Negative perception of demonstrative practice

In different parts of society in Sarajevo, there is a narrative thread that actually those people who above all others demonstrate to the outside how religious they are, are somehow less authentic. This is seen as particularly negative if they seem to be using it for political gain or other prestige. There is some inherent tension between how on the one hand there shouldn't be judgement from the outside and on the other, only the outside actions can be perceived on the outside.

One realm where this demonstrating to the outside can take place is on social media, which is very public. Overall, there seems to be quite a negative view of posting religious content on Facebook, Instagram, and other online platforms. This goes for those that are religiously educated and for others amongst my interview partners as well. It is perceived as performative and not necessary or reflective of 'true' feelings. This could also be connected to the value of seeing religion as private, with the internet being a public space.

For example, Meliha, who has a lot of formal education when it comes to religion, says:

Mostly the people who are not very involved in religion, they feel the need to post religious stuff, in my opinion.

Meistens die Leute die mit der Religion nicht viel zu tun haben, sie haben das Bedürfnis zu religiöse Sachen zu posten, meiner Meinung nach.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:05:23.1 - 00:06:13.3.

<sup>385</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:22:49.0 - 00:22:58.1.

Frenky, who herself doesn't practise regularly and drinks alcohol and so on, is also against the being very expressive about religion on social media.

[If you post] for example, a picture of mosques or a quote from the Bible or the Quran [on Facebook], I do not like it at all. I mean, if you are religious then you should be so for yourself, and not the whole that you are really religious, that this is on Facebook that you are really religious, and that is also questionable, that is really common here and I don't like that at all.

[Wenn Du] beispielsweise ein Bild von Moscheen oder ein Zitat von der Bibel oder dem Koran [auf Facebook postest], das gefällt mir überhaupt nicht. Ich meine wenn Du religiös bist dann sollst Du das für Dich sein, und nicht [...], dass das auf Facebook ist dass Du wirklich religiös bist, dass das auch ja fraglich, dass ist hier wirklich üblich und das gefällt mir überhaupt nicht.<sup>386</sup>

All of this suggests that there are complicated relationships with practice, behaviour and thought in terms of faith and in terms of humanity or being a good person.

While talking about religious practice overtly or being performative in the practice is seen as negative, it is seen as particularly negative when it is done for a specific goal. The connection here is that between politics and religion.

This is judged harshly, as can be seen in the following quotes.

Hasna refers to politics, religion and economic gain:

There [has] always [...] been a connection between nationality and religion, [...] Orthodox with Serbs and Catholics for Croats and Muslims as Bosniak, [...] you can't really separate those things [...] because in this region people are making most of their living and most of their money based on religion and nationality.<sup>387</sup>

Arnesa criticises the how political parties that are making reference to Islam spread a negative image of the religion:

There is, [...] a party that is quite extremist in terms of Islam, considered to be a Muslim party, and then people who are in contact with that party are promoting Islam, faith, we pray, we say Selam Aleikum, although in the end their actions do not show that they are, and now the third person who sees it all considers Islam as something that Islam is not. So, in essence it is all the connection of a man with God.

I zbog takvih slučajeva je to Selam alejk postalo...još ima i druga stvar, mi imamo i političku stranu, imamo stranke neke, između ostalog ima jedna stranka koja je poprilično ekstremistička u smislu Islama, kao smatra se muslimanskom strankom, i onda ljudi koji su u dodiru s tom strankom potenciraju Islam, vjera, mi klanjamo, mi govorimo Selam alejk, iako opet na kraju krajeva njihova djela ne pokazuju da su to oni i sad treća osoba koja to sve gleda smatra Islam nečim što Islam nije. Tako da je u biti to sve veza čovjeka s Bogom.<sup>388</sup>

<sup>386</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 00: 55: 07.4 - 00: 55: 33.2.

<sup>387</sup> Interview, Nejra, 3.1.2017, 00:26:38.1 - 00:27:05.4.

<sup>388</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:16:01.6 - 00:16:40.3.

Here, also, there is the concern that the politicisation of religion has wider implications. Because of the gap between the performance of religion and the actual behaviour as a good person, Arnesa is afraid. She fears that people who are not practising will connect the negative behaviour to being Muslim and thus will receive a bad image of Islam.

Elma mentions a specific party when talking about how religion and nationalism are entwined:

I would never vote for the SDA, I do not like them at all, I do not like that they take and influence religion and nationality [...] and that they brainwash people so most people that are [...] in the SDA or vote for them, they don't have anything, but no, you have to be a Bosnian, nationality is the most important thing, but whether you have bread or food or what that does not matter, but it is important for me that you are a real Bosnian. And I do not like that, I think that's not nice.

SDA würd ich nie wählen, die mag ich überhaupt nicht, ich mag das nicht das sie die Religion und die Nationalität in diesem Sinne nehmen und beeinflussen, und das sie die Menschen so brainwaschen, die meisten Menschen die da sind, da die in SDA sind oder sie wählen, können, haben gar nichts, aber nein, man muss ein Bosnier sein, die Nationalität das ist das wichtigste, aber ob Du Brot oder Essen hast oder was das macht nichts, aber es ist wichtig für mich das Du ein richtiger Bosnier bist. Und das mag ich gar nicht, ich denk das ist nicht schön.<sup>389</sup>

She continues:

I think that is one, one of the worst things for us, is for the further development of the country, [...], there are people that are fasting each day of Ramadan, and also go to pray on *bajram* because they are seen, and then these are also the right aggressive backers of the ethnic group of Muslims, but [these same people] would also like to normally drink quite a lot of alcohol when no one sees it. So, it all depends on who sees them, whether they can sell themselves well [...], but when it comes to commenting on Facebook or anything that is negative for others then they are the first, so 'we Muslims ...' and so on, 'we are the best here', but [whoever says that] is quite far away from the best in this sense, so I do not like that.

Ich denke dass das eine, eine der schlimmsten Sachen für uns ist, für die Weiterentwicklung der, also des Landes, weil die Menschen eigentlich mehr...umm...also, die versuchen irgendwie, wie soll ich das sagen, es gibt Menschen die irgendwie jeden Tag von Ramadan fasten, und auch zum Beten, auch wenn Bajram ist gehen, weil sie gesehen werden, und dann sind auch diese Menschen, die richtigen aggressiven Verteidiger der ethnischen Gruppe der Muslime aber würden auch gerne ganz normal richtig viel Alkohol trinken wenn sie niemand sieht. Also es hängt alles davon ab wer sie sieht, ob sie sich gut verkaufen können [...] aber wenn es darum geht [...] auf Facebook oder irgendwas zu kommentieren was negativ für andere sind dann sind sie die ersten, also "wir Muslime.." und so, " wir sind die Besten hier" aber der ist ganz ganz weg vom Besten in diesem Sinne, also das mag ich nicht.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00: 54: 15.3 - 00: 55: 25.4.

<sup>390</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:55:34.0 – 0:58:42.1.

For her the demonstrativeness is not just negative in a religious sense, but she also sees it as negative for the country. In her view, nationalism distracts people from economic and social problems and focuses energy on issues that are not really central. For her, those that are very overt about their practice behave in the way they do due to nationalist ideas and for political and economic gain.

Elma also sees a type of performance in where people choose to sit during jummah, as this is filmed:

This elite Islamic group, or these families, [...] I think that's what you see most when jummah is because that's being filmed, [...] you know who comes in the first row, who comes in the second row and who are all the other people, so the normies, and you just have to be seen.

Diese elitisch-e islamische Gruppe, oder diese Familien, [...] ich denke dass man das am meisten sieht wenn Jummah ist, weil das gefilmt wird, also meistens wird das gefilmt, weiß man wer in die erste Reihe kommt, wer in die zweite Reihe kommt und wer all die anderen Menschen sind, also die Normalos, und man muss einfach gesehen [werden].<sup>391</sup>

From all this it is clear that for my interlocutors, the private-public divide is crucial. Religiosity is honest if it is not really seen. Yet, it is only through behaviour that ethics can be determined, which creates a paradox. Because only the behaviour can be seen, and it is viewed as negative to judge people by observables, there is a tension in seeing others and not knowing their motivation.

While the overt display of practice, particularly for political or gain, is seen as negative, practice of course plays a large role in the religious life and identity formation. As was outlined above, starting to practise is seen as linked to the start of being a believer, and when talking about the family, practice is used as a signifier for religiosity. This is why the next chapter will discuss some aspects of practice, including reading the Quran, consumption and prayer.

## 7 Muslim practice in everyday life

When speaking to my interlocutors about what it means to be Muslim, there was a clear focus on having faith and behaving in a good way, as outlined above. However, more obviously, religious practices were also important for one's positioning as Muslim. However, there was some weariness around religious practice that is performed overtly or for political gain, as outlined

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<sup>391</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01: 35: 22.6 - 01: 36: 28.5.

above. A topic that came up again and again was that of the importance that the practice be private, personal, between God and the practitioner, and not public or for show. The private, personal nature of this relationship with God also came up with regards to my informants' families, as in not being able to know if family members really have faith. A distinction was made between religious practice that was done outwardly and being a good person in all areas of life. Choosing to practise from inner motivation, not outside pressure, was also a dominant theme.

Indeed, one common thread throughout my interviews was that being a good person, *dobar čovjek*, and one's inner state (e.g., being good 'on the inside') are important. However, when the women I interviewed were asked if their family was religious or about their development with regards to Islam, it was often prayer, or sometimes fasting, that was used overwhelmingly as a marker of the family member's religiosity. So, in these the narratives, both personal and familial, demonstrative practice takes centre stage and belief doesn't play such a big role. Often when talking about others, there was an emphasis on the impossibility of knowing their internal processes. And when talking about themselves, it was not infrequent for my informants to speak about some sort of epiphany moment. Still, practice was seen as a marker of being Muslim, likely because it is precisely this that is visible on the outside. Indeed, when narrating their personal religious development, the women often talked in detail about the beginning point of different forms of practice, such as beginning to fast during Ramadan or go to mosque.

This chapter starts with where and how my informants gained the religious knowledge that later influenced their practice. These were reading the Quran, fasting, food restrictions, abstention from alcohol, and prayer.

Of the Five Pillars of Islam, only praying and fasting are discussed here in detail. The others, performing *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca), giving alms (*zakat*), and the profession of one's faith were not narrated as key by the women I spoke to for my study. Indeed, Amina was the only one of my interlocutors who even mentioned the Five Pillars. She listed them as follows:

There are five things that you have to do in Islam to be Muslim: one is to identify self though alleging that Allah is your God and Muhammed is your prophet, the second thing is praying, third is fasting, *hajj*, giving

*zakat*, [...] those things are [...] are the pillars [for] you to call yourself a Muslim.<sup>392</sup>

Praying and fasting came up as relevant and self-declaration as Muslim was mentioned rarely, whereas the *hajj* and giving *zakat* weren't discussed much. This is possibly because travelling to Mecca is not something that is easily available, particularly for younger women, and paying the religious tax (*zakat*) is something that is done without changing behaviour significantly.

When talking about practice, it was again critical for the women I spoke to that there is some personal choice. Interestingly, this generally didn't lead to critical engagement in the sense of questioning or wanting to change certain types of practice but rather determined whether certain practices were taken on at all and in which form.

Similarly to what studies have shown for Muslims in Western Europe, high value was generally placed on the personal decision to practise in a certain way.<sup>393</sup> This was particularly strong regarding wearing hijab, which is explored in more detail in the section focused on that, but the value of personal choice also applies to other forms of practice. Amina contrasts this current mode with how things 'used to be':

[People used to say] you shouldn't stand out, so everyone would pray, everyone would fast Ramadan; now, people decide for themselves. So, I think people who are coming into religion and decide to wear hijab or beard or whatever, it is their own decision. Unlike the old times when everyone had to present themselves [in a certain way], my grandfather liked to drink alcohol, but his father, my great grandfather, didn't know about it. [My grandfather] was, like, doing it secretly.<sup>394</sup>

She thus also sees an advantage in the contemporary approach of having agency and making one's own decisions, the choice to practise rather than conforming to societal pressure or convention.

Data on practice is hard to come by. In his study on secularism, Dino Abazović concluded that while almost 83 per cent of Bosnian Muslims self-identify as religious, the percentage of practitioners is less.<sup>395</sup> Those who five times a day

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<sup>392</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:13.8 - 00:00:13.9.

<sup>393</sup> For example: Nökel. Bendixsen; Göle.

<sup>394</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:13.9 - 00:00:14.0.

<sup>395</sup> Abazović, 127.

or at least daily reach only a third of this number, while the percentage of those fasting for the entire period of Ramadan is slightly higher.<sup>396</sup>

During my fieldwork, I also received estimates from different experts and other interview partners on the percentage of practitioners of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina. While this is only anecdotal, it consistently hovered around twenty per cent of 'ethnic Muslims' being practitioners. However, on what grounds this division into 'practising' and 'not practising' was done was not clearly defined and likely varies between people.

When asked about how religion featured in a typical week, the question didn't make sense to many of my interview partners, as their faith permeates day-to-day life and influences many different aspects in an ongoing way. Seen in this way, thus, 'practice' cannot properly be delineated. For example, Meliha says:

I think a person with faith can't measure religion and say it features three times in a week. When you see that you have five prayers [...] praying, fasting, washing before prayer [...], thinking about God and everything you see around you. You could say [religion features] twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Ich glaube ein gläubiger Mensch kann jetzt nicht die Religion messen und sagen in der Woche kommt die Religion dreimal vor. Wenn man sieht dass man fünf Gebete hat, Beten, Fasten, und das Waschen vor dem Beten, das Nachdenken über Gott über alles was man um sich sieht. Man könnte sagen 24 Stunden, sieben Tage die Woche.<sup>397</sup>

Amina also talks about washing, and how the religious rules influence what she does:

Praying, reading the Quran, [...] washing yourself when you go to toilet, [...], the ritual is something when you wash yourself, when you bathe yourself, and you need to wash yourself after intercourse, and sometimes that influences if you have intercourse, if you don't have time to wash, to bathe yourself after that, that is how religion is part of my life.<sup>398</sup>

Still, there are some practices that are seen as primary markers, particularly in difference to those parts of the population that are seen as cultural Muslims. These also serve to position one as Muslim in everyday life, and there are certain activities that are more clearly denoted as religious than others.

While there was a range amongst the women I spoke to regarding *how* frequently or detailed certain practices should be performed in order to be seen as a

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<sup>396</sup> Abazović determined that 31.4 per cent of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina pray five times a day or daily, while 38.7 per cent fast for all of Ramadan. *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>397</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:24:51.8 - 01:25:22.0.

<sup>398</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 2:06:50.0 - 2:11:14.9.

practitioner, *what* these key practices are remained fairly consistent: prayer and fasting. For example, Frenky talks about a relative of hers like this:

My mother had an aunt; she was religious, she didn't have a headscarf, but she prayed five times a day, she fasted, all sorts of things. And you could really talk to her.

Meine Mutter hatte eine Tante, die war religiös, sie hatte kein Kopftuch, aber sie hat fünf Mal täglich gebetet, hat gefastet, alles Mögliche. Und mir Ihr konnte man wirklich reden.<sup>399</sup>

She also talks about her family as, 'there are maybe five people that really pray five times a day, that also fast for Ramadan and that' ('da sind vielleicht fünf Menschen die wirklich fünf mal beten, die auch Ramadan fasten und so').<sup>400</sup> Similarly, when Alma talked about increasing religiosity, these are the indicators she uses: 'People are starting to fast, to pray'.<sup>401</sup> Clearly, fasting and praying are the main indicators of practice. Fasting, however, can be seen as more ambiguous than regular prayer, as quite a few people abstain from food or alcohol during Ramadan, or for a portion of Ramadan, without practising the rest of the year. Fasting can either make one seem steadfastly religious, especially if they fast regularly, or it can make people seem of like a 'Ramadan only' sort of Muslim, or anything in between. Thus, fasting per se can not be linked to any particular type of religious practice. As will be outlined below, for those that consider themselves practising, there is a focus on also including other spiritual practices in this time, such as reading the Quran or praying more. With regard to food, the main rule followed in Bosnia-Herzegovina is not eating pork. As this is also the case for many traditional Muslims, it becomes mainly relevant when travelling, as there are plentiful halal options in Sarajevo, but not necessarily in other parts of the country or abroad.

The whole complex around wearing hijab will be treated separately. Reading the Quran is also included in this chapter on practice because, although it doesn't have the same normative value as an indicator of religiosity, it is mentioned frequently as both a practice and a source of religious knowledge.

The role of religious rules was viewed positively by my informants overall, although they also acknowledged that it is important that one not suffer for not following them exactly. As was the case with practice in general, it was crucial that one not perform following rules simply for the outside, but rather in order to

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<sup>399</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015 00:13:33.5 - 00:13:45.6.

<sup>400</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 00:00:29.6 - 00:00:36.4.

<sup>401</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 0:29:40.6 - 0:29:52.2.

come closer to God. As mentioned on the section on what being a Muslim means, one's intention and non-performativity is key here. When speaking about whether their family was religious, the main indicators my informants used were also visible aspects like practising, perhaps logically, as faith cannot be seen from the outside.

Another important point to mention around practice is how it is dependent on time and place. Many women acknowledge the located-ness in a particular context with regards to practice; for example, Amira says, 'The society in which you are living, and the culture in which you are living, they are much impacting the way you are practising your Islam as well'.<sup>402</sup>

Ena talks about her journey from a literal interpretation to adopting one that is more compatible with her life:

When I started learning about Islam for me, it was 'you have to pray five times a day' [...] I [myself] was again literal, [...] you don't drink and you don't eat pork [...] But I realised at some point that I cannot be that strict. For a Muslim in twenty-first century there is a saying that to be religious would be like holding [glowing coal].<sup>403</sup>

As well as the time (twenty-first century) and place (Bosnia-Herzegovina) Elma also acknowledges differences based on class, political party and specific location:

It also depends on what party you belong to, what they practice, what community you belong to, and there are simply those layers [...] that are really different varieties of what you think what is right and what [...] is wrong, this elite-y Islamic group, or these families, that can also have [...] an effect on it as it is. Es hängt auch davon ab zu welcher Partei Du gehörst, was die praktizieren, zu welcher Gemeinde Du gehörst, und es gibt einfach [...] diese Layers [...] verschiedene also wirklich einfach Varietäten davon was man denkt was richtig und was falsch ist, [...] diese elitisch-e islamische Gruppe, oder diese Familien, das kann auch [...] ein Effekt darauf haben also wie es ist.<sup>404</sup>

Along with acknowledging that there is some range for interpretation, there also is some concern about practising correctly. For Frenky, this worry is a reason she does not feel ready to become, as she calls it, really religious:

I am not *too* young, I understand everything, but in the sense... I always say I have time for that later, when I have been through a lot, and also made mistakes, and in my opinion, if you are religious, like, really religious, then you can't make mistakes. I mean, you make mistakes, everyone makes mistakes, but some mistakes you shouldn't leave like that, and I don't want

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<sup>402</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:22:38.0 - 00:22:52.9.

<sup>403</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 2:29:09.7-2:32:17.1

<sup>404</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:35:22.6 - 01:36:28.5.

to do anything wrong, and if I did it now, I would want to do it correctly, and I think I couldn't do it correctly now.

Ich bin nicht zu jung, ich verstehe ja alles, aber im Sinne dass...ich sag immer ich hab Zeit dafür, irgendwann später, wenn ich vieles durchgemacht habe, und auch Fehler gemacht habe, und meiner Meinung nach, wenn Du religiös bist, also wirklich religiös bist, kannst Du keine Fehler machen. Also man macht Fehler, jeder macht Fehler, einige Fehler sollten Du nicht so lassen, und ich möchte nichts falsch machen, und wenn ich das machen würde, würde ich es richtig machen wollen, und ich denke nicht dass ich es jetzt richtig machen könnte.<sup>405</sup>

On the other hand, Amira, who is covered and went to a *madrassa*, is more forgiving of people not fulfilling all their religious obligations:

Yeah, but I am telling you, you can't really, like, you do whatever you can from your side, you have the intention, but then if it happens, it happens. I mean, you can't, you're not going to die because of that. But you know, some other people, they make huge issue out of that.<sup>406</sup>

For her, the internal approach is more relevant than the actual performance, and judging others is not appropriate.

Overall, while there is an emphasis placed on inner faith and general good behaviour, practice also is an important marker of religiosity. As the last section showed, young Muslim women in Sarajevo see practice as somewhat dependant on context. They also tend to all see prayer and fasting as practice's primary activities. Before exploring reading the Quran, consumption patterns, and prayer, the following section examines where my interlocutors actually obtained their religious knowledge.

### 7.1 Reading Quran for guidance, spiritual nourishment, and devotion

Reading the Quran is a central part of Muslim practice. Like praying or fasting, reading the Quran can be a practice of religious affirmation, often in Arabic. On the other hand, the Quran can also be a source of more concrete guidance on specific questions or overall correct/moral behaviour. Its use is thus both an active positioning as Muslim and the most important source of theological information. Some young Muslim women in Sarajevo read the content, some look for specific answers, and others are more interested in reciting the Arabic text without understanding it.

In my sample, there was a diversity of opinion on whether the Quran is – as is the doctrine – directly transmitted, or rather also a text which has human

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<sup>405</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 00:46:57.9 - 00:47:30.9.

<sup>406</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 01:01:03.6 - 01:01:23.5.

influences. There also is a difference in if it is seen as timeless or rather as situated within a certain time period. The following quotes demonstrate this range of opinion amongst my informants. Amina sees the Quran, in the form it is available, as for all people, independent of time and place:

Islam is brought for whole civilisation until the end of times. So [the] Quran is the latest book, the most perfect book, and it is meant for everyone. [The] Torah and other books are sent by Allah but only for that period of time and the culture they were given to. So, we respect those books, and somewhere [sic] we don't acknowledge [the] Bible because we believe it has been tampered [with], over time, so we don't think that many of those things are for this time.<sup>407</sup>

Belma was the only person in my sample who very clearly viewed the Quran as a product of its time:

In sixteen centuries something changes with a text in a time where there wasn't any book printing [...] and how the book was disseminated, though oral tradition that included [...] some parts [...] [that] were added [...] by people, that means I can't believe that it appeared in the same way that we read it now, in the time without book printing. And I think the same with the bible. In 16 Jahrhunderten da ändert sich was mit dem Text in der Zeit in der es keinen Buchdruck gab, und [...] wie das Buch verbreitet wurde, durch mündliche Tradition, das bezieht [...] das mit ein, dass auch Abschnitte [...] von Leuten [...] dazu...gesetzt wurden, das heisst ich kann es nicht glauben dass es in der Form in der wir es jetzt zu lesen kriegen, das es in der Form irgendwie vor 1600 Jahren erschienen ist, in der Zeit ohne Buchdruck. Und dasselbe glaube ich mit der Bibel<sup>408</sup>

Belma also diverts from mainstream interpretations in other ways. She says she has seen the Quran mainly in bits on social media.<sup>409</sup> When asked if she has ever read it systematically, she responds:

No, not at all systematically. But I also think, as I say, that because Quran is plagiarised, then it can't be systematic. So, if one were to do it [read the Quran systematically], it would have to be clear what parts of it. There are certainly parts that are not plagiarised, but there are very many parts in the Quran that are plagiarism. Nein, überhaupt nicht systematisch. Aber ich denke auch irgendwie, weil ich sage Koran ist Plagiat, das kann nicht systematisch sein, also, wenn man es müsste erst einmal klar sein, was davon, es gibt bestimmt Stücke die nicht plagiiert sind, aber es gibt sehr viele Stücke im Koran, die Plagiat sind.<sup>410</sup>

Amina, on the other hand, does see the Quran (and the hadith) as historically correct and disregards here the issues of translation and contextualisation.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:04.6- 00:00:04.7.

<sup>408</sup> Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, 01:11:24.6 - 01:12:42.

<sup>409</sup> Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, : 01:10:08.5 - 01:10:54.1

<sup>410</sup> Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, 01:10:08.5 - 01:11:19.5

<sup>411</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:07.4 - 00:00:07.5.

Emina uses the Quran as a basis for her interpretation of religion, to be independent of other peoples' views. She talks about reading the Quran and making her own opinions, because, in her words, 'I cannot be a literalist or formalist, my mind guides me, if I see that something is not reasonable, I ponder it myself' ('Ne mogu biti bukvalista ni formalista, taj razum me vodio, ako vidim da nešto nije razumno, sama sam razmišljala').<sup>412</sup>

So, she doesn't disregard see what is written in the Quran as contextual, but neither does she take it literally. As these examples show, when using the Quran as theological guidance, there is some variation in how much flexibility and personal interpretation is seen as permissible.

Another aspect to explore is how the Quran is engaged with, which includes looking for answers, reading it as a symbol of starting to practice, trying to see cultural influence, and finding spiritual nourishment.

A traditional practice is the finding of answers in the Quran randomly. Arnesa describes it such:

I know, from my mum, that I open the Quran and find answers myself there. If God exists, and I believe He exists, He knows that I have questions in my head and that I am looking for answers from him to this question. And so, I learn the Quran, I pray, I ask God that I arrive at the right answer and I always do.

Ne znam, od mame, a u biti otvorim Kur'an i tražim sama odgovor. Ako Bog postoji, a vjerujem da postoji On zna da imam pitanje iznad glave i onda za to pitanje od Njega tražim odgovor. I onda učim Kur'an, klanjam, molim Boga da dođem na pravi odgovor i uvijek i dođem.<sup>413</sup>

Ena also describes this finding of answers as an important step in her religious development:

The main book is Quran really in Islam. The moment when I started reading Quran in a way that I opened up to it. [...] In the beginning when you don't know about it, you read it like any other book and that's not the way to approach Quran. [...] I had some amazing experience[s], [and] at some point I realised that I can find any answer in the Quran. [...] I just opened up. It was during Ramadan, [...]. I just opened the Book and, [...] found the answer for something that happened to me that day, and after five days the same thing happened, after ten days the same thing happened. And then I realised, 'okay, this is it'. This is like, this is the way because it doesn't happen every time but [...] when I really ask, [...],

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<sup>412</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:58:41.7 - 00:59:20.4

<sup>413</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:31:35.1 - 00:31:55.6.

when I open it in a way that I really want to find the answer I get to find it because it's an instruction book for a Muslim on how to live.<sup>414</sup>

Starting to read the Quran can also be a key moment in the becoming Muslim in a religious sense. It is less so than fasting or prayer, but at least for Emina and Ena, it was highly relevant. As Emina says,

So I asked myself, Dear God, that I live my life and that I never opened your book. I never felt ready until now, I was young and thought of a million things, and, I don't know, lived some sort of freer life, I always tried to do no wrong, I had some internal navigator that God gave me. Ono pitala sam se: Bože dragi, da proživim život a da nikada nisam otvorila tu knjigu. Nisam se nekako još uvijek osjećala spremnom, bila sam mlada pa sam razmišljala o milion stvari, i onda tako ne znam vodila sam taj neki način života malo slobodniji, uvijek sam se trudila da ne griješim, i unutrašnji neki navigator sam imala koji mi je Bog dao.<sup>415</sup>

Ena speaks similarly of a moment in which began to practise:

I came home and read [the] Quran. I just googled Quran. [...] so it was Quran that I read, and when I read it, I was so angry, why nobody told me this stuff, why nobody told me that there is heaven and hell. I mean I read at that point, it made sense to me that there is good and evil, blah, blah, blah. So basically, that is how it started.<sup>416</sup>

It continues to be an important source of religious interpretation for most people. Frenky explicitly wants to read it not just in a religious sense but also to get an overview, likely for the cultural role it plays:

[I] also want to [read the Quran]; I have the great desire to somehow read it through, to see the connections [and] also the differences. We read a lot in the university from the Bible, from the Quran, and you see very beautiful things but somehow you have no time to read it [not only] from a religious point of view, but somehow as an overview, I would really like that, but I would somehow have to find the time.

[Ich] will [...] auch gerne [den Koran lesen], ich habe den großen Wunsch das irgendwie durch zu lesen, [dass man], die Zusammenhänge [und] auch die Unterschiede sieht, wir haben in der Uni irgendwie vieles gelesen was [...] aus der Bibel stammt, aus dem Koran stammt, und man sieht sehr Schönes aber man hat irgendwie keine Zeit es [nicht nur] aus religiöser Sicht, sondern irgendwie aus Übersicht zu lesen, einen solchen Wunsch habe ich, aber ich würde irgendwie die Zeit haben [müssen].<sup>417</sup>

Lejila also reads the Quran regularly and mentions the similarities to the Bible:

Well, what I think is positive is, I read the entire Bible, and I read the Quran constantly and the Tafsir of the Quran, that is, the interpretation of the Quran to say, the closer explanation of the Quranic verses. When we take the Bible, the comparison between the Bible and the Quran shows very many similarities.

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<sup>414</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 0:48:08.5 - 0:52:43.2

<sup>415</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:46:41.1 - 00:47:33.1

<sup>416</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 0:4:00.9-0:09:19.9

<sup>417</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9. 2015, 00:53:31.4 - 00:54:09.4

Pa ja ono što mislim da je pozitivno jeste, ja sam pročitala da kažem i Bibliju i znači čitam i Kur'an stalno i tevsir Kur'ana, to jeste tumačenje Kur'ana da kažem, poblize objašnjavanje Kur'anskih ajeta. Kad uzmemo Bibliju, poređenje Biblije i Kur'ana, ima jako jako puno zajedničkih strana.<sup>418</sup>

Both Frenky and Lejila, who are at opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to practice, thus point out the similarities between the Quran and the Bible. This could connect to the finding of Iva Lučić of how being Muslim in Bosnia-Herzegovina is closely tied to being in relation to Christians, namely Orthodox and Catholic.<sup>419</sup>

Ena also engages with the Quran's meaning:

Just hanging out with Quran, like just being, like reading, listening [...] that's what really purifies you. Really purifies you in a way that you have all the reminders, all the stories all the depths because Quran is like an ocean, you always discover some new stuff, and what purifies is the fasting.<sup>420</sup>

So, for her, reading and simply spending time ('just hanging out') with the Quran is also source of spiritual cleansing. Thus, this text is relevant both for the intellectual and the spiritual aspects of religiosity. However, in terms of over-performance, the aspect of demonstrating to the outside rather than actually doing on the inside, this discrepancy is also talked about with regard to the Quran. Being religious in public is seen as negative. It is mainly criticised via the performance of posting things on social media, such as when Arnesa says:

I think that [posting online] isn't it [...], what does it mean to put a 'like', someone posts an *ayat* and like it? You'd better spend that hour for which you spent searching the *ayat* sitting down and reading the Quran for real, rather than looking for a picture that will get a like, hey. That's how I see it and that is what I think.

Mislim, nije to...nema nikakvog smisla, šta znači staviti lajk, neko stavi ajet i staviš lajk? Bolje da si taj sat vremena dok si tražio taj ajet sjedio i čitao Kur'an stvarno, nego tražio sliku da staviš lajk, eto. Meni je to, ja to tako razmišljam.<sup>421</sup>

Frenky contrasts people who instruct others in a negative way on how they should practise with those who know the Quran. First, she says that she doesn't like people that tell others to grow a beard or wear hijab, and that she prefers those that have faith (*sind gläubig*) for themselves. She prefers talking to people

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<sup>418</sup> Interview, Lejila, 24.1.2017, 0:17:10.9-0:19:26.5.

<sup>419</sup> Lučić, 288.

<sup>420</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2017, 2:56:27.0-2:59:45.6.

<sup>421</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:39:45.8 - 00:40:04.8.

...who tell you, [...] that this and that is written in the Quran [...] that really know a lot, that do it for themselves, not to brainwash others. That really annoys me. That is the case here very often.

[die] erzählen, [...] im Koran steht das und das [...]. Die die sich wirklich damit auskennen, die das auch für sich machen, nicht für andere Brainwashen. Weil das nervt mich wirklich. Das ist sehr häufig hier der Fall.<sup>422</sup>

Knowledge of the Quran is an indicator of being a proper Muslim here, not just performing but believing.

For Emina, posting quotes on social media is not something she likes to see. However, she does value when a friend of hers, who understands Arabic, analyses the Quran:

At the moment, if I look at people, I prefer those who are versatile, where you recognise that he is religious, but there is not that much in terms of status. Unless it's something new, something I can't find anywhere, something interesting, for example I have a friend who does something that no one does and he, for example, translates something from Arabic, [and gives a] critical analysis of the Quran. And then yes, yes I'm happy with his posts because there are no such translations anywhere; he knows Arabic and he translates it, but now, some content that is available to everyone and that is copy/paste[ed], then it is not interesting. I don't like that.

Trenutno ako pogledam ljude, više volim one koji su svestrani, kod kojih prepoznaješ da je religiozan, ali nema to toliko po statusima. Osim ako nije baš nešto što je novo, što ne mogu naći nigdje, nešto zanimljivo, na primjer imam prijatelja koji nešto što ne radi niko i on na primjer prevodi s arapskog nešto, tu kritičku analizu Kur'ana i onda se ja obradujem tim njegovim objavama jer tih prevoda nema nigdje, zna arapski i on to prevede, ali sad neki sadržaj koji je svima dostupan i taj copy/paste onda to nije zanimljivo. To mi se ne sviđa.<sup>423</sup>

So, it seems that having a critical analysis does imply some level of interpretation.

Thus, knowledge of the Quran, and engaging with the meaning of it for one's theological development, is one way of interacting with the book that is deemed desirable.

Reading the Quran in Arabic, believed to be directly transmitted, is also a form of religious practice, independent of understanding. Vocalising the Arabic script is an important part of this. To learn how to recite the Quran, there are a number of *sufara* courses on offer in Sarajevo. I participated in one at Nahla.<sup>424</sup>

Alma talks about the process of recitation for her:

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<sup>422</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 0:12:11.1 - 0:12:15.3

<sup>423</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:36:53.5 - 00:37:54.1.

<sup>424</sup> CEI Nahla.

[I] know [Arabic] letters, I can read. Generally, I can read, for example, I can read from Quran on the Arabic, but I don't know [the translation], I don't know Arabic language.<sup>425</sup>

There is also the approach of doing both, reading in Arabic and understanding, through using a translation. Arnesa talks about how she tried to learn Arabic, also at Nahla, but she didn't get past being able to read.

I read for myself, the translation and in Arabic at the same time to follow. I mean, just reading in Arabic does not mean anything to me because I do not understand. But I'm reading to understand the translation.

I da, znam čitati arapski, to je ono za potrebe Kur'ana, i tako. [...] a u biti čitam radi sebe, prijevod i na arapskom istovremeno da pratim. Mislim, samo čitanje na arapskom mi ništa ne znači jer ne razumijem. Ali čitam da bi razumijela prijevod.<sup>426</sup>

Most of the women either have learnt some Arabic, or at least tried to, or are currently in the process of doing so. The teacher of the *sufara* course I participated in made the argument of, 'We all learn English to communicate to the world, why can't we learn Arabic to communicate with God?'.<sup>427</sup> The reading of the text without language skills is thus seen as a step on the way to a deeper understanding of Islam.

When talking about the content of the Quran, one *surah* is referred to more than any other. This is *surah* 96 *iqraa*, which is said to have been the first one that was revealed and starts with the command, 'Read'. The *surah* on learning is applied to all sorts of knowledge and skill acquisition. This is talked about all across the spectrum of intensity of practice and following, from Belma, who even eats pork sometimes, to Lejila, who wears a niqab.

Belma answers someone who asks about her being Muslim:

...what makes up my Islamic identity, and I told him, I think my Islamic identity begins and ends with the sentence, 'learn, learn, learn'. I think this sentence, I think it is the first sentence in the Quran, embodies my entire philosophy.

Was meine Islamische Identität so ausmacht, und ich hab ihm gesagt ich denke meine Islamische Identität beginnt und hört auf mit dem Satz 'lerne, lerne, lerne'. Ich denke der Satz, ich denke es ist der erste Satz im Koran, ist meine ganze Philosophie enthalten.<sup>428</sup>

And Lejila says, when talking about raising her son:

Because it is really important, it says in the Quran, amongst the first *ayats*, the first *ayat* that was revealed is 'Learn, read'. So, to say primarily

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<sup>425</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 0:05:05.3-0:05:18.4

<sup>426</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:17:36.7 - 00:18:40.5

<sup>427</sup> Fieldnotes, 28.3.2016.

<sup>428</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 01:06:21.2 - 01:06:45.9

to learn, read, study science, when I learn by myself and read by myself, I will come up with some things as they are, are they correct, are they not.

Jer je jako bitno, u Kur'anu se kaže, među prvim ajetima, prvi ajet koji je objavljen jeste „Uči, čitaj“. Znači prvenstveno da uči, čita, proučava nauku, kad uči sam i čita sam, sam će nadolaziti na neke stvari kako su, da li su ispravne, da li ne.<sup>429</sup>

They all see this reading and learning as reaching well beyond the religious domain. Amina elaborates on this:

[The] first thing that was brought by Angel Gabriel [...] to Muhammed was 'learn' [...] and 'read', so, [...], I can't imagine my life without exploring new knowledge. [...] I feel really uncomfortable when my day goes by without learning something new, trying something new, [...] I am like that in nature, but sometimes [...] I need to do that because my God asked me to school my knowledge, so I do all sorts of things, knitting, or learning languages, or watching [...] a video related to my profession or [something]. I can't imagine my day without improving myself, and sometimes I feel like I am praising God when I do that, that is my week. You can't just separate yourself that there are certain things you do because you have to do in religion, and it becomes your life. Everything you do, you do because you feel that is part of your life.<sup>430</sup>

This is one of the clarifications why what actually constitutes religious practice becomes impossible to untangle. As well as being a good person, a *dobar čovjek*, and generally showing respect, practice can also encompass learning to knit or getting dressed (as discussed below). Religious practice, thus, is a constant and ongoing part of life.

As had been outlined, the Quran can be integrated in several different ways into the life of young Muslim women in Sarajevo. This includes that regular reading is linked to the start of being a believer. However, being too showy about posting excerpts is perceived as negative. As well as engaging with the meaning, there are practices like reading in Arabic without understanding. Finally, there is a strong emphasis on the *surah* about learning. From nourishment for the mind (and soul) the next section looks at nourishment of the body, namely, what is eaten and drunk, and what particularly what is not.

## 7.2 Consumption patterns: fasting, food, and alcohol

After hijab, the most visible/public/demonstrable show of religiosity is probably around consumption-patterns, particularly fasting, not drinking alcohol, and not

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<sup>429</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:13:51.6 - 0:15:09.2.

<sup>430</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:16.3 - 00:00:16.6.

eating pork. As abstention from pork is mainstream amongst cultural Muslims in former Yugoslavia, it is not a strong marker of being practising or non-practising. Drinking alcohol, on the other hand, is quite common amongst cultural Muslims in the region, so abstaining from drinking does signify more of a pious position.

These consumption patterns are part of positioning around religiosity in the everyday. So, first, I will outline the ways in which others react to fasting, then how the practice is seen as cultural, and how Ramadan is a period of special spiritual significance. Then I will analyse some issues regarding food more generally and finally look at aspects around alcohol.

### 7.2.1 Ramadan as a cultural tradition and spiritual practice

The month of Ramadan is seen as a socially and spiritually special time in Sarajevo. The atmosphere in the city is changed, particularly at night, when the old town is packed with groups of families and friends socialising, eating, drinking, and walking around. For residents of the city and the surrounding area, it is a period to re-connect with friends, intensify or take up religious practice, and cleanse body, mind and spirit. It is also a particularly popular time for tourists, though this may change when Ramadan moves to the colder time of the year.

As the following section shows, the practice of Ramadan fulfils a number of different functions. It can be seen as a time to confirm one's identity in several ways. This goes for Muslims more broadly, for south Slavic adherents of Islam, and for families. There are also several roles in social interactions, with some taking up fasting as a way of 'coming out' as practising in some contexts. Additionally, this section will outline how various aspects are negotiated for those not fasting, such as if they should be considerate when eating during Ramadan or not. Then I will briefly talk about *bajram*, focusing on the holiday's significance for family cohesion. After briefly outlining the practice of not drinking alcohol during Ramadan, this section will then discuss how the balance of social and spiritual focus is addressed.

For different people living outside Sarajevo, the city becomes a *Sehnsuchtsort*, a place of yearning with a magnetic quality. A young, German hijabi I met at a

conference in Sarajevo was wide-eyed after a night-time walk through the throbbing streets and said, 'I feel so at home. It is amazing to be in Europe and be surrounded by other Muslims during Ramadan' ('Ich fühl mich so krass zu Hause. Es ist toll, hier irgendwie in Europa zu sein und andere Muslime um sich rum zu haben, also während Ramadan').<sup>431</sup>

Another encounter that really brought the importance of Ramadan in Sarajevo as an imagined centre for south-Slavic speaking Muslims into focus took place in the mountains in Montenegro, close to the border with Albania. Having gotten lost in the fog and rain, my hiking companion and I ended up being hosted by three generations of female shepherds in their very basic huts. Chatting over cornbread and cheese, the one approximately my age was moved when I told her I lived in Sarajevo. With a reverence usually heard when talking about global cities such as Istanbul or New York, she shared that a big dream in her life was to go to Sarajevo during Ramadan. The family listened to the radio transmission of the sermons on holidays and she had seen pictures of Begova, the central mosque, lit up at night.<sup>432</sup>

Ramadan also is a period of group-performance, where one's identity as Muslim is re-affirmed in a group. This is likely also a reason why many who don't practise the rest of the year do join in during *bajram*, or many also during Ramadan more generally.

Beliefs in the field around who fasts during Ramadan – and why – varied immensely. During Ramadan in my fieldwork in 2016, I also fasted for two days. Going with the phenomenological approach to qualitative research, I wanted to physically experience it and also saw it as part of participation.<sup>433</sup> The reactions I received demonstrated varied opinions regarding the intersections between identity, belief, and fasting. Many responses were positive, with people with whom I spoke about it generally seeing me as very committed to my research. Although many also saw it as me being willing to truly understand the field, others saw it as unnecessary if not connected to faith.

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<sup>431</sup> Fieldnotes 24.6.2016.

<sup>432</sup> Fieldnotes 28.8.2016.

<sup>433</sup> Eberle.

Additionally, there is some debate around the role fasting during Ramadan played with regards to ethnic and religious identity, particularly around the war in the nineties. While Aydin Babuna claims that the increased practice of Ramadan was seen as European, and because of the freedom of worship as 'associated with values of the West',<sup>434</sup> others disagree. According to Tone Bringa, one of the five points of why Ramadan sums up the role of 'practical Islam in Muslim identity formation' in Bosnia-Herzegovina is 'the expression of a distinctive Muslim *nacija* identity vis-à-vis other non-Muslim Bosnians'.<sup>435</sup> She analyses Ramadan as 'an individual statement of one's personal commitment (as a believer, *vjernik*) and an affirmation of Muslim unity and identity'.<sup>436</sup>

During my fieldwork, my interlocutors also had clear ideas about who in their circles fasted during the month of Ramadan, and what this practice means to them. Hasna notes that only certain members of her family practise:

I don't know why it is just women. I mean it is not ONLY women in my family, but mostly. [...] We are stronger than men so I, I mean it is in my family like that, just find some strength in faith or something. Maybe it is that.<sup>437</sup>

Hasna's experience is consistent with the work of Tone Bringa, who also noted that Ramadan is mainly practised by women in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>438</sup> However, apart from this quote of Hasna's, this tendency wasn't born out in my research, neither in the interviews nor in the wider fieldwork.

Rather, a dominant theme was that holidays and periods such as Ramadan are also important for family cohesion. On *bajram*, family, friends, and neighbours are visited, further weaving a social net. As visiting thus is performed in groups and in public, it is more useful to re-enforce the feeling of belonging and identity than other practices. The practice of Ramadan and the celebration of *bajram* at the end of the month is also an important family event. So, similarly to Christmas for many Western European cultural Christians, it is an event that structures the year, a time to connect. Many people participate and visit their family of origin who otherwise don't practise much, including many who do not

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<sup>434</sup> Babuna, 412.

<sup>435</sup> Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*, 169.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>437</sup> Interview, Hasna 3.1.2017, 00:12:58.0 - 00:14:00.4.

<sup>438</sup> Bringa: 165.

fast.

Elma talks about how Ramadan is an important time for the family to come together, even for those in her family that are not religious:

We have always had the tradition, in the family, [that] Ramadan somehow plays an important role in the sense of the family is together and I think that's how it always will be, [...] my sister is not religious at all, really not [and she always joins].

Wir [hatten] eigentlich [in der Familie] immer die Tradition, [dass] Ramadan irgendwie eine wichtige Rolle spielt [...] die Familie ist zusammen und ich denke das bleibt immer so, [...] meine Schwester ist überhaupt nicht religiös, also gar nicht [und die ist auch immer dabei]<sup>439</sup>

As outlined above with a focus on interacting with others, the personal commitment aspect of practice came out strongly in my research. The aspect of reaffirmation of 'Muslim unity and identity', on the other hand, was not so present. This dual role of group identity and personal faith likely also explains why fasting tended to be less important for personal faith for my informants than prayer or reading the Quran.

Social interactions also change during Ramadan in terms of both duration and content – as both the main social activity, having coffee, and others, like having a meal, are not possible during the day. The nights, however, are a social whirlwind for many, with *iftar* with different groups of friends or sections of the family followed by coffee, a visit to the mosque, walking around, and more. Some people I spoke with saw this as highly problematic, as they hold that the focus of Ramadan should be on spiritual cleansing, reading the Quran and similar, rather than fun with other people.<sup>440</sup>

Although Ramadan is seen as a special period, everyday life in Sarajevo does continue, in the sense that people go to work or university, exercise and so on. So, the act of not eating does become a way of positioning, a demonstration of practice in front of family or colleagues. As quite a lot of people fast who are otherwise not particularly observant, the social expectation is for those that are eating to take care not to eat in front of those fasting. At the same time, there is an expectation that it isn't a big issue to eat or not. The following quotes show this diversity. Hasna talks about the situation at university: 'Most of [the others] actually just don't pay attention, they just say they are sorry they are eating or

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<sup>439</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:31:55.0 - 00:32:31.6.

<sup>440</sup> Personal communication, 25.4. and 26.4.2020.

something.<sup>441</sup>

Frenky, who doesn't fast herself, explains why she doesn't eat around people who are fasting:

Even if they say they don't mind, and they shouldn't mind, but somehow out of respect or, I don't know, human kindness or whatever, you just don't eat in their presence.

Auch wenn sie sagen dass es sie nicht stört, es sollte sie auch nicht stören, aber irgendwie aus Respekt, aus keine Ahnung, Menschenliebe, was weiß ich, da isst Du in der Gegenwart lieber nicht.<sup>442</sup>

Elma sees the onus on those fasting, and describes the reaction of her colleagues thus 'I always tell them [at work] that it isn't a problem; I don't have an issue [if they eat].' [...] I have to function normally in day-to-day life. (,Ich sag denen immer [auf der Arbeit] das ist kein Problem, ich hab kein Problem damit [wenn sie essen]. [...] Ich muss normal funktionieren im Alltag,').<sup>443</sup>

In the interview with Amina, she was really very insistent on her practice being private, not even wanting people to know she is fasting, not wanting them to feel sorry for eating. She talks a lot about how fasting is private and she doesn't want to push it.<sup>444</sup> This could be connected to the socialist value about religion not being public, or the multi-religious view that everyone's interpretation should be respected. It also ties in to the importance of religion not being for show. To me, it does not seem like a very pushy thing to say if one is fasting, though it is also more public than other practices.

Fasting, as well as rejecting alcohol or pork, as outlined below, can be a conversation starter which also leads to exchange about religiosity more generally, as the following examples show. Aida says:

And then speaking to others, for example during this project, one year was Ramadan and of course I was fasting, all day, summer, long days, it was very warm and then they were surprised that I am suddenly fasting. Like, 'Are you a Muslim?' I said, 'I am Muslim'. 'So is it hard for you?' And then they began to ask different questions about religion, to be interested in both Ramadan and the customs that exist in our country.

I onda kroz priču, npr. u toku ovog jednog projekta, jedne godine je bio Ramazan i naravno ja sam postila, čitav dan, bilo je ljeto, dugi dani, jako toplo i onda su se oni začudili kako sad ja odjednom postim. Kao: Pa zar si ti muslimanka? Reko' jesam, muslimanka sam. Pa jel' ti teško? I onda su počeli da postavljaju razna pitanja i o religiji,

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<sup>441</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:03:33.0 - 00:04:00.8.

<sup>442</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 00:45:20.4 - 00:45:39.6.

<sup>443</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:13:24.4 - 00:14:11.4.

<sup>444</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 0:09:20.6-0:12:44.4.

da se interesuju i za sam Ramazan i za običaje koji postoje kod nas.<sup>445</sup>

Similarly, Elma spoke about how people at work know that she is practising:

Because I'm the only one who is fasting, [...] because sometimes I can't concentrate, we have a lot to do and I'm really, really, slow motion, for real. And actually, everyone knows that I am the only one of the girls. [...] at work ... and even though our boss said we, the ones fasting, can go home earlier, [...] but I don't accept that, we have so much to do, an hour earlier doesn't really make a difference.

[Ich bin eigentlich die] einzige [...] die fastet, [...] manchmal kann ich mich nicht konzentrieren, wir haben viel zu tun und ich bin dann richtig richtig, slow motion, echt. Und eigentlich wissen alle das ich die einzige bin, von den Mädchen. [...] auf der Arbeit.. und obwohl unser Chef gesagt hat das wir, die die fasten können früher nach Hause gehen, [...] aber ich akzeptiere das nicht, wir haben so viel zu tun, ist auch egal, eine Stunde vorher ist nicht so viel.<sup>446</sup>

She would have some exemption by her boss, who practises himself, to leave early, but she refuses the special treatment.

Arnela focuses on the importance of not judging others for adhering or not to Ramadan. Here it is not a conversation starter or something about coming out as practising, but more of an enforcement of personal choice.

So, it's on an individual basis, I decided to fast and I will not eat anything that day, but I also do not mind what others eat, I do not watch them at all. Because it is my feeling with God, and my relationship with God, I think that I don't mind what others eat, it's not the point.

Znači, nego je na individualnom osnovu, ja sam odlučila da postim i ja taj dan neću ništa jesti, ali isto tako ne smeta mi što drugi jedu, njih uopšte ne gledam. Jer to je osjećaj moj s Bogom, i moja veza s Bogom, mislim šta me boli briga svi da jedu, nije to poenta.<sup>447</sup>

For her, fasting is very much a private thing, as her practice and how she wants to relate to God, and it is important to her not to perform in front of others.

As with other practices, when talking about fasting during Ramadan, it is seen as very important to do it out of personal motivation. Belma, for example, says:

And that I fast when I fast only for myself, not because of the world, and so that others also have full integrity and have the right to do what they want.

Und das ich dann faste wenn ich faste das tue ich nur wegen mir, nicht wegen der Welt, und also dass die anderen Personen auch die volle Integrität haben und das Recht haben, zu tun was sie wollen.<sup>448</sup>

Amina even actively dislikes when people apologise or make extra efforts to accommodate her fasting:

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<sup>445</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 1:01:05.7-1:02:37.4.

<sup>446</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:12:26.6 - 00:13:16.3.

<sup>447</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:10:26.7 - 00:11:32.4.

<sup>448</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 01:09:15.0 - 01:09:33.8

I really hate that when people [apologise for eating]. Because it is my decision to do that, because if I would ever feel struggle with my fasting, I would stop. [...] I am doing it for my own purpose and own belief, and it is something so personal that I don't want anyone to feel offended or struggle with something that I have decided to do, so feel free to eat and drink, it is your own world and I would prefer if no-one knew about it, because it is so personal and private, that I would just like to say 'thank you, I don't want to eat now', not to push it on others, so that, they do that, but I really feel bad when they [do that], [...] that's my thing, do your own..(laughs).<sup>449</sup>

So, for Amina it is again the personal choice and freedom to practise or not that is central. She rejects other people's wishes to accommodate her and the need to explain herself. As fasting is forcibly public to a certain degree, for example at work or in front of friends, the women in my sample, who see displays of practice as negative, actively try to do it privately, bringing it back to a more personal experience. Arnela also focuses on this personal motivation and makes a contrast with a perceived difference to Arab countries.

In Arab countries, they are more devoted to rules. And most likely they are so much under the burden of different rules that they are to invested in following the rules, not the essence. While all of us are off the hook, and you yourself need to find that path. So, it is all up to you, no one will [judge] you, if you eat for Ramadan, it has nothing to do with it, the only point of faith is I am not eating, I do not eat for Ramadan. You can fast all day, it wouldn't count if you haven't done it in the right way, for the right reasons. Again, it falls on the individual.

U arapskim zemljama su oni više posvećeni pravilima. I vrlo vjerovatno su njima, oni su toliko pod teretom pravila različitih da su se previše pravilima posvetili, a ne samoj suštini. Dok kod nas je sve pušteno, kao s lanca, i ti sam sebi trebaš naći tu put. Znači sve ti je, neće te niko, ti ako jedeš za Ramazan, nema to nikakve veze, poenta sama vjere nije jedem, ne jedem za Ramazan. Ti možeš postiti cijeli dan da ti se taj post ne primi jer ga nisi radio na pravi način, iz pravog razloga. Opet se svodi na individualno.<sup>450</sup>

Individual choice for practice, rather than following the culturally predicated path or religious rules, is thus seen as the most desirable. Arnesa describes a possible conflict during Ramadan as that involving women who wear hijab eating, also pointing to the individual responsibility:

Only then do we have a conflict, if we have students, we socialise there, if it is Ramadan, some fast, some don't fast, there is nothing, I have not noticed, there is no conflict, why you do not fast, and so on, but there is only one [exception to this rule]: if the girl is covered, if she eats during Ramadan.

Jedino tad imamo konflikt, znači ako imamo studente, mi se družimo tamo, vamo, ako je Ramazan, neko posti, neko ne posti, nema nikakvog, ja nisam primijetila, nema

<sup>449</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 0:07:15 - 0:08:23.1.

<sup>450</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:02:07.1 - 01:02:39.9

nikakvog sukoba, što vi ne postite, što vi ovo ili ono, nego samo postoji taj, ako je djevojka pokrivena, ako ona jede u Ramazanu.<sup>451</sup>

She continues:

People immediately mark her [...] although it is not necessarily wrong. [...]. But [...] after all, she would not do it (eat in public during Ramadan) I mean, I do not eat in Ramadan and if I do not fast, then I will not eat because, I don't know, I have some respect to make it easier for other people.

Nju ljudi odmah označavaju, [...] uopšte, ne bi trebalo biti pogrešno. [...] Ali o tom, po tom, na kraju krajeva, ona sama ne bi, mislim i ja ne jedem u Ramazanu i ako ne postim, onda neću jesti jer ne znam, imam nekog poštovanja da olakšam drugim ljudima.<sup>452</sup>

As discussed in more detail in the section on hijab, the individual responsibility and choice becomes more fuzzy when it comes to women who are covered. For hijabis, my respondents agree, there is pressure to 'represent' the religion in a certain way and thus behave in a particularly 'good' way, including not eating during Ramadan even though they might have their period and thus be free from the obligation to abstain from food.

This double issue of, on the one hand, people who were fasting themselves declaring that they wouldn't mind if I ate in front of them, and on the other hand the social convention being not to do so led to an awkward situation for me personally. Quite early in my field work, I was invited by some friends to go with them to a mountain *iftar* they do every year during Ramadan, hiking to a hut and breaking the fast together there and staying overnight. One of my closer contacts, upon being asked, told me not to worry about eating or drinking in front of the others. So, the first couple of hours this is what I did, drinking in the van (though somewhat discreetly), having a sandwich while others were doing their noon prayers. I got chatting with the only other girl not fasting, as she was on her period, and she gently informed me of what was proper. She let me know that if I did want to eat or drink, I should refrain from doing so in front of the others, but rather hide it by, for example, moving away a little.<sup>453</sup>

In addition to the question of eating or not, there are a few other ways in which interactions with other people can be significant during Ramadan. Some experiences reported by my interview partners are around keeping other rules of the holy month. These include not gossiping, not swearing, being extra kind,

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<sup>451</sup> Interview, Arnesa 5.5.2016, 00:12:15.0 - 00:12:48.1.

<sup>452</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:11:49.2 - 00:12:12.8.

<sup>453</sup> Fieldnotes, 27.6. 2015.

giving money to the poor, praying more, and being more devoted to work, as well as restrictions around sexuality

For Emina, a deep gratitude comes through in her recounting how a hotel she was at for a meeting took care of her:

The hotel helped because it was a period of Ramadan. [...] They left me food in the evening so I could eat. They do not have separate halal foods, but they left it out for me so that I could eat.

Hotel mi je izašao [...] pošto je bio period ramazana. [...] Oni su meni ostavljali hranu za uveče da bih mogla da jedem. Nemaju odvojenu halal hranu, ali su mi izašli u susret da mogu da jedem.<sup>454</sup>

Elma talks about the difficulty of being in a mixed-gender environment of not just not eating during Ramadan, but truly following fasting in all complexity:

So [if you are] in a school that has a lot of boys, and many [different types of] girls, it's a bit hard. [...] to meet these moral requirements too. Not just fasting, so not only not eating and not drinking, which means you just have to, [...] you have to somehow merge with this, with the whole thing.

Also wenn Du [...] in einer Schule [bist] die viele Jungs ha [t] und viele Mädchen[...] aller Art ist es ein bisschen schwer[...] diese moralischen Bedingungen auch zu machen. Nicht nur fasten, dass heißt nicht nur nicht essen und nicht trinken, das heißt man muss sich einfach, [...] Du musst Dich irgendwie verschmelzen mit diese[r], mit der ganzen Sache.<sup>455</sup>

While she doesn't mind working with people who aren't fasting, with regards to morally correct behaviour, she does see some difficulty. Being around people who are gossiping and swearing, maybe even flirting, is not an ideal frame to abstain from morally incorrect behaviour.

The value of everyone being able to decide for themselves was communicated strongly during my fieldwork, as well as ideas about not being too public about practice, and there may well be reasons that are seen as legitimate for women to eat or drink. Nonetheless, several of my informants communicated that, to them, women with hijab are expected to represent proper Muslim behaviour. This includes not eating or drinking during Ramadan. More on the expectations covered women are faced with below.

As with many aspects of Muslim-ness in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the cultural, ethnic and religious aspects of fasting are closely entwined. Fasting is quite public and also has a social component of breaking the fast together (*iftar*), so

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<sup>454</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 01:43:58.6 - 01:44:40.5.

<sup>455</sup> Interview, Elma, 11.5.2016, 00:33:39.3 - 00:34:39.5.

even more than other practices it plays a societal and cultural role. While starting to fast is sometimes seen as an indicator of practice, it is generally not portrayed as such. Rather, it is something many cultural Muslims also do.

*Bajram* is mainly seen as a family celebration, and not particularly important for one's personal religiosity, as Alma suggests when she said, 'They are all Muslims just by name and they consider they are Muslim just because they celebrate *bajram* and so, but they don't pray and they don't fast, yeah.'<sup>456</sup>

Similarly, Amina said, 'A typical Bosnian Muslim family, you know, you have a lot of customs, you go for *bajram*, bake cakes and stuff like that, but they are not so...they are not practicing'.<sup>457</sup>

So, celebrating *bajram* is specifically not included as part of what 'being practicing' means. This even goes so far that Belma complained about a relative who started introducing prayer as a part of the *bajram* practice:

We used to just meet for breakfast, [...] and the men went to the mosque [...] not at all so that [...] anything religious, [no-one said] a prayer or anything. [...] this has changed, with the mixing of the family. [...] this cousin of mine, [...], his daughter married [...] a man who is very religious, and since then there are things [...] that I haven't seen in my extended family, for example, to come with the headscarf [...], for this breakfast, [...] and to say some prayers out loud, and I have to say I don't really enjoy that.

Früher war es einfach so dass wir uns zum Frühstück treffen, [...], und dass die Männer also in die Moschee gegangen sind, [...] überhaupt nicht so dass [...] das irgendjemand was Religiöses gesagt hat, ein Gebet oder so. In letzten Zeiten hat sich das geändert, mit der Vermischung der Familie. Zum Beispiel dieser Cousin von mir, [...] seine Tochter hat [...] einen Mann geheiratet der sehr religiös ist, und seitdem gibt es dann so Sachen die ich [...] in meiner Großfamilie nicht gesehen habe, zum Beispiel das man mit Kopftuch [...], zu diesem Frühstück kommt, [...] und dass man [...] irgendwelche Gebete dann laut spricht, und ich muss auch sagen ich genieße das auch nicht so.<sup>458</sup>

Ena also highlights that the religious customs she participated in with her family were not explained, and thus she failed to make a connection to religion:

Basically, my experience with Islam [was] during the holidays, *bajram* [...] for me [was] about eating baklava, *kurban bajram* about giving [...] it's not about Bosnia-Herzegovina, it's about how you live your values. The way that people live here, it's a part of tradition, so you don't explain yourself. I never had the idea why do you do this *kurban* thing, why do you have baklava, why do you celebrate *bajram*? And if you don't know why [then] it's not your thing, you don't connect with it. So, I didn't feel it

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<sup>456</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:29:32.5 - 00:29:44.6.

<sup>457</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:18:28.7 - 00:20:25.1

<sup>458</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 01:22:36.2 - 01:24:26.0.

at all.<sup>459</sup>

She thus makes a distinction between the customary holidays and understanding and practising from a religious perspective.

One practice that was referenced several times in the field, both in interviews and even more so in casual conversation, was abstaining from alcohol during Ramadan. Frenky describes it as such:

In general, here, if you don't fast, that at least you don't drink [alcohol] during Ramadan, [...] it is like an unwritten rule that you do that; the young folks are mainly doing it. Also because, it really isn't nice to see somehow, someone you know presenting as Muslim, and he drinks beer during [...] Ramadan, that is stupid.

Hier ist es üblich dass wenn Du nicht fastest, das Du wenigstens während Ramadan [keinen Alkohol] trinkst, [...] auch wie eine nicht geschriebene Regel wie Du das machst, aber die Jugendlichen machen das hauptsächlich. Das auch, weil das ist wirklich kein schöner Anblick, wenn Du das siehst, dass eben irgendwie, Du weißt dass er sich irgendwie als Muslime ausgibt, und trinkt Bier während [...] Ramadans auch blöd.<sup>460</sup>

Belma talks about how her practice varies depending on whether she is in Germany or in Bosnia-Herzegovina during Ramadan with regard to drinking alcohol:

I did not drink any alcohol last year either, whether I was fasting or not, but usually, because I was fasting already, I had the feeling that it does not make sense now that I now stick to this tradition and fast, and then drink alcohol. For example, this year when I'm in Germany during Ramadan and drinking alcohol everywhere, I do not have to stick to the rules, like in the previous years, so every time I was in Germany I did drink alcohol during Ramadan. And in Bosnia, it is difficult to get alcohol, so during the month of fasting, for example, in Tuzla, where I used to be at home, alcohol isn't served in many places.

Letztes Jahr habe ich auch keinen Alkohol getrunken, egal ob ich dann gefastet habe oder nicht, aber normalerweise, weil ich schon gefastet habe hatte ich das Gefühl dass es jetzt keinen Sinn macht dass ich mich jetzt an diese Tradition halte und faste, und dann Alkohol trinke. Zum Beispiel, dieses Jahr wenn ich zum Beispiel in Deutschland bin während des Ramadans und da wird überall Alkohol getrunken, dann muss ich mich nicht unbedingt an die Regeln halten, ähnlich wie in den früheren Jahren, also jedes Mal wenn ich in Deutschland war habe ich Alkohol getrunken während des Ramadans, und in Bosnien ist das schon, ist das an sich schwer an Alkohol zu kommen, also im Fastenmonat wird dann zum Beispiel in Tuzla, wo ich früher zu Hause war wird dann kein Alkohol in ganz vielen Orten nicht eingeschenkt.<sup>461</sup>

Amongst my interlocutors, there were two ways of looking at those that keep Ramadan even if the rest of the year they aren't very pious. Fasting in absence of other practices was sometimes frowned upon by those in the sample who

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<sup>459</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 00:11:44.9 - 00:12:37.8.

<sup>460</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9. 2015, 00:49:44.0 - 00:50:22.5.

<sup>461</sup> Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, 01:18:26.4 - 01:19:45.3.

also pray regularly or read the Quran a lot. Others saw it as positive that at least one month of the year people that are not super religious are having more of a spiritual practice.

The critical view is demonstrated by this quote of Meliha's, which is probably one of my favourite bits of any interview:

Gossiping, stealing, drinking, [...] taking off your clothes or something...stuff that in Bosnia is typical, that you are only not allowed to do during Ramadan.

Lästern, klauen, trinken, [...], sich ausziehen oder so...was in Bosnien üblich ist das man das nur im Ramadan nicht tun darf.<sup>462</sup>

Elma describes the same phenomenon:

There are people, as I said, who are good during Ramadan, and suddenly they are wild again, after that time.

Es gibt Menschen, wie ich schon gesagt habe, die gut während des Ramadan sind, und auf einmal sind sie wieder voll wild, nach dieser Zeit.<sup>463</sup>

Meliha is of the opinion that the particularly good behaviour shouldn't just happen during Ramadan, but at all times:

[...] for people who come to [the] religion, one should perhaps tell them that one should not gossip only in Ramadan, but that is not the case, one should not do that before or after Ramadan, like all other things that you are not allowed to do.

[...] für Menschen die in [die] Religion kommen sollen, da sollte man ihnen vielleicht sagen dass man nur in Ramadan nicht lästern soll, aber es ist unmöglich das darf man auch nicht vor oder nach dem Ramadan machen, wie alle anderen Sachen die man auch nicht machen darf.<sup>464</sup>

For Elma, 'being religious', as indicated by praying and reading the Quran, is something her mother does during Ramadan:

[The] mother [of my father] was religious but he never [was], my mother is okay, so she is only religious, so she prays during Ramadan, and she reads the Quran even then, but actually, not during the [rest of the] year.

[Die] Mutter [meines Vaters] war religiös aber er nie, meine Mutter ist ok, also sie ist nur religiös, also sie betet wenn Ramadan ist, und sie liest den Koran auch dann, aber eigentlich, während des Jahres nicht.<sup>465</sup>

The interesting aspect here is how being religious is described as something that is possible in a time-bound manner, as shown through practicing.

This factor that Ramadan is a time that can also be more spiritual for non-practitioners was also picked up on by Belma:

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<sup>462</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:37:12.0 - 01:37:27.2

<sup>463</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:18:32.2 - 01:19:02.4

<sup>464</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:36:33.9 - 01:37:11.4.

<sup>465</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:14:17.1 - 01:14:36.8

And I do not practise [...] in my everyday life, but I do not rule it out, for example, it's 2016 now, and even before the month of fasting is here, I am thinking it would be nice if I were to go to the mosque for these night prayers, but I end up not going there, but [...] early in the year, and it is two more months before, then I say, 'Oh, it would be nice if I went' but when the month comes, I do not find time. But I would like to. Just [to go to] the mosque, on such an occasion as after breaking the fast and then [pray], and so I would like to go there.

Und ich praktiziere [...] nicht in meinem Alltag, aber ich schließe es auch nicht aus, zum Beispiel, es ist jetzt 2016, und noch bevor der Fastenmonat da ist denke ich mir, es wäre sehr schön wenn ich einmal in die Moschee gehen würde um dieses Nachtgebet zu machen, aber da gehe ich dann nicht hin, aber wenn wir jetzt früh im Jahr sind, und es sind noch zwei drei Monate, davor, dann sage ich 'oh es wäre schön wenn ich hingehen würde' aber wenn der Monat kommt dann finde ich keine Zeit. Aber ich würde schon gerne. Einfach in die Moschee, zu so einem Anlass wie nach dem Fastenbrechen wird dann gebetet, und so würde ich gerne hingehen.<sup>466</sup>

Hasna talks about this regarding her family:

My brother and sister are both older, [...] they are both into [Islam], my parents not so much; I mean, my mum fasts for Ramadan, but basically, [it is] not really important to them.<sup>467</sup>

So, even though her mother fasts, this doesn't necessarily indicate that she is 'into Islam'.

Hasna also denotes the difference between praying during Ramadan to transitioning to doing so more regularly: 'I literally started one day, I don't know why, because I am somebody who [was praying] maybe, [...] for Ramadan, or once a day, when I remember[d]'.<sup>468</sup> Hasna also talks about how it is specific for Bosnia-Herzegovina to fast during Ramadan and how this isn't an indicator of overall practice:

[...] in Bosnia it is really typical [...] for Muslims to go fasting for Ramadan. Then we see everybody fasting, celebrating [...]. You can't really tell by one month, if somebody is experiencing that during the entire year and life generally.<sup>469</sup>

Next, I will discuss how the period of Ramadan is both a particularly social and spiritual time in Sarajevo. Given this combination of factors, there can be a tension between the (obligation) to socialise and the prerogative and desire to use this period for prayer and reflection. Emina talks about it as a pro and con of living in Sarajevo:

Here I have a crew that I don't have in Belgrade, so now [Ramadan is]

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<sup>466</sup> Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, 00:59:46.3 - 01:00:49.0.

<sup>467</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:12:03.6 - 00:12:21.7.

<sup>468</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:42:21.0 - 00:42:33.9

<sup>469</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:12:58.0 - 00:14:00.4

more comfortable, and different, and easier [...]. And it was hard for me there, I was alone, I did not have a friend for that, and I could not do some of those activities. It's hard to be alone, I had a lot of time then so that I was thinking and reading and researching, so it helped me to overcome, I felt more spiritual than ever. [...] I immediately had a different, higher level of responsibility. [...] And here it is a different Ramadan, because we all go together to the *iftar* and the mosque and everything. Here it is touristic, I did not feel half the connection as in Belgrade.

Ovdje sad imam i društvo, u Beogradu nemam, pa mi je sad komotnije i drugačije i lakše, [...]. A tamo mi je bilo teško, bila sam sama, nisam imala prijatelja za to i nisam mogla te neke aktivnosti. Teško je biti sam, imala sam tad puno vremena zato da razmišljam da čitam i istražujem, pa mi je to pomoglo da prebrodim, osjećala sam se baš duhovno kao nikada. [...]i pridržavala se svega što se nisam ranije pridržavala, meni je odmah bilo drugačije, viši stepen odgovornosti. [...] A ovdje ramazan drugačiji, jer svi zajedno idemo na iftar i u džamiju i sve. Ovdje je to turistički, nisam osjećala ni pola one veze kao u Beogradu.<sup>470</sup>

Because everyone seems to be fasting in Sarajevo, including Emina's group of friends, she describes not feeling an obligation to be so strict, whereas in Belgrade, only a small community fasts during Ramadan, and thus she felt more responsible for her own fasting. There is the sense if she doesn't fast, no-one will, or only a few.

Belma talks about creating her own traditions when she was away from her family:

I think [fasting is a] beautiful tradition, [...] here in Sarajevo, you meet and do something together, you eat together for breaking the fast, and there is, or there should be such a spirit, so that somehow you open a door, and that was the idea of the Islamic tradition for me. But when I saw that I was not being invited by anyone, I thought, 'I'll build my own traditions, and let's see'.

Ich denke [Fasten ist] eine schöne Tradition, [...] hier in Sarajevo trifft man sich und macht was zusammen, man isst zusammen zum Fastenbrechen, und es gibt so einen, oder es sollte so einen Geist geben, also das man irgendwie so eine Türe öffnet, und das war die Vorstellung von der islamischen Tradition für mich. Aber als ich selbst gesehen habe dass ich von niemandem eingeladen wurde habe ich gedacht ich baue meine eigenen Traditionen, und mal schauen.<sup>471</sup>

Frenky acknowledges that Ramadan is a time that feels special, but she doesn't see any value in actually fasting considering, that she doesn't practise during the rest of the year.

[I am] trying not to do [such things] in public, [...] you're trying to somehow behave yourself, so to speak, and I do try to do that ... but during Ramadan, you somehow feel it in the air, and then you feel the urge to become even better. At least that you do, if you already do the

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<sup>470</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5. 2017, 01:57:15.8 - 02:00:01.8

<sup>471</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 02:00:08.4 - 02:01:08.2.

other. I would also fast, that's not a problem, but I always think, 'Why should I fast if I do not pray regularly?' That one belongs to the other, if I look at that as a package and not in part. That's why I don't do it.

[Ich] versuche [...], in der Öffentlichkeit nicht so Sachen zu [machen] Du versuchst schon irgendwie Dich zu benehmen, sozusagen, dass versuche ich schon so...aber während des Ramadans, dass spürst Du schon so in der Luft. Und dann verspürst Du den Drang dazu noch besser werden. Wenigstens dass Du machen, wenn Du schon das andere nicht machst. Ich würde ja auch fasten, das finde ich kein Problem, aber ich denke immer, wieso soll ich fasten wenn ich nicht bete regelmäßig, das eine gehört zu dem anderen, wenn ich mich als das ansehe dann als Paket und nicht teilweise, deswegen mache ich das ja auch nicht.<sup>472</sup>

Although Elma, meanwhile, also practises during the year, she likes the intensified period of Ramadan:

Actually, I like it when I go to the mosque more often when it's Ramadan, so I'm really involved, and I feel better when I go more often. [...] When you go less, or not so often, then you just are not that [in it]. But if it is Ramadan or something else of that nature, I feel somehow more comfortable, I like it. And I like it because I see more of my girlfriends I actually do not see so often, and that's just such a ... such a way to see each other again, to talk a little bit ... to be together, to do something together.

Eigentlich mag ich es wenn ich öfter in die Moschee gehe wenn Ramadan ist, dann bin ich richtig [...] involviert, und ich fühle mich wohler wenn ich, [...] öfter gehe [...] wenn man weniger geht, oder nicht so oft, dann ist man einfach nicht so [drin]. Aber wenn Ramadan ist oder etwas anderes dieser Art, fühle ich mich irgendwie wohler, ich mag es. Und ich mag es weil ich öfter mit meinen Freundinnen sehe die ich eigentlich nicht so oft sehe, und das ist einfach so ein...so eine Art sich wiederzusehen, bisschen zu reden...zusammen zu sein, etwas zusammen zu machen.<sup>473</sup>

As is outlined in the section on becoming Muslim, the special period of Ramadan can also encourage people becoming religious, act as a trigger and a turning point. Ena talks about it as a hallmark on her journey:

And then another Ramadan came, so now there's this year, that was kind of easy and stuff, new people, new learning, new everything and then the Ramadan, the other Ramadan came, this is my second year or something like that of my religious experience, and during that Ramadan it was also, like, when I decided to fast, to pray, to read Quran with some new approach, you know, differently.<sup>474</sup>

Elma elaborates on the challenge of being a working mother regarding the time- and energy-intensive activities taking place during Ramadan:

There are people, I think [they] are not working, or just studying, who [...] are going to *travija*, [...], and are awake all the time, [...] in the cafe [...], and then they have this night prayer and *sabah*, that morning prayer [and I am like] what are you doing? When are you sleeping? [...] I have a life, I have a child, I also have to sleep, [...] And there are truly large groups

<sup>472</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, : 00:50:33.0 - 00:51:21.8.

<sup>473</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:39:02.0 - 01:40:02.1.

<sup>474</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 00:25:11.4 - 00:25:49.2.

of people doing that. Especially when during the summer, because [...] you fast longer, and the time of not fasting is really short.

Es gibt Menschen, ich denke [sie] arbeiten [nicht], oder studieren [nur], die wenn Ramadan ist die gehen also zur Travija, also das längere beten, und sind die ganze Zeit wach, [...] im Café [...], und dann auch haben sie diesen Nachtbeten und Sabah, also dieses Morgenbeten, [...] und [ich so] was macht Ihr denn? Also, wann schläft Ihr? [...] Ich hab ein Leben, ich hab ein Kind, ich muss auch schlafen, ich muss auch arbeiten [...]. Und es gibt wirklich Gruppen die das machen. Vor allem wenn es Sommer ist, weil [...] man länger fastet, und die Zeit des Nicht-Fastens ist richtig kurz.<sup>475</sup>

*Travija*, the practice of praying for a long time during the nights of Ramadan, and *sabah*, the prayer between dawn and sunrise, are difficult to fit in along with socialising and day-to-day life during Ramadan.

This emphasis that Elma places on spending time with her child and working, even at the expense of performing all the Ramadan religious practice, is again about the importance of excellence everywhere, in all spheres of life, not just in religious areas. So, the public display of religion is less important to my research participants, than trying to be good in all areas, as the following quote by Alma shows:

It is very special month, and you are trying to be much [...] better person, to help other people; if you know some person is poor and he doesn't have money to buy food, sometimes I buy and bring it and, yeah. It's [a] really nice month.<sup>476</sup>

On the issue of time, Hasna is surprised at how much time she actually does have:

Well, mostly my family and friends, [we're] at home or we go out, and it doesn't really make a big difference. Or I visit my friends and family, and, but I mean, it is always with somebody, meeting some groups of people every day. I actually like that part, I mean, you see people more often than you normally do. People you actually see once a year, and during Ramadan two [or] three times, it is really cool. It shows that you actually can find some time for people that you wouldn't usually, it shows how much you can actually organise your time. [...] You have so much time, definitely.<sup>477</sup>

Alma outlines some of the things she does during Ramadan (which she calls *Ramazan*, using the word in the local language), and how for her the social aspect plays an important role, as well as seeing herself as 'a better Muslim':

I really love [Ramazan]. [...] I used to cover my hair and to fast of course, to pray. And I like, [...] walking around the city covered (laughs). [...] And

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<sup>475</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:40:10.9 - 01:41:19.7.

<sup>476</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:51:35.2 - 00:51:54.5

<sup>477</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1. 2017, 01:32:34.4 - 01:33:16.8.

I think I become [a] much [...] better Muslim than I am right now, in Ramazan. [...] And [...] tourists, Chinese people, once they came to me and said can they have a picture with me, which was very interesting for me and I said, 'Of course' (laughs).<sup>478</sup>

Later she says:

And we get together [as a family], so it is very special, you know. Three minutes before it is *ezan* outside we are all together, and we are happy and we are talking some jokes, and I love that period very much, and I think I am going to miss it when I marry.<sup>479</sup>

Waiting together with her family of origin for the call to prayer which signals the end to the day's fasting is a special experience for Alma, and something she anticipates that will be lacking once she marries and no longer spends time with that family regularly for *iftar*.

How Ramadan is experienced also changes throughout one's faith-journey and life stage, as Ena talks about:

At the beginning it was so easy, [...] you know, when the religion comes [...] not religion, the faith, [...] it comes to your heart, it's just so easy because you just know why you are doing it, you know why it's right [...] and then you forget (laughs). Then [...] that human ego [...] just starts to wake up and again and [...] wants to come out. [...] [during the] first Ramadan and second, I was a student. [...] The whole month I was able to spend [it] the way I wanted to [...]. [Now] I am working, and it's totally different, [...] working with people who are swearing for example. [...] You just have to accept what it is [...] and learn to live with it in the best possible way you can.<sup>480</sup>

This renewal of getting in touch with the faith and practice for a set period of time can also be helpful for those already practising regularly, to gain motivation for the rest of the year, as Ena also notes:

[...] it is a challenge to fast and [...] be in surrounding[s] that [are] not maybe supportive of that, but it's ok. You just accept it. [The] last two Ramadans I discovered Quran. [...] [I]t really purifies you [...] it gives you clarity for another half of the year and second half of the year is the struggle and oh, Ramadan, please come, [...] Ramadan gives you that opportunity to grow as a human being, to develop some skills, [...] when you realise that you can go a month without eating, because you are doing triple in Ramadan I think, you are fasting, you are doing the voluntary work, you try to do so much good because all the good stuff in Ramadan is so heavily rewarded so you are doing good, good, good, doing, doing, doing, and you see, 'Wow look what I can do'. So it gives

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<sup>478</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:23:07.8 - 00:23:48.1.

<sup>479</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:52:06.0 - 00:52:24.8.

<sup>480</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, : 02:53:12.8 - 02:56:46.7.

you motivation, really.<sup>481</sup>

Above, a distinction is made again between what is seen as just performing the practice, mainly not eating, and the spiritual requirements of being a better person and using Ramadan to intensify this connection. For these dimensions of the month, the social aspect is not in focus.

Aida talks about not only various dimensions of behaviour during the month, but also what fasting in all senses of the word can cause one to appreciate:

I think that if someone fasts, and just doesn't eat, there is no use. So, fasting is not just cleaning the body of some toxins, of some bad things. It is also a kind of spiritual cleansing, where, for example, we hesitate, sometimes it happens that we say bad words, to anger someone, etc., however, when we fast, we must try to reduce these things. And when you do not say bad words for a month, when you are laughing all day for a month, being kind to everyone, it is very long after Ramadan, it remains simple. And it's indescribable, [...] the feeling of peace and happiness that simply exists somewhere in the air. Then you learn more to appreciate such things. We are not even aware of how happy we are to have so much food, that we have clean water, unlike many people in the world, and when some of these things are taken away, then we start to value them more. And then it happens that, for example, we deal with many things from, for example, the dates that are there, the ordinary glass of water we look forward to. These are such small things that you simply exacerbate the senses and some things make sense to you only for Ramadan, never again. It's just such a kind of period that is truly indescribable.

Naravno jer mislim da ako čovjek posti, a da samo ne jede od tog nema nikakve koristi. Znači sam post nije samo čišćenje organizma od nekih toksina, od nekih loših stvari. Nego je ujedno i neka vrsta duhovnog čišćenja, gdje mi npr. se ustručavamo, nekad čovjeku se desi da opsuje, da se naljuti na nekoga itd., međutim, kada postimo moramo se truditi da i te stvari umanjimo. I kada mjesec dana nikad ne opsužete, kada mjesec dana ste nasmijani čitav dan, prema svima srdačni, ljubazni, onda to se zadrži jako dugo i nakon Ramazana, ostane jednostavno. I neopisiv je osjećaj mira i neke sreće koja jednostavno postoji negdje u zraku. Zatim čovjek više nauči da cijeni takve stvari. Mi nekad nismo ni svjesni koliko smo sretni što imamo toliko izobilje hrane, što imamo čistu vodu za razliku od mnogih ljudi u svijetu, i onda kad se te neke stvari čovjeku oduzmu, onda počne da ih više cijeni. I onda se desi da npr., obradujemo se mnogim stvarima od npr. hurmi koje su tu, običnoj čaši vode se radujemo. To su takve sitnice koje čovjeku jednostavno izoštre čula, i neke stvari ti imaju smisla samo za Ramazan, nikad drugo. To je jednostavno takva vrsta perioda koji je zaista neopisiv.<sup>482</sup>

So, Ramadan really fulfils a number of different functions. For practicing Muslims, it is often a particularly spiritual time that recharges, similarly the function of daily prayer, albeit on a larger scale. It can also be a social period of tying the community together. In this latter function, this month is also

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<sup>481</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 02:56:49.6 - 03:00:32.6.

<sup>482</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 1:32:58.0 - 1:34:56.9.

observed by customary Muslims, some of whom abstain from food and some who don't. Either way, it can be a period of affirming the identity of being socially 'Muslim', and of spending time with friends and family.

### 7.2.2 Eating halal at home and on the road

Eating, as something that is done daily, can be another element of positioning with regards to identity and religion. In Sarajevo, not pork is typical for practising and cultural Muslims alike, and default setting of food in general is that it is halal. Practising Muslims also don't tend to be very careful beyond that, and it is more a cultural marker than a religious one. Detailed debates about additives in processed food as well as ways of slaughtering didn't play a large part in food choices for the women I spoke to. However, the question of halal food becomes important when travelling, both within Bosnia-Herzegovina and internationally.<sup>483</sup> It also came up as a relevant during the war and when one is a guest. This includes practical considerations, such as learning what to avoid eating when outside a Muslim-majority environment. When travelling and interacting with non-Muslims, revealing that one doesn't eat pork can be the strongest moment of coming out as Muslim. This is particularly the case for those who don't wear hijab and those who drink alcohol. However, the necessity of 'coming out' by revealing one doesn't eat pork is not always present, particularly in countries where being vegetarian is common. Below, I will discuss these issues and also highlight some examples of how halal food is seen as healthy, which is seen as a general sign of the inherent positivity of religious rules.

In non-Muslim-majority countries, halal butchers and restaurants can become meeting places, and discussing where and what is possible to eat creates community. How strictly rules around consumption are interpreted also acts as a type of differentiation within the community.<sup>484</sup> Not eating pork is common among otherwise non-practising Muslims in the western European and Australian diaspora; it acts as a key socio-cultural identity marker.<sup>485</sup> Mirroring

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<sup>483</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 01:27:48.1 - 01:28:04.3, Interview, Emina 4.5.2016, 01:32:05.0 - 01:33:12.6, Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 02:35:13.1 - 02:37:04.0.

<sup>484</sup> "Binnendifferenzierung" Schrode, 117.

<sup>485</sup> For Germany: *ibid.* and personal communication, for UK, Netherlands, Switzerland, France, Austria, personal communication.

the non-pork-eating as an identity marker, it is presumed that non-Muslims have a strong desire to consume pork. I, a vegetarian, was informed countless times where I could buy pork in Sarajevo, by practising and non-practising Muslims alike.<sup>486</sup>

Belma is the only one of the interview partners who says she sometimes eats pork. Though she wouldn't go out of her way to choose it for herself, being a considerate guest and trying new things is more important to her:

So, pork is forbidden in Islam, alcohol as well. I have no thoughts when I drink alcohol; for pork, for example, I eat salami, and I do not care if it's pork or not, I don't check every package if it has pork inside or not, but [...] I don't have the habit of eating pork: I would not order pork schnitzel, for example in a restaurant, I would probably much rather order something else. But, for example, when I'm visiting somewhere, in a house where I'm a guest, and pork is offered, I also eat pork, without asking, because I also think that it's Islam, [to behave as if] you're a guest, because somehow, somehow, it's not poison. [...] I eat meat, anyway. If I can choose, then I choose something else.

Also, Schweinefleisch ist ja verboten im Islam, Alkohol auch. Ich hab keine Gedanken wenn ich Alkohol trinke, bei Schweinefleisch esse ich zum Beispiel Salami, und ich kucke auch nicht bei jeder Verpackung ob Schweinefleisch drin ist oder nicht, aber [...] ich hab diese Gewohnheit nicht Schweinefleisch zu essen, ich würde kein Schweineschnitzel zum Beispiel im Restaurant bestellen, ich würde mich wahrscheinlich für was anderes viel eher entscheiden. Aber zum Beispiel wenn ich irgendwo zu Besuch bin, in einem Haus, wo ich zu Gast bin, Schweinefleisch angeboten wird, esse ich Schweinefleisch auch, ohne zu fragen, weil ich auch denke dass es islamsch ist...ja, weil man zu Gast ist, [...], es ist kein Gift.<sup>487</sup>

During my fieldwork, I met another person who eats pork, and he had an interesting story to tell. During the war, their former neighbours, non-Muslims, sent them a parcel with food that contained pork sausages. A debate between his mother and father followed. His father argued that considering that they had very little food and that it was a gift, they should eat the sausages. His mother didn't want to, and suggested they give them to pork-eating people in their life. The father and kids ended up eating them, while the mother did not. He now lives in Germany, speaks excellent German, took his German wife's German name and still eats pork regularly. In telling the story he made a contrast with his brother. Though his brother also ate pork during the war rather than starve, he stopped again once arriving in Germany as a refugee. He struggled with the language and married a woman from the Bosnian diaspora. In the story, eating

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<sup>486</sup> At the Grbavica market.

<sup>487</sup> Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, 01:01:32.7 - 01:02:40.8.

pork was closely entwined with taking on a German identity.<sup>488</sup>

Besides being a guest or experiencing wartime, the process of travelling also requires paying more attention than everyday life in Sarajevo does, particularly in environments that are not majority Muslim or don't have a significant Muslim minority. Belma learnt from her father that it is okay to eat pork while travelling:

When I'm on the road, [...] I've heard from my dad that it's allowed, or that pork is not a question, that you have to eat while traveling, if there's nothing else to eat. Especially if there are some specialties, for example, if it is with pork, such as sausage, I want to try that, then it is not a question whether it is made of pork or not. And, that's not just limited to pork, but as far as the other meats are concerned, I tried crocodile meat because I was curious, and also ostrich.

Wenn ich unterwegs bin, [...] ich habe von meinem Vater gehört, dass es erlaubt ist, beziehungsweise dass Schweinefleisch gar keine Frage ist dass man das auf Reisen sowieso essen muss, wenn irgendwie nichts anderes zu essen ist. Besonders wenn es irgendwie so manche Spezialitäten, zum Beispiel, wenn das mit Schweinefleisch ist, wie zum Beispiel Würstchen, ich will das probieren, dann ist das auch keine Frage ob das Schweinefleisch ist oder nicht. Also das beschränkt sich nicht nur auf Schweinefleisch, sondern was die anderen Fleischsorten betrifft, ich hab aus Neugier Krokodilfleisch probiert, und auch Straussvogel [sic].<sup>489</sup>

Ena, meanwhile, finds other ways to try new things, though she doesn't eat pork, and likely wouldn't eat crocodile either:

It was in Georgia, in Tbilisi. [...] The Italians, they prepared an amazing meal for us but it was with pork and I said like, no, I don't eat pork. They were okay with that, they made me a special different [variation], for me, [so I could have] the experience.<sup>490</sup>

Through communicating her not-eating-pork and implicitly Muslim-ness early on, Ena manages to participate while also giving people cooking for her the opportunity to adapt.

When travelling in Germany, for example, there is more pre-set communication, for example, with university cafeterias providing signage indicating pork. Vegetarian meals can also be a good option, and alternative diets are quite accepted. Other countries can be more challenging, with more difficulty in obtaining the relevant information or with people just not understanding. My informants communicated that one way to avoid non-halal meat that does not cause much friction in international contexts is to go for vegetarian options, as this can be easier, particularly where there isn't a large Muslim population or, I

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<sup>488</sup> Fieldnotes, 10.7.2015.

<sup>489</sup> Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, 01:03:54.7 - 01:05:10.5.

<sup>490</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 01:09:51.1 - 01:10:18.7.

would propose, in places that there is even anti-Muslim sentiment. Amira talks about this:

I was travelling in Budapest, and [...] about [...] food preferences [...] I wrote halal food, or no pork/no alcohol and stuff like that, but still, when I came there, I don't know whether it is that, halal or not, so I said vegetarian then, it is easier. And they said 'Oh, you are vegetarian!' Well, I am NOT actually vegetarian, but I have to be right here, so yeah, there were some issues. I am still learning about that process, and there [in Budapest] were some of my friends, and I asked them, 'Well, how do you do that?' And they said to me, well, umm, a friend of mine who is really, really internationally active in NGOs and that, she said, 'Well, usually I ask [for] fruit,' and she is eating fruit and she is also bringing fish, those cans and those things. So, she is doing it that way.<sup>491</sup>

Arnesa talks about how not eating pork can be something that is taken for granted, which doesn't lead to further conversations:

For example, I will not eat pork and then they show me 'Here, you have no pork here' and they do not ask, they do not care, they think I'm a vegetarian.

li na primjer, ja neću da jedem svinjetinu i onda oni meni pokazuju 'Evo nemaš ovdje svinjetine' a uopšte se ne pitaju, njih ne zanima, oni misle ja vegetarijana.<sup>492</sup>

Alma, when she is travelling, does take care if food may be halal, beyond avoiding pork:

When I travel around, in Germany, in Austria, [...] I never eat meat, never. Even chicken, I don't eat because I don't know is it halal or haram. So, mostly I am vegetarian.<sup>493</sup>

Alma's approach goes beyond how most women I spoke to approached the subject.

It was Frenky who described how in Germany things were marked as pork or not in the cafeteria, and in Serbia, although she had to ask, she didn't feel uncomfortable, citing that people were respectful.<sup>494</sup>

Avoiding pork can lead to internal conflicts when being a guest, particularly for women who are not obviously Muslim. One example of this coming out as Muslim, even after knowing someone for a long time, is a story about Elma who recounted visiting her former teacher in Germany, whom she was close to, together with her male best friend :

'Yeah, do you want meat?' [she asked], and there was only pork, and I said 'no, no, it's okay', and he said, 'I never knew that, your mother never

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<sup>491</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10. 2015, 00:57:32.2 - 00:58:45.9.

<sup>492</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:00:09.9 - 01:00:20.8.

<sup>493</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:48:25.5 - 00:48:56.7.

<sup>494</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 00:06:22.4 - 00:07:11.1.

said that you're religious, I never saw her with a headscarf' [...] and I felt bad [because I gave them such a shock] because I thought it was not nice from my point of view, I did not want to eat meat, but I did not want to... well, I felt... so ... I was really glad that they brought me the food and that they prepared everything, and I could not eat it, so it made me uncomfortable. And I thought that somehow like that ... how do you say that I insulted her because of that.

„Ja, wollt Ihr Fleisch?“ [hat sie gefragt] und es gab auch nur Schweinefleisch, und ich hab gesagt ‚nein nein ist ok‘ und er hat gesagt ‚Ich wusste das nie, Eure Mutter hat nie gesagt dass ihr religiös seid, ich hab sie nie mit Kopftuch gesehen‘ [...] und ich hab mich schlecht gefühlt [weil ich die so geschockt habe] weil ich dachte es war nicht schön aus meiner Sicht, ich wollte kein Fleisch nehmen, aber ich wollte sie nicht damit also, ich hab mich [...] ich war richtig froh dass sie mir das Essen gebracht haben und so, das sie alles vorbereitet haben und ich konnte es nicht essen, deswegen war es mir unangenehm. Und ich dachte, dass sie sich irgendwo so...wie sagt man das, dass ich sie beleidigt habe deswegen.<sup>495</sup>

Here there is a conflict between two values. For Bosnians even more than, for example, for Germans, to eat food offered is what being a good guest dictates. However, Elma did not want to knowingly eat pork. Though she hadn't purposefully passed as non-Muslim (presumably Christian) she also hadn't communicated it, thus leading to this difficulty. While being Muslim is treated discreetly, as a private matter, this would be a situation where a previous vocal positioning and active announcement would have been helpful in avoiding internal conflict. There are also differing theological interpretations if eating non-halal food, if offered by a 'person of the book' is permissible or not.<sup>496</sup>

Elma recounts another instance where not eating pork led to being outed indirectly as being Muslim, also a negative situation. This occurred in Banja Luka, the capital of the majority-Serb entity of Bosnia-Herzegovina:

We only had a problem with a waiter once. So, my friend wanted her pizza without salami because it was pork, so he put down the pizza with pork and he knew we were from Sarajevo [...] and she said, 'I said WITHOUT meat', and he said, 'but why?' And she said, 'I just do not want it'. 'Why not?' 'I just do not want it' 'I think there is no problem' 'I think there is a problem' 'But which one?' 'I just do not like meat' 'I'm not so sure that's the reason' 'Ok, I'll pay for it but I will not eat it anyway, you can have it' Stuff like that, you know? But that was very ... maybe we had such problems two or three times, not very often.

wir hatten nur einmal ein Problem mit einem Kellner, also meine Freundin wollte ihre Pizza ohne Salami, weil es Schweinefleisch war, und er hat die Pizza mit Schweinefleisch also so dahingestellt, und er wusste das wir aus Sarajevo sind, [...] und sie hat gesagt "Ich hab gesagt OHNE Fleisch" und er hat gesagt "aber warum?" und sie "ich wills einfach nicht" "Wieso nicht?" "Ich wills einfach nicht" "Ich denk da ist kein Problem" "Ich denk da ist ein Problem" "Aber welches?" "Ich mag einfach kein

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<sup>495</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:22:28.9 - 01:24:17.1.

<sup>496</sup> Schrode, 118/119.

Fleisch” “Ich bin mir nicht ganz so sicher dass das diese Ursache ist” “Ok, ich werd dafür bezahlen aber ich werd es sowieso nicht essen, Du kannst es haben” Solche Sachen, weißt Du? Aber das war sehr...vielleicht hatten wir solche Probleme 2-3 Mal, nicht sehr oft.<sup>497</sup>

The waiter here is quite obviously trying to push her friend to ‘admit’ to not wanting to eat pork, and thus to being Muslim.

However, Belma also talks about how the conversation around food can be a good trigger to discuss religion more widely:

I was part of an [academic exchange] project in Germany [...] And then I realised we were eating in the cafeteria, and then people asked me ‘Yeah, do you eat meat, do you eat pork, are you Muslim’ and then you ask the neighbour, there is not only me, I’m Muslim, there are also people who are Jewish, and that is all, not taboo, which I think is very good, that we can talk about it then. And I think people are curious and want to learn something about it. And if you ask me something then I like to say something, but not that I think that I am a prototypical example, but then at least for myself I can say something about something.

Ich bin [...] Teil eines Projektes [für akademischen Austausch] in Deutschland, [...] Und dann hab ich festgestellt wir essen in der Mensa, und dann fragt man mich ‚Ja, isst Du Fleisch, isst Du Schweinefleisch, bist Du Muslimisch“ und dann fragt man den Nachbarn, es gibt ja nicht nur mich, ich bin ja muslimisch, es gibt auch Leute die jüdisch sind, und das wird alles so, nicht tabuisiert, was ich sehr gut finde, dass wir darüber dann reden können. Und ich denke die Leute sind neugierig und wollen darüber was lernen. Und wenn man mich dann was fragt, dann sage ich ja gerne was, aber nicht dass ich denke dass ich ein prototypisches Beispiel bin, aber dann kann ich wenigstens in meinem Namen etwas sagen, über etwas.<sup>498</sup>

As not eating pork is widespread also among non-religious Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is not a marker of religious practice in the same way it would be for Bavarian converts who stop eating it.

The rules around what is allowed and what is forbidden with regards to consumption are seen as examples of the inherent positivity of religious rules. Aida emphasises how these rules, including those relating to food, make sense in Islam:

I do not think there is any ban in Islam that is bad for people. That something is forbidden, and that it is good for you, lots of research has been done. So, out of curiosity, people began to question why some things were forbidden in Islam. Of course, pork is forbidden because the pig eats everything [...] when you give it paper it would eat that, plastic. So, it is this kind of animal, plus, to some degree, it is genetically very close to people, so pigs for that reason are forbidden to us. Then alcohol, I do not know how familiar you are with this, but at one time in Islamic history alcohol was not banned. However, when the leaders began to forget prayers, when they came drunk, when people began to do various

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<sup>497</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:07:30.6 - 01:08:50.1.

<sup>498</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 01:32:12.7 - 01:33:30.5.

bad things from excessive alcohol consumption, then alcohol was banned, and those sides in Islam prohibited everything that could harm human beings, take him to some wrong way, cause some diseases, etc. So, first of all, one has to take care of his body as if it were the temple.

Mislim da u islamu ne postoji nijedna zabrana koja je za čovjeka loša. Da je nešto zabranjeno, a da je za tebe kao dobro i mnoga su istraživanja rađena. Znači ljudi su iz svoje neke radoznalosti počeli da ispituju zašto neke stvari su zabranjene u islamu. Naravno, zabranjena je svinjetina zato što svinja jede sve živo, znači baš se šaroliko... njoj kad bi joj papir dali ona bi papir pojela, plastiku. Znači to je takva vrsta životinje još plus dijeli do neke mjere, genetski je vrlo bliska ljudima tako da je s te strane svinja zabranjena nama. Zatim alkohol, ne znam koliko si upoznata, ali u jedno doba islamske historije alkohol nije bio zabranjen. Međutim, kada su poglavari počeli da zaboravljaju molitve, kada su dolazili pijani, kada su ljudi počeli da rade razne loše stvari od prekomjernog uzimanja alkohola, onda je alkohol postao zabranjen i s te strane u islamu je zabranjeno sve ono što čovjeku može da naškodi, da ga odvede nekim krivim putem, da uzrokuje neke bolesti itd. Znači prije svega čovjek treba da se brine o svom tijelu kao da je ono hram.<sup>499</sup>

Aida also mentions the animal welfare aspect of halal butchering rules, an aspect that is discursively stronger in Western Europe:

When sheep are slaughtered, they put a blindfold on their eyes so that it does not see where it is going, meaning she does not have that feeling of fear, and the knife must be sharpened so that everything is very short, so that the animal does not feel pain and that there is no such stress. And that's why we strongly insist that it was halal food that the animal was killed in a proper way, without being tortured, without starving, etc.

Da se prilikom klanja ovce ovci stavlja povez preko očiju da ona ne vidi gde ide, znači da nema taj osjećaj straha, i mora nož jako da se naoštri da to sve bude jako kratko da životinja ne osjeti bol i da nema taj stres. I zato mi jako insistiramo da je to halal hrana da je životinja ubijena na propisan način, a da nije mučena, da nije izglednjivana itd.<sup>500</sup>

These examples show that the rules and regulations are seen as useful and healthy, and that there is a strong emphasis placed on the practice needing to be followed for reasons that are not arbitrary.

Overall, it is seen as important to try to fulfil food rules without being too strict about them. As with other aspects of practice, the focus is on the intention.<sup>501</sup>

This also shows that when pork is eaten accidentally, my informants tended to be quite relaxed about it, like this example of Emina from Belgrade shows:

It was very hard with food. I would ask those cooks in the student dorms, but I know that they fry in the fat, then cook the soup and put one and the other meat. I did not even know what I was eating.

Tamo je baš bilo teško sa hranom. Pitala bih ja tamo one kuvarice u studentskoj, ali znam da one prže na masti, pa onda skuhaju čorbu i stave i jedno i drugo meso. Ne znam ni šta sam jela.<sup>502</sup>

<sup>499</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 1:21:52.7-1:25:17.4

<sup>500</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 1:25:17.4-1:25:54.2

<sup>501</sup> Schrode, 108/109.

<sup>502</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 01:33:14.5 - 01:33:43.9.

Ena used to try to fulfil everything strictly but has become softer towards herself, while acknowledging the importance of the rules themselves:

I realised at some point that I cannot be that strict. [...] it's not that it is impossible, but it would be hard because all of the haram that would be around you. [...] I just have to say it is hard to be totally strict about halal food today. I might be thinking more than some people do, [...] because it's not about halal or haram, it's about being good to yourself because basically everything that is haram in Islam [...], [is] because it's bad for you. So, it's not about not eating it [...] it is about not doing bad to yourself.<sup>503</sup>

In countries where pork plays a traditional role such as Germany or the UK, deciding to stop eating pork or never consuming it at all can be a religious as well as an ethnic marker. In Sarajevo, however, this is not the case, as halal meat is standard. However, my informants did note that the question of pork does come up when travelling or otherwise interacting with non-Muslims. This can lead to a variety of outcomes, depending on the individual and the context. There can be internal conflict, as in the example where the former teacher was not aware that her guest didn't eat pork, to external, overt conflict, as with the waiter in Banja Luka, or even adaptation, such as with the Italian friends in Tbilisi. For my interlocutors, the ban on pork in Islam as well as other consumption rules are seen as proof that what is forbidden and allowed in Islam follows a logical pattern. This also goes for not drinking alcohol, although in the Sarajevo context, practices surrounding alcohol consumption are frequently more complex than those surrounding pork, as the next section shows.

### 7.2.3 (Not) drinking alcohol

While not eating pork is a widespread identity marker and practice amongst culturally Muslim Bosnians, drinking alcohol is a different story. Many in Bosnia who consider themselves Muslim and don't eat pork still drink alcohol. Rakija (fruit brandy) plays an important role in South Eastern European societies; beer, wine, and cocktails are also popular.

I've had quite a few conversations about the fact that Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina do drink, even though it 'ought to be' forbidden, according to Islamic teachings and customs. The conclusion I have come to is that not

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<sup>503</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 02:30:34.8 - 02:32:48.3.

drinking in Bosnia-Herzegovina has real social consequences in a way that not eating pork doesn't. Alcohol also has an effect that largely can't be replaced, whereas replacing pork with other meat is quite smooth.

Some of the women I interviewed drank alcohol, some didn't. Of those that didn't drink alcohol, some avoid the settings where it is offered, while others do not. Below are some quotes illustrating the role of alcohol in society and various personal relationships to it as seen. Amina has an explanation as to why drinking is popular:

I haven't been to parties or something where it is common to drink. But if you are ordering juice, probably in [people's] own mind[s] they are gathering pictures, puzzling themselves if you are pregnant or not...actually I had a few conversations with some of my American friends, that certain Muslims around here drink and eat pork, what about that [...] it is [...] the same level of prohibition, but [...] we take what we like [...] we like to be comfortable [...] most of the people here don't like to commit themselves to being uncomfortable, so they would say everything is fine as long as they feel comfortable. I want to drink, so I drink, that is fine, and somehow, you know, young people like to think that they come back to their senses, come back to religion when they are old.<sup>504</sup>

Along with the life-span development that older people tend to become more religious, there might well also be an element of the social cost decreasing. Major settings for drinking alcohol are bars and parties, and these are just not frequented as much by professionals, much less by those with children.

Hasna mentions that 'people actually tend to stress the importance of consuming alcohol' and that 'it is impossible basically to explain it to people who don't want to understand'.<sup>505</sup> Elma hangs out with a group of friends who drink but feels a bit stupid around them:

A few days ago we had a girls night, and actually everyone drinks, [...] and I don't have an issue with it, really, not at all, I was always somewhere where people were drinking, and it actually isn't a problem, but I think they are staring, like, 'Yeah, Elma and her juice' and that is a bit somehow...I don't know how they think that, if they think it is stupid or...actually I don't care, but somehow I feel a bit stupid, sometimes.

Vor ein paar Tagen hatten wir eine Mädchenabend, und eigentlich trinken alle, [...] und ich hab damit kein Problem, echt, gar nicht, ich war immer irgendwo wo man getrunken hat, und es ist eigentlich auch kein Problem, aber ich denke sie kucken, 'Ja, Elma und ihr Saft' und das ist ein bisschen irgendwie, ich weiß nicht wie sie das denken, ob sie das doof finden oder... ist mir eigentlich auch egal, aber irgendwie fühle ich mich ein

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<sup>504</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:10.0 - 00:00:10.2.

<sup>505</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:49:06.3 - 00:49:45.9.

bisschen doof, manchmal.<sup>506</sup>

Amira also talks about the feeling of social exclusion when her friends started to drink: 'My friends from primary school, they were already starting [to go to] to the disco, they were drinking, [...] and I wanted to be like that, [...] as well'.<sup>507</sup>

For Amina, the reaction of others very much depends on the situation – some friends are casual about it, while her colleagues put pressure on her:

Everyone [of my friends] knew I was Muslim, because I wouldn't drink when we would gather, we had our parties, we would meet at someone's place. They knew I wouldn't drink...but no-one cared about it.<sup>508</sup>

And on the other hand:

I had a situation one or two weeks ago, when we were talking about some teambuilding [at work], and a colleague said 'I will come if Amina would drink', and then that is like 'no...don't come then'. Because I am really strongly believing that that people [are] being bullied into drinking, doing things [that are prohibited in Islam].<sup>509</sup>

Among my interlocutors there was also a big difference in their interpretation whether places where alcohol is served are okay to visit or not. Aida says, referring to covered people:

For example, I could not enter the cafés in which one drinks alcohol [...]. Then I do not know, I think it's the only hurdle in fact, or then I could not go to some big concerts, festivals.

Npr. ne bih mogla ulaziti u kafiće u kojima se toči alkohol npr. Onda ne znam, mislim da je to jedina prepreka u stvari, ili onda ne bi mogla ići na neke velike koncerte, na festivale.<sup>510</sup>

Amina had a certain time where she drank, and explicitly mentions concerts as a space where she didn't drink:

And in that phase of my life, that was really present. I would [drink] because everyone would do that, but funny thing is that I would never go to a concert or something like that and drink, because I wanted the full experience, and I want to remember tomorrow that I was there, so, I had kind of, I had an opinion about my drinking, then. But it was like, you know for six, eight months, A very short period of time when I did drink. And perhaps I felt guilty [...] I thought like 'I don't like this taste'.<sup>511</sup>

Ena is critical of mixing of the traditional, ethnic Muslim identity with religion and connects this to alcohol: 'you know, somebody is drinking and he is saying he

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<sup>506</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:09:20.3 - 00:10:04.3.

<sup>507</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:12:47.1 - 00:13:01.5.

<sup>508</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:09.6 - 00:00:09.7.

<sup>509</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:16.8 - 00:00:16.9.

<sup>510</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 0:14:17.9-0:15:52.5

<sup>511</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:17.1 - 00:00:17.2.

is Muslim'.<sup>512</sup> As with the fact that pork is forbidden and other religious rules, she focuses on the fact that alcohol is forbidden for a reason: 'Alcohol, it's bad because it changes your state'.<sup>513</sup>

Selma talks about not-drinking alcohol as a way of being outed as religious, and also refers to normality:

My best friend [...] you would never realise that she is religious, ever. You might only notice that if she said, yes, I do not want to drink alcohol or something. But otherwise she is such a very normal person; she is not covered.

Meine beste Freundin, [...] bei ihr würde man nie merken dass sie religiös ist, nie. Man würde das vielleicht nur merken, wenn sie sagen würde, ja, ich will kein Alkohol trinken oder so. Aber sonst ist sie so ein ganz ganz normaler Mensch, sie ist nicht bedeckt.<sup>514</sup>

It sounds like she pushes the not-drinking into 'not normal' by referring to 'everything else', such as the lack of hijab, as normal. The more overt Muslim practices are thus, according to Selma, in the not-normal category.

For Belma, drinking (or not) is very much everyone's own responsibility and she doesn't avoid it: 'For example, it does not bother me if that person drinks a beer while I break my fast, because that's my philosophy as well (laughs)' ('Zum Beispiel mich stört es nicht wenn diese Person ein Bier trinkt, während ich mein Fasten breche, weil das auch meine Philosophie ist').<sup>515</sup>

There is thus a wide range of practice amongst the women I interviewed, both in regard to drinking themselves and whether they go to spaces where alcohol is served and spend time with people while they are drinking. Thus the consumption of (or abstention from) alcohol has a social component, shaping who Muslim women in Sarajevo spend time with and where they go. This practice therefore plays a role in positioning themselves with regards to other parts of society, in various ways. The next section focuses on something much more individual, which comes up for everyone, daily for many, and several times a day for a few: prayer.

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<sup>512</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 01:46:12.0 - 01:46:25.

<sup>513</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 02:39:30.3 - 02:39:43.6.

<sup>514</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:35:00.7 - 00:35:32.4.

<sup>515</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 01:08:59.0 - 01:09:13.4.

### 7.3 'Prayer is something you have to do': Varied approaches to a foundational practice

Prayer is a core part of faith and practice; 'prayer is something you have to do'.<sup>516</sup> Thus, it plays a role in how Muslims define themselves. Amongst the women I spoke to, there was a range in terms of how much they pray, varying from mainly during life rituals, such as burials, to regularly, up to five times a day. In the following section, several aspects around prayer will be examined. As with other aspects of practice, my interviewed demonstrated an overwhelming focus on choice, that no one should be forced to pray, or force someone else. The priority of being a good person over practice and its relevance for being Muslim is also present here. Young Muslim women in Sarajevo also spoke about the benefit of prayer in a way that was reminiscent of mindfulness and other meditation practices. This connects to the overall topic of religious requirements having a positive impact of the lives of practitioners. Moving from the internal to the external, this section considers how prayer plays a role in community building, and finally, it will consider what conflicts arise around the time and space that is required for prayer.

Learning to pray is seen as an important practical step in one's religious education and self-positioning, as was also discussed in the chapter on becoming Muslim. Prayer is also referred to as an indicator of faith, with reference made by the women I interviewed to the difference between performing the prayer for outward credit and doing it motivated by internal feeling. Compared to fasting, not drinking alcohol or wearing hijab, prayer is less outwardly visible and public as a practice. There is again a focus by my sample on the importance of own decision making and choice, as well as not judging others.

Alma talks about withholding judgement:

I think it should be private thing, you know. I cannot blame anyone because he doesn't pray, you know. It is between him and God, not between me and him, I don't have anything [to do] with that. So, I think it should be private, really.<sup>517</sup>

When Aida talks about her parents not forcing her to pray, this may also be to demonstrate to me, the interviewer, how flexible and open they are, particularly

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<sup>516</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:18.3 - 00:00:18.3.

<sup>517</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:30:20.9 - 00:30:40.5.

as the connection to being Muslim is made:

My parents have never forced me, like, 'You are a Muslim, you have to pray every prayer, you have to behave like that, you have to go here, you have to go there, you cannot do this, you cannot do that'.

Moji roditelji mene nikad nisu forsirali, kao: 'Ti si muslimanka moraš da klanjaš svaki namaz, moraš da se ponašaš tako, moraš da ideš ovdje, moraš da ideš ondje, ne smiješ ovako, ne smiješ onako'.<sup>518</sup>

This is how Arnesa talks about it: 'As far as I am concerned, God is only one. And how someone prays to Him...everyone chooses themselves' ('Što se mene tiče, Bog je samo jedan. A kako se ko Njemu klanja to je...mislim, svako sebi bira').<sup>519</sup>

For Elma, how regularly she prays really also depends on how much she has going on. 'So, I try to pray every day, at least twice a day when I don't have a lot of work, maybe more on weekends' ('Also ich versuche jeden Tag zu beten, wenigstens zwei Mal am Tag, wenn ich nicht viel zu arbeiten habe, am Wochenende vielleicht mehr').<sup>520</sup> This also shows how flexibly she handles the requirements to pray. She doesn't aim to pray five times, but rather two, and that also only if her other commitments allow. When she isn't working, she prays more often. Her practice fits in with the rest of her life, and it is important that praying is one, integrated aspect, rather than the dominant one.

The skills connected to prayer – what to do, what to say – were also sometimes mentioned. This is discussed in more detail in the section on religious knowledge. The main sources for this information was either parents or the internet.

Overall, when my informants were describing about their own religious journey, prayer was an important indicator, and it was also relevant when benchmarking other people's religiosity. However, at the same time, there was also a strong current of not over-estimating the importance of prayer. Particularly relevant overall was the continuing theme that living one's whole life in a good way, rather than just during practice, is what is important. The following quotes demonstrate this stated importance of being a good person. Hasna, for example, explains this in the following way:

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<sup>518</sup> Interview, Aida, 10.5.2016, 00:08:38.3 - 00:08:50.6.

<sup>519</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:51:06.8 - 00:51:15.5.

<sup>520</sup> Interview, Elma, 5.11.2016, 00:20:45.4 - 00:20:57.9.

I literally started [to pray regularly] one day, [...] from high school on it was like five times a day; it became a need and something [that] [was] normal for me [...] when I miss one I am not feeling as bad as I maybe would a few years ago, because I can see it is not the point literally, praying is the practical part, but actually living your life the way you would when you are praying [is what is important].<sup>521</sup>

Prayer, in particular regular prayer, is seen as a relevant starting point, as was explored in the section on becoming Muslim.

For Elma, prayer is the indicator of being more or less involved with religion, independent of faith, which she says she already had when she wasn't practising regularly.<sup>522</sup>

Meliha uses prayer as an indicator of being religious, given the absence of being able to perceive someone's faith. For her, regular prayer is the demonstration of faith:

The question is what you understand by 'religious'. Whether they believe, that is not something I can verify, but from their actions, you can tell. My father prays, my mother prays, my siblings all pray, although they aren't covered.

Die Frage ist was man unter religiös versteht. Das sie glauben, das kann ich ja nicht überprüfen, aber nach Ihren Taten könnte man das sagen. Mein Vater betet, meine Mutter betet, meine Geschwister beten alle, obwohl sie nicht alle bedeckt sind.<sup>523</sup>

As with other aspects of practice, it is seen as negative if there is too much talking about it, if there is the perception it is turned to the outside, rather than for an internal connection with God, or if the practice is more in focus than living a good life. Arnesa makes this explicit:

Or, I don't know, if you pray and say out loud 'I'm going to pray now' that everyone knows I'm going to pray, then again that isn't the point. The point is, what does it mean if a person puts their head on the ground and surrenders.

Ili ne znam, ako klanjaš i kažem naglas 'Oдох ja sad da klanjam' da svi znaju da ja idem da klanjam, onda opet nije to poenta. Poenta je, šta znači čovjeku glavu spustiti na zemlju i predati se.<sup>524</sup>

Hasna also talks about this aspect:

I mean, there are people that are actually praying a lot, but aren't actually helping their community or helping others or investing generally in their social life, or in their community as much as they should.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:42:20.8 - 00:43:08.3.

<sup>522</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:12:59.0 - 01:14:06.3.

<sup>523</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:12:55.5 - 00:13:16.5.

<sup>524</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:04:51.2 - 01:05:05.7.

<sup>525</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:43:19.3 - 00:43:34.9.

The central topic to 'Being Muslim' then, of doing good, being a *dobar čovjek* rather than publicly displaying practice, is shown again with regard to prayer too.

Arnesa also further expands on this to include entire societies, mentioning other things that are more important than regular prayer:

That is it, those are the principles, that there should be no corruption, that everyone has bread to eat and milk to drink today, some basic things, that people are neat and clean, that they do not drink alcohol, that there is no harassment, the rate of crime, and that makes the Islamic state, and it is not just that we pray five times a day and that is it. I mean, that's not right.

to je ono, to su principi, da ne treba biti korupcije, da svako danas ima da jede hljeba i mlijeka, neke osnovne stvari, da su ljudi uredni i čisti, da ne piju alkohol, da nema bluda, stopa kriminala i to i sve to čini islamsku državu, a nije samo mi sad klanjamo pet vakata danas i to je to. Mislim, nije to baš.<sup>526</sup>

Prayer is seen as an intermediary step between having faith without practice, as is common in wider society, and a self-directed interpretation of Islam based on reading and other information-gathering, as is seen as typical for true believers. Amina talks about her family thus:

In my extended family, you know, we believe in God, we call ourselves Muslims, but rarely [...] anyone prays.<sup>527</sup>

This is so, although there are also some customary Muslims that go to pray, particularly for jummah, while being perceived as not having faith. The Friday prayers are thus between public and private.<sup>528</sup> Here again it is stressed that no distinction can be made from the outside.

An important aspect when talking about prayer is that it has positive impacts in life. This goes beyond the good feeling of fulfilling religious duties or the interpretation that all religious rules have a good reason and are thus beneficial. The narratives are rather closer to mindfulness and other contemporary approaches.<sup>529</sup> The language used around how (regular) prayer affects them was surprisingly consistent between my interlocutors. Ena talks about the spiritual dimension of prayer and how much it gives her. Prayer here is a bridge between the inside world and the outside.

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<sup>526</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:13:55.4 - 01:14:23.5.

<sup>527</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:18:26.8-00:22:36.8.

<sup>528</sup> Funk, 210-212.

<sup>529</sup> Thanks to Julianne Funk for alerting me to this.

Really, [prayer] was like my thing, it was my time, it gave me so much peace. And [I] realised [...] why you should pray. You get the peace, you get the remembrance, you get the flow, you get the stop in a day and then I realised why it takes five times, because when you pray for five times you remember God five times and then after [...] you are saying thanks God [...] or God is the greatest, [...] and [...] you just realise you have everything in life. [...] At that point it starts to become a parallel experience of some inner experience and some outer experience in a way [...] on a cognitive level and on some sort of spiritual level, [...] that's the point when I started to live the religion. Not only am I a Muslim and [...] Islam is my religion, but I know why because I feel it: I am Muslim, I am Islam.<sup>530</sup>

For Elma, the focus is on liking to pray, how it feels good and generates a good feeling.

I just like it, it's kind of meditation for me [...] you just feel a little bit better. I know that I have done something good for myself, and you can always have excuses that you don't do it, 'yes, I don't have time, I'm exhausted ...'

Ich mag es einfach, es ist eine Art von Meditation für mich [...], man fühlt sich einfach ein bisschen besser. Ich weiß dass ich etwas Gutes für mich getan habe, und man kann immer Ausreden haben dass man es nicht macht, 'ja ich hab keine Zeit, ich bin erschöpft...'.<sup>531</sup>

When asked about if she had a specific mosque, Arnesa talks about how the mental focus is the more relevant part:

I mean, it does not matter in the end [where I pray]. The point is that I am present with my mind, that I am 100% here. It's not that I pray and think about what I have to do at university tomorrow and things like that. So, I give 100 per cent when I pray, I am dedicated to dear Allah, everything else is not important, but only me and dear Allah and that relationship

Mislom, na kraju svejedno je [gdje klanjam]. Poenta je da ja budem prisutna na namazu mozgom da sam tu 100%. Nije da klanjam i da razmišljam šta sutra imam na fakultetu da radim i takvim stvarima. Tako da sam 100% kad klanjam, posvećena sam dragom Allahu, sve drugo nije važno nego samo ja i dragi Allah i ta veza.<sup>532</sup>

Amina is also more focused on the outcome for her mental wellbeing: '[When] I am not practising I feel my anxiety is rising, and I feel I rely on God more.'<sup>533</sup>

Ena reflects on how important it is to her: 'Really for me, those ten minutes [of prayer] and that moment of peace, I wouldn't give it [up] for anything.'<sup>534</sup>

Aida talks about the benefits thus:

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<sup>530</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 00:27:28.8 - 00:29:21.8.

<sup>531</sup> Interview, Elma, 11.5.2016, 00:21:42.8 - 00:22:46.4.

<sup>532</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:19:17.5 - 01:19:56.6.

<sup>533</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:16.1 - 00:00:16.3.

<sup>534</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 02:28:26.7 - 02:28:53.1.

Probably because of the time in which we live, where there is a lot of stress, a lot of obligations, where they are now, there has been a situation that some of the shaky values, that people have become somehow cruel to one another, have no sympathy and so on. Then I realised that in fact the religion is my five minutes of silence during the day when I am left with myself, in my thoughts, the same therapy should be in this kind of turbulent life in which we live. Just like that.

Jer vjerovatno i zbog vremena u kojem živimo, gdje je puno stresa, puno obaveza, gdje su sada, došlo je situacija da su neke poljuljane vrijednosti, da su ljudi postali nekako okrutni jedni prema drugima, da nemaju saosjećanje i tako. Onda sam ja shvatila da u stvari da je religija mojih 5 minuta tišine u toku dana kada ja ostajem sama sa sobom, u svojim mislima, isto terapija neka u ovom nekom uzburkanom životu u kojem živimo. Jednostavno tako.<sup>535</sup>

Alma describes it in a similar way:

I pray every day, five times per day, and I always have time to pray because it is the most important thing for me. Yeah, so I think I relax in that way. I go pray and I relax little bit (laughs).<sup>536</sup>

When Ena talks about starting to pray regularly, it also becomes very clear how it is important not because of theology, but because of the feeling and action:

In religion, you have to do stuff to get to know stuff. I had to pray to realise why I had to pray, [...], sometimes I didn't know why am I doing it, sometimes I felt it, sometimes I didn't feel it, but it did give me peace.<sup>537</sup>

Above, Ena outlines direct spiritual benefits of prayer, which have an effect like meditation. In a contrasting perspective, Arnesa talks about receiving guidance through prayer:

And then I teach the Quran, I worship, I pray to God to come to the right answer and it always comes. For now, asking someone [...] when a problem is really significant, if it is not a scientific problem, something that I could ask five people, and probably five people would give five different answers, so I ask myself and talk to dear God; I mean, I pray and I ask Him to help me if there is anything.

I onda učim Kur'an, klanjam, molim Boga da dođem na pravi odgovor i uvijek i dođem. Jer sad, pitati nekoga, pitati ako je stvarno neki problem značajan, ako nije neki naučni problem nogo nešto što je životno mogu pitati pet ljudi pa bi vjerovatno od pet ljudi dobila pet različitih odgovora tako da pitam samu sebe i pričam sa dragim Bogom, mislim klanjam i Njega molim da mi pomogne ako je nešto.<sup>538</sup>

Another value of prayer is how it creates community. This mainly happens when prayer is not performed at home but on the road, in a prayer room, mosque, or other spaces. By leaving university or another workspace, people clearly

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<sup>535</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 00:10:36.0 - 00:11:27.0.

<sup>536</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:40:39.3 - 00:40:54.6.

<sup>537</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 00:25:36.9 - 00:27:28.7.

<sup>538</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:32:49.1 - 00:33:21.1.

communicate they are going to pray. Practitioners can thus identify each other.

Arnesa describes it like this:

I take that break, usually during that break we have a mosque nearby and now there are girls going and I go with them. They like it [and say] 'Ah-ha look at that.' I mean, we talk about it in society because, I mean, faith is an integral part of life.

Ja napravim tu pauzu, obično u toj pauzi imamo u blizini džamiju i sad ima djevojaka koje idu i ja idem s njima. Njima to bude simpatično-Ah-ha vidi, vidi i tako. Mislim, pričamo mi u društvu o tome jer, mislim, vjera je sastavni dio života.<sup>539</sup>

The feelings triggered by prayer were described in a variety of ways. Particularly in group settings, prayer was described by my sample to trigger feelings of revelation. This is a phenomenon discussed elsewhere, in the section on 'Becoming Muslim'.

When travelling, visiting a mosque can provide one with a direct connection to the Muslim community there, even though the community may be more or less welcoming, depending on the context. In diaspora contexts, houses of worship often function as a node for community activities, including language classes for children and other social functions. In the ex-Yugoslav context, this can be a challenge for non-religious, non-nationalist people who struggle to connect to 'their' community.<sup>540</sup> In Sarajevo, this is not so strong, however, the group prayer or acknowledgement of prayer is still used to distinguish practitioners from non-practitioners.

When asked who she talks about religion with, Amina responds: 'Most of the people gather together to pray together, not to discuss'.<sup>541</sup>

Alma talks about a situation she had of connecting with another practitioner while travelling:

Another situation was, I also travelled, this was on my return way but when I was going to Germany I was also in the airport. Yes, I was in Tuzla [at the] airport, so I needed also to pray and I met one guy and according to his appearance I guessed he [was] religious. And we were waiting for our [flight] so we talked about life, about religion and so [on] and I really, I saw that he was religious so I said to him like 'Oh, I need

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<sup>539</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:03:27.8 - 00:03:42.2.

<sup>540</sup> Danijel Majić and Krsto Lazarević, *In Gottes Namen! Die kroatischen Gemeinden in Deutschland*, podcast audio, Neues vom Ballaballa-Balkan, accessed 17.9.2020, 2018, <https://ballaballa-balkan.de/14-in-gottes-namen-die-kroatischen-gemeinden-in-deutschland/>.

<sup>541</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:07.6 - 00:00:07.6.

to pray' and he said 'Oh I need to pray too' and then we prayed together, like he was imam and I was behind him.<sup>542</sup>

One of my favourite parts of my fieldwork were regular hikes with Nahla, a Muslim women's association. Depending on the weather and difficulty of the hike, we were between 15–50 people, many of them women, but there were also men and older children. A fixed part of these day-long expeditions was a group prayer, usually in a beautiful location. While on hikes with other associations, there might be some people who went off to pray during the lunch- or coffee break; here, prayer was centred as a key element, as a group experience.

Another point where the role of religion was frequently negotiated by my informants is around how much time and/or space is provided for prayer, particularly in public.

Here is one example Hasna talks about:

If you practise, [people ask], 'why the hell', more or less. Usually in a bad way: [...] for example in medical school, up to the third year, we [...] had a *medžid* there, [...] just a small room, nothing basically inside, [...]. once I actually went to pray, [...] when I came back to a café [...] they asked me where I was [...] and the non-religious, I mean by-name-Muslims, they were really so aggressive, [...] that we have *medžid* that we don't have [something similar] for other religions, [...] I mean, it is kind of stupid, if you want to fight for something you have more things to worry about, [...] I didn't know it existed [until the third year], [...] so they try to make a big fuss about it, and show how secular and open minded they are, by trying to shut down things, that people actually use and are enjoying. [...] I mean [...] if somebody needs some space for praying [...], it is really modern topic, and very popular to talk about it, how everybody needs some space, but when you look at the mosques and churches, they are empty. So, I really hate people saying, 'we need some room'.<sup>543</sup>

As she points out, the discussion is often more symbolic than practical, a storage room such as Hasna describes being used by some people to pray doesn't affect anyone else directly. A different case that also took place at universities, on a much larger scale, was when a group of students demanded that no classes should take place on Friday lunchtime, to allow them to go to

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<sup>542</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:43:30.0 - 00:45:06.5.

<sup>543</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 01:01:31.3 - 01:03:17.6.

jummah.<sup>544</sup> There are thus recurring conflicts around the time and the space allocated in wider society for religious practice.

The fact that there are prayer rooms in the main shopping centres, which are financed by Middle Eastern businesses, was also seen by some local and international contacts as a sign of the growing influence of Islam.<sup>545</sup> Most women I spoke to prefer to do their prayers at a mosque or to just do them at home.

Such as Elma:

No, I don't use [prayer rooms]. [...] I think it is a bit better, [...] when I go to mosque, I don't know why. I heard [...] they have prayer rooms, in BBI [a shopping centre] I think, but I have never been there. But my friend said it is really nice, I don't know.

Nein, [Gebetsräume] benutze ich nicht. [...] ich denke es ist ein bisschen besser, [...] wenn ich in die Moschee gehe, ich weiß auch nicht wieso. Ich hab gehört, wo haben sie Gebetsräume, im BBI denke ich, aber da war ich noch nicht. Meine Freundin hat gesagt es ist richtig schön, weiß auch nicht.<sup>546</sup>

Meliha says she does use them when she is in these new shopping centres – although usually she spends more time in the Old Town: 'When I'm in the new areas like BBI or SCC, then I use these prayer rooms.' (In den neuen Gebieten wie BBI oder SCC bin, dann nutze ich diese Gebetsräume.)<sup>547</sup>

As has been shown, the practice of regular prayer has several dimensions. It is emphasised that whether someone prays or not should be their choice, and that other aspects of being a good person are more important to being a Muslim. The women in my sample spoke frequently about how relevant prayer is for them as a meditation or practice in mindfulness, also demonstrating the inherent positivity of religious rules. Communal prayer can also act as a way to identify other practising Muslims and to build group identity. Finally, some conflicts were outlined with regards to how much time and space is allowed for prayer in different public settings.

Looking back over the different aspects of practice, some common themes become clear. Firstly, there is the high value placed on choice, that learning,

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<sup>544</sup> Amer Tikveša, 'UNSA - Džumanske razmirice', *Skolegijum* (2017),

<http://www.skolegijum.ba/tekst/index/1117/dzumanske-razmirice>, accessed 20.7.2020.

<sup>545</sup> Such claims should be taken with a grain of salt. There are, for example, department stores in Munich, Germany (such as 'Oberpollinger') that also have a prayer room, and such cities are rarely discussed regarding a growing influence of Islam.

<sup>546</sup> Interview, Elma, 11.5.2016, 00:23:36.4 - 00:24:25.0.

<sup>547</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:26:07.4 - 01:26:31.9.

reading the Quran, consumption patterns and prayer should be driven from an internal wish and not requirements by parents, organised religion or society more widely. There is a focus on individuality and independence related to this. Secondly, as explored in the sub-chapter on ethical behaviour, it is repeatedly stressed that showing that one is a good person is more important than strictly adhering to religious practice. Thirdly, with learning as well as with different ways of reading the Quran, fasting, eating halal food, not drinking and prayer, the women I interviewed spoke about the internal benefits. This includes spiritual, physical and mental effects, which were often held up as proof that the religious requirements in Islam are there to help practitioners. Finally, all the ways of engaging with Islam that are examined here were used by the women in my sample to position themselves, to identify other believers and to craft their own role in society.

Two areas which are particularly relevant for positioning in public and private life are work and love. The next section will look at these in more detail.

## 8 Being Muslim in relation: Practice and belief in context

### 8.1 Work and Love

Various parts of an identity influence how life is navigated. Some aspects such as relationship to the family of origin have already been touched on. Here some other aspects of private life – dating and marriage as well as friendships – will be examined, as well as the professional situation.

When Alma is asked to introduce herself, she talks about her age and then adds:

I am dentist. I have my job. I am working every day and I am engaged with someone, a guy. And that's it (laughs).<sup>548</sup>

Taking Alma's introduction at face value, her profession and her relationship status are the two aspects of her life that define who she is, excluding other aspects.

#### 8.1.1 'He feels faith in the right way': Dating and starting a family

Being Muslim has an effect on how the women I spoke with viewed dating and marriage, primarily in that almost all wish to have a partner who is also Muslim.

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<sup>548</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:01:44.6 - 00:01:58.4.

Implicitly or explicitly, there is also a desire that he practise in the same way. This idea will be examined first in this section, followed by an exploration of the connection between marriage and attaining full womanhood as a member of society. Finally, motherhood will be examined in more detail, touching on both the role in Islam and in a post-socialist urban society more widely.

When talking about how they wish their future partners to be, or how their partner is, interview partners placed a strong emphasis on their partners being similar to them. First and foremost, this means also being Muslim. This is not framed as something ethnic, as is often the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but rather as a question of religion. With one exception, all of the boyfriends and husbands of my interlocutors were themselves Bosnians and Muslim believers. My respondents met their partners through university, on the internet, or via mutual friends. In this, my findings differ from those of Andreja Mesarič, who specifically identifies Islamic spaces as key to what she calls 'Sharia Dating'.<sup>549</sup>

The women I talked to explicitly expect a partner to practise, not just to be 'Muslim by name'. Generally, the central and most important factor for 'being Muslim' was 'being a good person'. In contrast, when talking about their partners (potential or real), 'being Muslim' tends to be more about visible practice. This includes aspects like going to mosque and abstaining from alcohol. In the words of Mesarič, this means that the 'pool of potential marriage partners effectively narrows to men within the faith community'.<sup>550</sup> The reasons given for why a partner should also be a believer were not all the same, but dominant themes included strengthening each other in faith and the responsibility to future children.

Wanting a partner, and a male one at that, was also seen as the default. Being queer did not come up at all, and the option of remaining without a partner was only raised by one woman. While most women do talk about wanting a partner or husband, Meliha says she wouldn't, because she has the impression that having a relationship is like having a foster child results in the loss of one's independence.<sup>551</sup> This, too, resonated strongly with Mesarič's analysis that a

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<sup>549</sup>Mesarič, "'Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 587-588, 591.

<sup>550</sup>Ibid., 590.

<sup>551</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:11:19.4 - 00:12:53.9.

modern nuclear family, founded on a partnership between pious individuals, is a key conception of Islamic marriage.<sup>552</sup>

'Mixed marriages', that is, marriages across ethno-religious groups, are remembered as a common occurrence during Yugoslavia. While the data around this is contested, there seem to have been significant differences between urban and rural areas and mixed versus homogenous regions. It also varies with regard to which ethnic lines the marriages cross.<sup>553</sup> Sarajevo, as an urban setting with a (pre-war) mixed population, should therefore have had a relatively high percentage of mixed marriages. So, the reality possibly feeds into the constructed memory. For the time that the interviews took place, around twenty years after the end of the war, the pre-war time was often remembered in a distorted way. This includes remembering intermarriage of different ethnic groups as common and unproblematic.

In her study on feminist and Muslim identities, Zilka Spahić-Šiljak describes a non-observant woman whose family expects her to marry someone who is 'Muslim' and 'normal', even though the family themselves do not practise.<sup>554</sup>

Emina explicitly talks about how ethnicity is not relevant for her. She talks about 'being Muslim' in a religious sense as the main requirement. However, she also talks about the importance of a partner being European, and more or less excludes Turks and Albanians.

Emina: [I have] some long-term plans [for] Sarajevo, maybe I'm getting married [...]. He doesn't have to be a Bosniak, only [...] Muslim.

Franziska: You think? And [what about someone from] Tunisia?

E: Well I don't know that [...] when you say Europe, we know each other better, they are closer to our way of life than Arab countries, because they are more open, and I do not know there how much we can understand [each other].

F: Maybe [from] Turkey?

E: Mum doesn't like Turks.

F: Or Albania?

E: I don't know, I had no experience, we have to write criteria and applications [both laugh].

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<sup>552</sup>Mesarić, "Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 594.

<sup>553</sup>Helms, 'Gendered Visions of the Bosnian Future: Women's Activism and Representation in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', 64.

<sup>554</sup>Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*, 183.

E: Neki dugoročni planovi su Sarajevo, možda i da se udam.[...] Ne mora biti Bošnjak, samo da je musliman.

F: Misliš? I [nekoga iz] Tunisa

E: Pa ne znam to [...]To je kad kažeš Evropa, bolje se poznajemo, bliži su nam načinu života nego arapske zemlje, jer su otvoreniji dosta, a tamo ne znam koliko bi se mogli razumjeti.

F: Možda sa [Turčinom]?

E: Mama ne voli Turke.

F: Ili [Albancem]?

E: Ne znam, nisam imala iskustva, moramo napisati kriterije i aplikacije ono kao [both laugh].<sup>555</sup>

While theoretically converts or foreign Muslims could be potential partners, no one in my sample dated either of these, and it was also not a common occurrence in my wider fieldwork.<sup>556</sup> Two women outside my sample had marriages with men of north African decent that ended, partly because of what they described as ‘cultural differences’ and ‘expectations around the behaviour of women’.<sup>557</sup>

Alma puts the shared religiosity at the centre of what binds who to her the man she is engaged to:

He is also a dentist and he is also [very] religious [...] we like each other because [...] religion connects us very much. Basically, we are [...] different persons and we like different things but because he is very religious [...] I think I am going to marry him (laughs). I liked him first because of his appearance and then when I figured out that he is kind of religious [...] I started dating [...] him.<sup>558</sup>

Arnesa mentions why this ‘being Muslim’ is such an important category in everyday life, not just ideologically but very practically:

When he turned up, I saw him as someone who can accompany me through life. [...] By that, I mean a person who can correct me in my faith. [...] that he can help get back on track when I walk astray, and in essence I was looking for a person, the Quran says ‘I created you as one’, which means that the male and female are the two halves that should form one whole. I was looking for that other half that would help me get closer to dear Allah and I received from him, from a guy, such support [...] *Elhamdulillah*, it's good (laughs).[...] he prays and everything, but I think he feels faith in the right way [...] That is important to me. That man should be aware at all times that dear God sees him and acts in accordance with that.

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<sup>555</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 02:38:26.4 - 02:40:18.9

<sup>556</sup> Mesarič, “Islamic cafés” and “Sharia dating:” Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina’, 593.

<sup>557</sup> Fieldnotes, 3.1.2016 & 7.5.2016.

<sup>558</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:07:43.6 - 00:08:37.1

[...] kad se on pojavio ja sam u njemu gledala osobu koja mene može pratiti kroz život. [...] To mi znači osobu koja mene može u vjeri ispravljati. Kad ja negdje skrenem da mi on može pomoći da se ispravim i vratim na pravi put, i u biti sam tražila osobu, u Kur'anu se kaže „Ja sam vas stvorio kao jedno' što znači da su muško i žensko dvije polovine koje treba da čine jednu cjelinu. Ja sam tražila tu drugu polovinu koja će meni pomoći da se ja dragom Allahu približim i ja sam od njega dobila, od momka, takvu podršku [...] Elhamdulillah, dobro je (laughs). [...] klanja i sve ali mislim da na pravi način osjeća vjeru i na pravi način [...] Meni je to važno. Da čovjek u svakom trenutku treba biti svjestan da ga Bog dragi vidi i da se tako ponaša.<sup>559</sup>

Emina, who studied in Belgrade, acknowledges that her chances of finding a matching partner are higher in Sarajevo, but that there are still a number of factors that need to fit. However, the being Muslim is an essential component.

It was hard for me in Belgrade [to find a guy], because [...] I hung out with Serbs, I didn't have Muslims in my group of friends, [...]. I avoided some situations when they approached because I didn't want [to be in a relationship with a Serb] [...] he had to be Muslim in order to start something more serious and then I couldn't commit to it... and then now that I came here, [...], I would like to, but to really find someone who is right for me, to be looking at life as I do, the same interests...we have to compromise on some things, and we all have priorities, what [qualities] we think are important that a person has.

U Beogradu mi je bilo teško [naći momka], jer [...] družila sam se sa Srbima, nisam imala muslimane u svom društvu[...]. Izbjegavala sam neke situacije kad su prilazili jer ja to ne želim, [...]Mora biti musliman da bi nešto ozbiljnije krenulo i onda nisam mogla da se posvetim tome.. i onda sad kad sam došla ovdje, [...] voljela bih, ali da nađem nekoga baš ko mi odgovara, da gleda na život kao i ja, ista interesovanja...da imamo kompromis za neke stvari, a svi imamo prioritete sta nam je važno da ima ta osoba.<sup>560</sup>

Amina places some quite limited requirements on her husband with regards to what 'being Muslim' constitutes:

For me, it is important that he acknowledges that God exists and that this God is Allah to stay in this marriage, but I am not there to push him, because I am not doing him a favour, if I want him to find Islam nice, I need to be nice, so I am not pushing.<sup>561</sup>

This also reflects the mindset that the best way to attract people to Islam is by being a good person rather than through overt proselytising. When conversing on topics related to Islam, it remains important not to pressure people, with the value of personal choice being high. Amina continues,

He came to know many things through me, so I would never tell him what to do, so if someday he grows to the idea that he would like to do that because his religion tells him to do that, I am fine with that, so I am not going to push that, I can't tell anyone what to do.<sup>562</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:20:43.1 - 00:22:59.4

<sup>560</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:16:15.0 - 00:17:47.4.

<sup>561</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:06.7 - 00:00:06.8.

<sup>562</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:03.8 - 00:00:03.8.

So, beyond the relevance of acting as *dobar čovjek* for one's own good, it was also seen as an important way of showing Islam to the outside world and potentially winning over other people to join.

Belma is the only person who mentions an explicitly non-religious partner: 'This person isn't religious, I am religious.' ('Diese Person ist nicht religiös, ich bin religiös').<sup>563</sup>

She previously talked about the importance of autonomy and not influencing each other, which evidently extends to religion.

For Hasna, the importance of having a Muslim partner is not so much about supporting each other in religiosity but rather the perspective of what influence it will have on future children:

I wouldn't actually mind [whether my future husband was Muslim or not] but long term, when it comes to raising kids [...] if I can have some effect there, I think it would be simpler if we were both the same religion.<sup>564</sup>

In such a statement, the role as a Muslim woman as a mother who is responsible for the personal values of her children is seen to already influence the choice of partner.

Tone Bringa noted how, in the village, women are the 'key performers of religious rituals'. At the time of her research, she noted that this was also connected to men having to be 'Yugoslav' and thus not too public about their religiosity.<sup>565</sup> This has changed now, with a certain degree of performance of practice actually helpful for accessing networks.<sup>566</sup> In other words, during socialism being religious was generally not advantageous in society or politics, but this has changed in the post-war period.

Most of the women I spoke to referred to how it was important to them that their (potential) partner is religious or has faith, but I do wonder if the setting of this interview influenced that. As we were talking about religion and their practice, these topics might have been higher on their mind than a partner being financially stable or an intellectual match.

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<sup>563</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 01:05:13.6 - 01:05:42.5.

<sup>564</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:11:27.5 - 00:12:01.8.

<sup>565</sup> Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*, 9-10.

<sup>566</sup> Funk. Fieldnotes.

In all the statements above, the key is religiosity and explicitly not ethnicity, though in the Bosnian context, this is hard to separate. Franky talks about ethnicity as a factor, particularly when it comes to the expectations of families:

I once had a friend who was from a mixed marriage. His father was, I don't know [...], but his mother was Serbian, because of his name, that does not bother me personally, there are always problems mainly because of parents, many parents say, 'Well, that does not bother us, but what if you later have issues with their parents?' I just talked to a friend about this, she has been [with her boyfriend] for two and a half years now, he was Muslim and she from [a mixed marriage], Serbian-Croatian, and his father threatened to chase him out of the house if he does not break off the relationship. That's a bit conservative here. I think that's the way it is in the post-war situation, [...] it is terrible.

Ich hatte mal einen Freund, der war aus einer Mischehe. Sein Vater war, das weiß ich [...] nicht, aber seine Mutter war Serbin, wegen seines Namen, mich persönlich stört das nicht, es gibt immer Probleme wegen der Eltern hauptsächlich, viele Eltern sagen ‚Also uns stört das nicht, aber wenn Du später mit seinen Eltern Probleme hast‘ ist das üblich [...] Ich habe da gerade mit einer Freundin darüber gesprochen, sie ist jetzt seit zweieinhalb Jahren [mit ihrem Freund zusammen], er war Muslime und sie [aus einer] Mischehe serbisch-kroatisch, und sein Vater hat ihm gedroht dass er ihn aus dem Haus jagt wenn er die Beziehung nicht abbricht. Dass ist hier ein bisschen konservativ. Ich denke das ist hier so, in der Nachkriegszeitssituation [...], das ist schlimm.<sup>567</sup>

There is a lot of importance placed on the similarity of the role religion plays in everyday life, so not just that someone is Muslim but also how they understand and practise Islam. Highlighting this difference between tradition and religion is thus also present when looking for a partner. Mesarič links this to 'the shift toward universal Islam in contradistinction with traditional Muslim practices'.<sup>568</sup> This is also something I found. Bendixsen, who Mesarič also quotes, observed the same in Berlin, finding an increase in cross-ethnic marriages which she links to a shift towards universal Islam.<sup>569</sup> Sigrid Nökel noticed something similar occurring amongst German Muslims. She quotes Hatice, saying that she likes that her husband is not a typical Turk, that he 'knows how to distinguish between the regime of traditional Islam and scriptural Islam and that he sees the latter as binding'. Nökel analyses this as the translocal and universal superseding the focussing on space, ethnicity and nation-state.<sup>570</sup> This distinction between traditional 'Muslims by name' and believers is made in Bosnia-Herzegovina as well. Women who place a high value on being

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<sup>567</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 00:08:40.4 - 00:09:30.6.

<sup>568</sup> Mesarič, "Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 593.

<sup>569</sup> Bendixsen, 236-238.

<sup>570</sup> Nökel, 233-234.

autonomous, on choosing their practice informed by their interpretation of Islam, and who feel connected to the global ummah rather than the local tradition, would understandably want something similar from their partner.

This plays out on the one hand as potential partners not necessarily (though practically) being ethnic Bosniaks, and thus part of the local community. On the other hand, there is the expectation of the type of commitment to religion being similar. Elma focuses on her husband being 'normal', so practising, but not excessively. The high value of being not-extreme that is also referred to in regards to oneself is thus also brought to assessing partners.

[He is] a normal guy [...], he doesn't drink. And [...] [he] goes to the mosque, [...] but not very often. [...] He was involved a bit more in religious [...] activities for a while, but [he] did not really like it, [and] he distanced himself, and now he's trying to balance it, so to be normal.

[Er ist] ein normaler Typ [...] der trinkt auch nicht. Und [...] geht [...] in die Moschee, aber [...] nicht sehr oft. [...] Der war einige Zeit ein bisschen mehr [in] religiösen [...] Aktionen involviert, aber [es] hat ihm eigentlich nicht gefallen, [und] er hat sich distanziert, und jetzt versucht er das so zu balancieren, also so normal zu sein.<sup>571</sup>

This also shows how the similarity to herself is constructed, to the imagined 'middle of the road' Muslim-ness. This 'same type of practice' as something that is desirable exists on all levels of practice. So, for example Leijla, who now wears niqab, talks about her husband as follows:

He is the same, yes, Muslim, and he also wears a beard and so on. I think when we [met], one of our common interests we had was religion. I think why I liked him the most was because of practising [his] faith.

On je isto, da, musliman i isto nosi bradu i tako eto. Mislim kad smo se [upoznali], jedan od interesa jeste bio zajednički je taj vjerski. Mislim ono zašto se meni, da kažem, najviše i svidio jeste praktikovanje vjere.<sup>572</sup>

Being similar and sharing values is regarded as very important. Ena talks about it like this:

Definitely you can't live with someone who doesn't share your values. [...] I am more open to differences because I think that they make us richer. I don't have like some predispositions [that] he has to be the same as me [...]. But for me it is important that he [...] support[s] [...] me on my way [...] towards God, but everybody has different ways. So, he doesn't have to be on my way [...] but for me it's important that he supports me, that I support him, and that he understands me. Just that he understands my story. So, it's not like he has to do this [or that] but he just has to be really, [it is] important for me that he's Muslim.<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:24:55.2 - 00:26:35.8.

<sup>572</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:12:56.6 - 0:13:28.8.

<sup>573</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 01:39:37.1 - 01:40:37.1.

Aida talks about how her partner is religious, but not too much so:

He is also a member of a dervish order, now I do not know exactly [which one], [...], but he is a very positive person, he is not a conservative but he has an open mind, but he is very religious.

On je i pripadnik jednog derviškog reda, sad tačno ne znam, [...], ali jako je pozitivna osoba, nije konzervativan nego je onako otvorenih shvatanja, ali jako religiozan jeste.<sup>574</sup>

One aspect that came up quite a lot in casual conversations, more than during interviews, was the challenge of finding a compatible partner. The difficulty was seen in finding someone that is both religious and encourages his partner to be active. Amira goes into this in some detail:

I am covered, [...] it is like, you're finding someone who is similar to you, so someone who is going to understand it, somebody who is going to support it, somebody who is also going to give you the freedom to choose, along the way, if something happens, that you want to do and all those things, it is really about finding someone that is really, really similar to you. I would never consider marrying someone of a different religion, unless he converts, [...], if somebody is not living that, they can't really understand why you are doing that, it is just like that, but definitely I would need a guy who is not that strict, [...], you have men from different cultures, some who are practising Islam more strictly, some who are not so strict, and you know, I believe that I need some kind of mixture of someone who is really, really going to understand why am I wearing [the] scarf, who supports it all, but on the other side understands all my energy, and all that I want to do and who understands just because I am covered it doesn't mean I can't do all the other things as well, [...] climb mountains, [...], there are a lot of people who don't understand that.<sup>575</sup>

Sigrid Nökel quotes quite a few of her interlocutors as having challenges around (potential) partners presenting as more universalist and modern at first, while actually being traditional.<sup>576</sup> For young women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this aspect of duplicity didn't come up.

Emina talks about the challenge of women having a more equal position:

Now I do not know how smart it is to selectively invest in women, because at some point we were like, somehow in a lower position, subordinates, they had prejudices against us and bad behaviour, and now we are trying, we become mature, we invest in us and now somehow the situation reversed, it is harder to find a man who so much...

E sad ne znam koliko je to pametno selektivno ulagati u žene, jer smo u jednom trenutku bile kao, nekako u nižem položaju, potčinjene, imali su predrasude prema nama i loše ponašanje, a sad se mi trudimo, sazrijemo, ulažemo u nas i sad se nekako

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<sup>574</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 00:52:08.1 - 00:52:35.0.

<sup>575</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:38:18.1 - 00:40:47.7.

<sup>576</sup> Nökel, 236-240.

situacija obrnula, malo je teže naći muškarca koji toliko [su aktivni].<sup>577</sup>

Amina also interprets her husband not talking about religion with her as being rooted in her knowledge of religion:

My husband doesn't drink. That is a thing that [shows] me that he takes [the religion] in but he just doesn't want to discuss it with me, because I know too much.<sup>578</sup>

So, while women appreciate their own being knowledgeable in religion for themselves and their path, it can be a challenge on the dating market.

Emina had also previously mentioned wanting her partner to be Muslim, but then goes into other aspects:

Besides [that], being respectful, being a good person, that is something primary to be[ing] a good person ... then, to have a wider perspective, not to be limited or narrow-minded, [...] I would like him to be open both to the world and to others .. different interests ... like me.

Osim toga da bude neko poštovanje, da bude dobar čovek, to je nešto primarno da je dobar čovek.. onda da bude širokih vidika, da ne bude ograničen ili skučen[...] voljela bih da bude otvoren, i prema svijetu i prema drugima,..različita interesovanja..kao ja.<sup>579</sup>

Somewhat unsurprisingly, the value of being a good person is also emphasised in looking for a partner.

Aida also refers to other aspects of her partner's personality, namely that he is open when it comes to meeting people from other cultures:

Well he's very sociable, maybe more than me. He has [...] many friends from different cultures [...]. At this university where he studies, his friends are from Africa, from Asia, from America, really from different countries. [...] He is very sociable and loves languages as well. He learned both Turkish and Kurdish, and some laz, which is some dialect I don't know, then Italian, he speaks a little German and English and so on ... he loves cycling, and so many things.

Pa on je jako druželjubiv, možda više od mene. [...] ima puno prijatelja iz raznih kultura [...]. Na tom fakultetu gdje studira njegovi prijatelji su iz Afrike, iz Azije, iz Amerike, baš, baš iz raznih zemalja. [...] Jako je druželjubiv i voli isto tako jezike. Onda je naučio i turski i kurdski, i neki lasča jezik koji je neki dijalekt ne znam, zatim talijanski, govori malo i njemački i engleski i tako da... voli biciklizam, i tako puno nekih stvari.<sup>580</sup>

So, Aida talks about his many different qualities, including how educated and well-travelled he is. She also qualifies how it is important to have a partner who is equal. She quotes her father as saying to her:

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<sup>577</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:39:31.1 - 00:40:10.2.

<sup>578</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:17.2 - 00:00:17.3.

<sup>579</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:17:52.3 - 00:18:38.1.

<sup>580</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 00:50:10.6 - 00:51:14.7.

[Marriage] is nothing that has to happen, that sometimes it is better to be alone than to be with some fool, [...] and to find someone who will be our equal partner in life.

[Brak] to [nije] ništa što se mora desiti, da je nekad bolje biti sam nego biti sa nekom budalom, [...]i da nađemo nekog ko će nam biti ravnopravan partner u životu.<sup>581</sup>

Overall, there was a strong wish for a partner to be a practising Muslim, but it was also important to be regarded as equal.

Another aspect where being Muslim intersects with life choices around partnerships is the idea that marriage is necessary to become a full member of society. Tone Bringa discusses how marrying changes the status of a woman from *cura* (girl) to *žena* (woman), while full *žena*-hood is only reached after the birth of a first child.<sup>582</sup> Zilka Spahić-Šiljak quotes one of her interviewees saying: "A girl is a girl and a woman is a woman". That is my mother's definition. And only when you get married do you become a woman'.<sup>583</sup>

This was also pointed out as a key point for women in the diaspora in Berlin. The importance of marriage to transitioning to *žena* didn't come up during my research at all. As this contrasts with existing research, I followed up with an inquiry on social media. Anecdotally, the answers suggested that there is an urban-rural and a generational difference. In contemporary Sarajevo, it is possible to be a *žena* without a husband and children, whereas in other parts of the country it is still more common, particularly amongst older people, to see a woman without a husband as a *cura*.

Elma talks about the connected obligations that come with being religious and being married, which she connects closely:

but [...] all the women that I know who are religious, and who are married, they are really in a good place, they all try the maximum to master their career, to study, to work, to have kids, so everything. [...] as a Muslim woman that really practises religion you can't do everything in the same way as someone that is twenty and doesn't have a child and isn't married.

[...] alle Frauen die ich kenne, die religiös sind, und die verheiratet sind, denen geht es eigentlich richtig gut, die versuchen alle maximal ihre Karrieren zu meistern, zu studieren, zu arbeiten, Kinder zu haben, also alles. [...] als eine Muslimische Frau wenn Du wirklich die Religion praktizierst kannst Du ja nicht ganz alles machen wie

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<sup>581</sup> Interview, Esmā, 11.5.2016, 01:14:02.2 - 01:14:24.7.

<sup>582</sup>Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*, 119.

<sup>583</sup>Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*, 184.

jemand der 20 ist und kein Kind hat und nicht verheiratet ist.<sup>584</sup>

Thus, the combination of working and having a family was an indicator of doing well. Elma also touched on the conflict of time and energy as a resource to invest in practice and other responsibilities. However, she doesn't seem to see it as a major difficulty. 'Being married and having a child' is also mentioned as key differentiator from young women.

Hijab has already been discussed elsewhere in more detail, but it is also relevant in regard to being a (married) woman. Wearing hijab is seen generally as a marker of being more pious and can be connected to marriage. This argument is made by Alma:

You should be beautiful just for your husband and it is my general opinion. Not for the others. If I am married [...] I don't need to be [attractive] for other persons, I should be just beautiful for my husband.<sup>585</sup>

She also talks about an element of fashion and the difficulty of the decision.

I really love [hijab] and I am planning to cover also my hair. I really love it very much. I love the dresses and hijab and colours also. [...] I think every woman who is Muslim, who is practising Islam, should wear it because [...], you should be beautiful just for your husband [...] Not for the others. [...] Yeah, it is a hard decision but I am planning, really. [...] maybe when I marry. Actually, I plan when I dress the wedding dress to put hijab that day but maybe I will do it a little bit before, I need to buy things.<sup>586</sup>

While in other interview sections I didn't find this connection of marrying and becoming a full Muslim woman in the sense of participating in society, for some of these women it does seem to be connected.<sup>587</sup> If covering is seen as another step on the trajectory of piety, it is interesting how it is connected to marrying. There also is the practical step that if the veil is primarily seen as covering from eyes other than the husbands', then it needs a husband to make it worthwhile. There are certainly others who do not see the connection between marriage and hijab as central, as they covered in their teens without a husband in sight. This could also be connected to the idea of womanhood as connected to marriage and the role in society of passing on the faith to the children. Hijab, which will be discussed in more detail below, is thus signifying being a Muslim woman, which is important for the role of a

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<sup>584</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:41:52.9 - 01:43:29.1

<sup>585</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:49:29.6 - 00:49:47.5.

<sup>586</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:49:50.3 - 00:50:09.4

<sup>587</sup> This point was made very strongly by a Dutch diaspora contact and academic.

wife and, by extension, of a mother. Emina discusses how other people assumed that she must be married because she wears hijab:

They think if the husband practises religion, so he wants his wife to do so as well. And when I told everyone that I was studying in Belgrade, everyone asked me if I was a private college, because as a matter of fact I can't be covered and study pharmacy at the state university in Belgrade, which is in Serbia. They also thought I was in a religious school, or that I was married.

Misle muž prakticira vjeru, pa hoće da mu i žena. A kad sam svima rekla da studiram u Beogradu svi me pitaju je'l privatni fakultet, jer kao ono ne mogu ja biti pokrivena i studirati u na državnom fakultetu farmaciju Beogradu, koji je u Srbiji. Mislili su i da sam u vjerskoj školi, ili da sam udata.<sup>588</sup>

The assumption that she is faced with is that she either must be married, to a religious husband, or visit a religious school. Outsiders present her with the image that there must be an outside force through her education or relationship to make her cover.

Motherhood is also an important aspect for women's identity. When talking about the role of women in Islam (see elsewhere) the quote about the kingdom of heaven being found at a mother's feet came up repeatedly. So, motherhood is intensely interwoven with being a woman, and with being a Muslim women specifically. While the distinctions between *cura* and *žena* are not made so explicitly any more in Sarajevo, becoming a mother is still considered a central step in a woman's life, as in most societies globally. Why this is so relevant is argued by other authors in various, connected ways. Elissa Helms writes about the importance of the role of women in raising children and influencing their husband, and thus having responsibility for society as a whole.<sup>589</sup> Andreja Mesarič concludes that marriage is also seen as a religious duty and that raising children in a nuclear family of believers is seen as important for society.<sup>590</sup> Ina Merdjanova places emphasis on the role families play when it comes to communal identities. Women are important in these processes both with regards to values and to construct who is part of the in-group.<sup>591</sup> Thus becoming or being a mother is also key from a religious and societal perspective, not just on a personal level.

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<sup>588</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 01:29:20.6 - 01:30:05.4

<sup>589</sup> Helms, 21-22.

<sup>590</sup> Mesarič, "Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 590.

<sup>591</sup> Merdjanova, 86/87.

Women, from my observations in the field and my interviewees statements, are still the main homemakers in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and as part of that are also responsible for passing on religiosity to the next generation. Arnesa talks about it like this:

[Women in Bosnia] are educated, they have the right to education, but on the other hand, they know the value of the family and that it is a woman's field, that a woman should devote herself to family, develop a family, teach children faith, instil true morale in them, really that feeling. [Žene u Bosni] obrazovane su, imaju pravo na obrazovanje a s druge strane ipak znaju koja je vrijednost porodice i da je to ženin teret, da žena treba da se posveti porodici, da razvija porodicu, da uči djecu vjeri, da u njih usadi pravi moral, upravo taj osjećaj.<sup>592</sup>

For her, participating in society and also being responsible for the formation of the next generation is a key responsibility for Muslim women, as also outlined above, in discussing the role of being a mother.

The idea of the 'right kind of women' reproducing and passing on their values is not only an argument that can be observed in religious circles in Bosnia-Herzegovina. To fulfil the role, as a perpetrator of good values, the Muslim woman must not only be married but also have children, my interviewees stated. An ongoing role for women, however, is maintaining and passing on the religion in the family. Andreja Mesarič sees this as connected to the gender complementarity, so the idea reproduced in some Muslim circles that genders are not equal but complement each other.<sup>593</sup>

The relevance and high standing of women in Islam as mothers is mentioned frequently by my interlocutors, both as someone to be revered and someone who has a great responsibility. The following quotes show the complexity of this situation. Ena is troubled by the issues she has with her own mother:

I don't have a really good relationship with my mum but that's something I am working on [...] In Islam, parents are so important and then mum is the most important person.<sup>594</sup>

Elma also talks about the different moral expectations on women who are 'really practising' and links this to having a family:

[A]s a Muslim woman, if you really practise the religion, you can't do everything like someone that is twenty years old and has no child and

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<sup>592</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:06:03.7 - 01:06:50.9

<sup>593</sup> Mesarič, "Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 594.

<sup>594</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 03:09:40.7-03:13:16.7.

isn't married [...] not [just] in the sexual sense, just in partying and [...] those things. But otherwise, [regarding] the career and [...] generally as a woman I think it's okay [being a woman in Islam].

Du sollst nicht [...] als eine Muslimische Frau wenn Du wirklich die Religion praktizierst kannst Du ja nicht ganz alles machen wie jemand der 20 ist und kein Kind hat und nicht verheiratet ist. [...] nicht [nur] im sexuellen Sinne, einfach [im] Party [machen] und [...] diese Sachen. Aber sonst, was die Karriere [angeht] und [...] überhaupt als Frau [...] denke [ich ist es] ganz ok [als Frau im Islam].<sup>595</sup>

Leijla, who also is successful in her professional life, starts by centring her family when asked to introduce herself. She says: I am called Leijla, I am married, I am the mother of three children ('Ja se zovem Leijla, udata sam, majka sam troje djece').<sup>596</sup> Similarly to the quote of Alma at the beginning of this chapter, her role in the family is the first thing she refers to when asked to speak about herself.

As to how the relationship between career and motherhood in former Yugoslavia is discussed in the literature, this can only be touched upon here. Zilka Spahić-Šiljak links the importance that is placed on the role as a mother to the patriarchal structure of Bosnian society, with women located in the private sphere.<sup>597</sup> Meanwhile, Ina Merdjanova's analyses that female students at theological faculties throughout the Balkans don't see their role as mothers as confining and also don't see it as limiting in terms of career is reproduced in my research.<sup>598</sup> Without this being the focus of my research, I suggest that the perceived ease of combining work and family has more to do with the post-socialist context than the Muslim aspect of society.

At the outset, it was my goal to include more women with children in my sample. That turned out to be challenging because most women who work or study, are religious, and have children rarely can take the time to talk to researchers. For those interview partners who do have children, an overarching point made is that their children should grow up to be good people and focus on their studies. It is important to them that their children become religious themselves, though the 'own decision' value is maintained there as well. For example, Elma speaks about her son:

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<sup>595</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:43:07.0 - 01:43:47.0.

<sup>596</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:02:38.8-0:04:38.0.

<sup>597</sup> Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*, 132.

<sup>598</sup> Merdjanova, 99.

That is his thing, in the end, I can't [...] push him, I [...] wanted to discover it by myself, and I want him to do it like that too, but actually it is really important to me that he turns into a morally good person.

Das ist seine Sache, am Ende, also ich kann ihn nicht [...] drängen, ich [...] wollte es alleine erforschen, und ich will das er es auch so macht, aber eigentlich ist es mir richtig wichtig, dass er moralisch ein guter Mensch wird.<sup>599</sup>

Her focus, thus, is on him growing up as a *dobar čovjek*.

Leijla also speaks about the general good-ness of her children and connects it to her faith:

I primarily raise them to be human beings, [...] but [...] when I look at it, I look through the prism of my Prophet, who was to say the best man by many manners that even the culture of today proves, meaning behaviour, towards other people, other religions, neighbours, friends, relatives, up to spheres where one needs to help others and such things. [...] So it is primarily to learn, read, study the science, when learning and reading alone, [my children] will come to understand some things as to whether they are correct, yes or no.

Pa prvenstveno odgajam ih da budu ljudi, [...], ali opet kad to gledam, gledam kroz prizmu svog Poslanika s.a.v.s., koji je bio, da kažem, najbolji čovjek po mnogim manirima koje dokazuje i kultura sada znači i ophođenje, samo ophođenje prema drugim ljudima, drugim vjerama, komšijama, prijateljima, rodbini do, ne znam, sfera gdje treba drugima pomagati i tako te stvari. [...] prvenstveno da uči, čita, proučava nauku, kad uči sam i čita sam, sam će nadolaziti na neke stvari kako su, da li su ispravne, da li ne.<sup>600</sup>

The general notion of passing on Islam and upholding the community is thus understood very concretely as being a good person, and this is outlined for different areas of life. While women are theoretically seen as equal, there is much pressure on them to fulfil expectations as a mother, the same as everywhere.

When talking about dating, marriage, and family, three aspects were outlined as particularly important with regards to self-positioning as Muslim. Firstly, both in interviews and in my wider fieldwork, the importance of finding a partner with similar values, and the challenges around that, were discussed. Secondly, there was an exploration of the notion that women have to marry to become full members of society; the results here show that this belief varied amongst my interlocutors. Thirdly, I examined motherhood, highlighting the importance of mothers in Islam and their role in passing on the faith. While partnerships and

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<sup>599</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 0:35:02.0-0:47:08.0.

<sup>600</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:13:51.6 – 0:15:09.2.

family are key, another group of significant social contacts are friends. These are the people the next section deals with.

### 8.1.2 Friendship and sociality

Friendship is an area of private life that is important for all ages. In the twenties and thirties, as part of shaping our identity, there is more focus on finding friends that share our values. For most of the young Muslim women I spoke to in Sarajevo, friends played an important role.

First, I will briefly explain some social contacts beyond friendship that were relevant for the women in the ethnographic field, namely neighbours and those encountered through the practice of drinking coffee. Then, I discuss the importance given to celebrating the holidays of other ethno-religious groups. Next, I will look at what is considered important in a friend; as with partners, similarity is mentioned, as is being a good person. Practically, friends did tend to have a similar religiosity as the last part goes into, when looking at hijab-wearing (or not) amongst friends.

Initially, I had avoided writing this chapter, as I had heard that some Muslims prefer not to have non-Muslims as friends and I didn't want to feel like I was being rejected by people I considered my friends post-factum. However, my data as well as other research did not bear this fear out.<sup>601</sup>

One thing that I became aware of in the course of my fieldwork is the importance of other social relations beyond friendship in Sarajevo. This is particularly the case in contrast to my personal surroundings in German large cities, as an academic without a large immigrant community. A key difference is how relevant neighbours are. This is particularly pertinent to the 'first neighbour', but also the whole neighbourhood.<sup>602</sup> Families also tend to be closer connected than in urban German settings, with daily visits between generations or sharing the same house not being uncommon. Another key social aspect is the importance of having coffee. This practice is performed with colleagues, family, friends and neighbours. It is also done between people who

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<sup>601</sup>Mesarič, "'Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 592.

<sup>602</sup>Sorabji, 'Bosnian Neighbourhoods Revisited: Tolerance, Commitment and Komšiluk in Sarajevo'.

are more distant connections, relationships that in English could be described as acquaintances. I really didn't 'get' having coffee. It happens all the time, spontaneously, in cafés and houses alike. When people in Sarajevo 'get coffee', it could be a 1-on-1 or group event. People may also join and leave. It can last from 30 minutes to several hours, and it's always during the day. Conversation moves from making jokes to talking about daily life, politics and gossip about mutual acquaintances. While 'getting coffee', people could also consume other drinks, such as lemonade or, if they drink alcohol, beer. While I did have a lot of coffees with people, I also didn't fully manage to adjust to the spontaneity of the practice – I often had some social or work plans when just bumping into someone in town or getting a call, and I also often didn't see the point of brief chitchat with relatively random people. Now I know it is an important social practice, but it took me some time to understand that, at least at a superficial level. There may have also been some cultural misunderstanding of people saying 'we should get coffee' without actually meaning 'we should arrange a time and place to drink coffee together'.<sup>603</sup> On the other hand, 'we should get coffee' can also be used as a proposal for a meeting with romantic intentions. So, the phrase, as well as the practice, contain multitudes.

Through having coffee, one articulates another social layer outside of close friends/family/neighbours, but closer than completely unknown people. While 'friendship' is difficult to clearly delineate in any context, it is important to note that it carries a slightly different meaning in Sarajevo to how many readers might interpret it.

Congratulating social contacts on their religious holidays or even celebrating together is seen as a marker of good inter-religious relations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This is particularly prevalent in the constructed memory of the harmonious past in Yugoslavia, but still plays a role today. Several women emphasised sharing holidays with their friends of other faiths. For example, Hasna says:

I have been to Christmas [...] in the cathedral here. I went with friends from here that are Catholic and actually also Orthodox [friends]. Actually

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<sup>603</sup> This seems to be a common challenge for Germans living abroad, I have anecdotal evidence from the US; for New Zealand, see Culture Swap, Steffen Kreft and William Connor. "Lifeswap Episode 7 - Making a Funny Party." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqmMC1mxy4k&t=1s> (accessed 17.2.2020).

[the] orthodox [friends] aren't really religious [...] but [the] Catholics are.<sup>604</sup>

She talks about how, as a Muslim, she attended one of the most important Catholic celebrations. The mention of Orthodox contacts is relevant too because the Serb-Orthodox church follows the Julian calendar, celebrating holidays on different dates than Catholics. Amina also fondly mentions Christmas. After I, the interviewer, asked if she had attended any religious celebration of another faith, she answered:

Yes, I went for a few, actually on Monday and Tuesday last week [December 26 and 27]. I went for cookies and [...] celebrations [with] my friends, they always invite me. Those are my friends that I bring *kurban* to, so we are all okay with that. This is something they are celebrating.<sup>605</sup>

She follows this with a theological explanation:

In Islam, we call people in Abrahamic religions 'people of the book', so Islam is like the latest, we respect that the Bible in its original form was sent to Isa, a.s. or Jesus, [...] there were so many prophets in Islam, we are acknowledging Muhammed as the latest.<sup>606</sup>

Her reasoning is particularly interesting because, in the memory of Yugoslav society as peaceful and marked by coexistence of different ethno-religious groups, shared holidays play a large role. So, something that was part of the socialist performance of 'Brotherhood and Unity' is kept up, but now legitimised through religious doctrine. The visiting friends for food in the days immediately after main holidays also seems like a Muslim tradition that has been adopted by Christians in the region. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is widespread, at least between Catholics and Muslims. As one informant told me, it is less common with Orthodox people because 'all my neighbours are Serbs now [after the war]'.<sup>607</sup> Both Catholics and Muslims, however, did say that they celebrate with Orthodox colleagues at the workplace or among friends. So, wishing happy holidays to social contacts of other religious groups, or even celebrating together, is seen as important and a sign of inter-ethnic harmony. This connects to Iva Lučić's theory that, for development of the Muslim/Bosniak identity, relations to other ethno-religious groups are key.<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>604</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:08:52.3 - 00:09:17.2.

<sup>605</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:35:13.4 - 00:35:41.6

<sup>606</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:35:42.0 - 00:36:26.8.

<sup>607</sup> Fieldnotes, 11.5.2016.

<sup>608</sup> Lučić, 107; 288.

The other point that is made about friends, as well as partners, as outlined above, is that it is important that they be similar. However, 'similar' can also refer to aspects other than religion or faith – one of my closest friends in Sarajevo is a practising Muslim who wears hijab, and even though I don't, we had many shared interests. In our case, these included hiking, cooking, and writing our PhDs. It is important not to reduce practising women to that one aspect of their identity. An example of shared similarity that comes up is the excerpt I am about to quote by Hasna. In it, she articulates how religious people may feel that they are better understood by religious people, even if they are of another religion. She says:

Sometimes [...] it is easier for me to ask my friends that are Catholic what [they] would [...] do, and at the end we have more or less the same opinions about most of the things, for example [...] about a partner [...], they would also like someone that is Catholic' that would make things easier for them, but at the end we are making bottom line [that they are] a good man or woman or whatever.<sup>609</sup>

So, she likes to exchange with her friends that have a different faith about relevant topics, pointing out the similarities. She doesn't explicitly mention it, but it is likely that this is seen in contrast to non-believers, of whatever background, who don't share the values of Hasna and her catholic friends. She also mentions the importance of being good, a *dobar čovjek*, as the core consideration.

Meliha also refers to the importance of being a good person rather than necessarily an outwardly practising Muslim. When talking about her friends, she says:

Most of the time they are religious people, [...] I can't look into their beliefs, but I look for friends who are honest, who are morally good, they don't have to be covered or anything, but [...] they have to have certain qualities.

Meistens sind es religiöse Menschen, [...], ich gehe nicht in ihren Glauben rein, aber ich such mir schon Freunde die ehrlich sind, die moralisch gut sind, sie müssen nicht bedeckt sein oder so, aber [...] einige Qualitäten müssen sie haben<sup>610</sup>

While she talks about how the inner values are more important, she also says that most of her friends are religious. Taken with some other observations about the socialising of covered women, this may point to a discrepancy, namely that

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<sup>609</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:18:43.2 - 00:19:24.2.

<sup>610</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:21:33.5 - 00:21:56.3

covered women are mostly friends with other covered women. While the ambition to befriend different types of people independent of outward shows of religiosity exists, the practice in reality may differ. One reason, as Emina refers to (below), is that there can be differences between the types of activities more pious and less pious people tend to engage in. Another may be around the expectation of behaviour covered girls and women face, both by themselves and externally.

The similarity that is seen as important in friends goes deeper than what is outwardly visible. Ena speaks about why it is better to spend time with a specific type of person:

[My friends are] definitely mixed. There's a lot emphasis in the Quran about [...] hang[ing] out with Muslims. [...] it's like an advice from God to us Muslims. I asked myself a lot why is that so. And then I realised when I'm hanging out with people [...] who are not conscious enough about their place in the world, I lose it. We start to talk about stuff that [is] so not important (laughs). I realise that I lose remembrance of God, remembrance of my purpose here on Earth. [...] You don't have to be Muslim but I need people who are conscious [...] people who [...] found peace. [...] So, I cannot say that I chose who I am going to hang out with because I don't know what's in you. You can be a better Muslim than me and not even say that you are a Muslim. Or not even declare that you are a Muslim. Or don't even know about Islam. I have to see it first. So, I'm never going to be exclusive [in terms of] who I am going to hang out or not hang out with.<sup>611</sup>

She does see it as important who she spends time with, but explicitly mentions that they do not need to be practising Muslims. This also ties in to the *dobar čovjek* concept.

Amina, when conversing with her Christian friends from the United States, also sees some benefit in examining her beliefs closely and in exchanging ideas with people of other religions:

You know something that is important to my friends is important to me [...] I even read the Bible, [...] I have a copy in English [...]. I even have a friend from America that [was] sent [by a] Christian organisation [...] and I really [...] love them, [...] I have been friends with them for fifteen years, and [...] we had discussions about how they see things, how I see things, and sometimes it made me wonder [...] it helped me even [to] investigate my religion.<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>611</sup>Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 00:52:43.2 - 00:57:24.0.

<sup>612</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:37:56.3 - 00:39:44.2.

Being Christian from the US, her friend doesn't fall into the Orthodox-Catholic-Muslim pattern prevalent in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Leijla mentions how it actually can be beneficial to be around people that don't practise so much. When asked if her friends are also religious, she answers:

Well, about half-and-half. [...] Not that it is an exclusion criterion that they are only religious, some are, I move in both circles, so to say. [...] there is a positive side when I am not [with religious people], [...] In order to draw them closer, I attract them with my behaviour, my gestures, in order to get them interested in exploring that religion or a regulation or something.

Pa polovično da kažem. [...] Da kažem nije isključeno samo da su religiozni, nego su, krećem se, da kažem i u jednom i u drugom krugu [...] ima pozitivna strana kada nisam [s religioznijim ljudima], [...] Da bi поблиže je privukla svojim načinom ophođenja, svojim gestovima, da bi je zainteresovala da sama istražuje tu vjeru ili neki propis ili nešto slično.<sup>613</sup>

This connects again to the idea that acting well is good and a sign of being a proper Muslim, of being a *dobar čovjek*. By demonstrating that through her behaviour, Leijla sees an opportunity to show what she sees as the positive sides of Islam. In order to do this, she needs contact to non-practitioners, though not necessarily non-Muslims.

Hasna mentions nationality and religion too:

It is easy amongst people you know, but on the big picture it is quite hard, because religion is definitely connected to nationality, but people mix it up in the wrong way. So, it is really hard, particularly with people that are less educated, and have less friends from other religions or interact with people that are only of their religion, it gets really weird, because they don't know how open you can be with someone from a different religion, because it doesn't really make you too different. It is an aspect of life.<sup>614</sup>

For her, being friends with people of other religions is a marker of education. This entails being aware of the differences between religion and nationality. Being able to make this distinction sets her apart from those, it is implied, that are 'only' customary Muslims. Bridging the gap and making friends with people from other religions, even having debates with them, as Amina points out, requires a solid grounding in one's 'own' religion, in this case Islam.

As Verena Maske points out for young Muslims in Germany, friendship can strengthen practice between practitioners and help to spread Islam to those

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<sup>613</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 00:14:35.6 - 00:15:09.8.

<sup>614</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:20:16.3 - 00:20:54.4.

who aren't believers or who neglect Islam.<sup>615</sup> Several quotes below show how some of the women in my sample like to socialise with others who display a similar level of religiosity to them.

Often, hijab, denoting being covered or not, is used as shorthand in these descriptions. It is interesting to note that while my interlocutors spoke about showing their religion and thus attracting people to Islam, in their own stories of becoming Muslims, peers played no role at all. Ena does mention one girl, but the influence seems to have been minimal: 'In high school [...] all the people around me were Muslims basically but I just didn't [...] have an interest in that.'

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Emina also talks about how common interests, reflected in what she does with her time, can connect her to people:

You feel the most comfortable and at ease with [the people you meet through your faith]. I have a friend who is not so religious and does not practise so often, so then I go to Arabic [class], and if someone has no interest in the same things then [we are] spending less time together [which does], not mean that we do not love each other ... for example if she is going to a club or with a boyfriend...if she goes somewhere where I wouldn't, I'll avoid it, and in some way it sets us apart, so I see her less. But in Serbia, for example, I have my best friend who is very close to me. Jovana is her name, she is a Serbian Orthodox Christian, and she knows some things about me that no one knows, [...] not even my female Muslim friends from Sarajevo. I lived with her for a year, we spent a lot of time together, have been through a lot and she knows me, knows a lot of private things about me. It's a rare person who knows how I feel, and she knows when I write something in a chat, she asks me what's going on because she knows me very well even though I don't say anything. She can read me the way I write something, even though I don't write anything. So, I appreciate those friendships too.

Najviše ti prijaju takvi ljudi [koje upознаš kroz vjeru]. Imam prijateljicu koja nije toliko religiozna ali ne prati tako često, pa onda ja idem na arapski, jer ako neko nema interesovanja ista onda se manje druži, ne znači da se mi ne volimo.. jer naprimjer ako će ona u klub ili sa momkom, ako će negdje tako gdje ja neću, ja ću to izbjeći i na neki način to nas razdvaja, pa je manje viđam. Ali u Srbiji naprimjer imam najbolju prijateljicu koja mi je baš bliska. Jovana se zove, ona je Srkinja hrišćanska i ona zna neke stvari o meni koje ne zna niko, [...] čak ni prijateljice muslimanke iz Sarajeva, živjela sam s njom godinu dana, prošle smo mnogo, dosta vremena smo provodile skupa i poznaje me, zna mnogo privatnih stvari o meni. To je rijetka osoba koja zna i kako se osjećam, i ona zna kad ja nešto napišem na chatu, ona me pita sta se dešava jer me poznaje baš dobro iako ja ništa ne kažem. Može da me pročita iz načina kako nešto napišem, iako ništa ne napišem. Tako da cijenim i ta prijateljstva.<sup>617</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> Maske, 118-119.

<sup>616</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 00:10:45.5 - 00:11:30.9

<sup>617</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:33:14.5 - 00:35:30.6.

So, in her current life in Sarajevo, she grows more distant from people who engage in activities that she doesn't want to participate in, like going to clubs and socialising with men, and who don't do the things she does, such as learning Arabic. However, her best friend is non-Muslim, and the history and closeness they share is more important than what maybe sets them apart in terms of religiosity. Belma quite explicitly says that it is not her responsibility to disperse negative ideas people might have in Germany or Bosnia-Herzegovina about Islam, saying : 'I am not an education system.' ('Ich bin kein Bildungssystem').<sup>618</sup> She thus has a different view than most people I spoke to about the role of being a good example and thus demonstrating the beauty of Islam, attracting non-practitioners and people that are not Muslim.

Emina elaborates on the prejudices of people in Serbia, where she grew up, and explains how they influence her preference to live in Sarajevo:

[they] will always be different to you, strange, different, like, 'she is a Muslim' and stuff. [...] Well, I'm here, I'm part of society, but we're all different [...] sometimes when I walk, I feel the looks, you feel someone's attention and you know it's because of the headscarf [...] and here it is different, Sarajevo accepts different people and nations, faiths. I have my crew of people here that are similar to me, I like it here, we have similar lives, ways, interests, etc. We all look for [friends] similar to ourselves, at least for our closest friends.

uvijek će biti drugačiji prema tebi, čudan, drugačije kao ona je muslimanka i nekako. [...] Dobro ja sam tu, dio sam društva, ali ono različiti smo svi [...] nekad kad šetam osjetim poglede, osjetiš nečiju pažnju i znaš da je to zbog marama.. a ovdje je drugačije, Sarajevo prihvata najrazličitije ljude i nacije, vjere.. Imam svoje društvo ovdje - ljude koji su slični meni, i lijepo mi je ovdje, imamo slične živote, načine, interesovanja itd.. Svi tražimo sebi slične, bar za najbliže prijatelje.<sup>619</sup>

She really likes the fact that in Sarajevo, she blends in. Additionally, although she refers to the idea of Sarajevo as multi-cultural and accepting of all faiths, she also acknowledges finding friends who are similar to her.

Hasna, who does not wear hijab although she plans to cover once she marries, makes the following observations about the social dynamics:

I don't actually have any close friends that are covered. I mean, I know many of them, but I am not really close. Because they tend to actually kind of stick together, or I just have that impression, but it doesn't make a difference. Nobody is actually covered in my family.<sup>620</sup>

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<sup>618</sup> Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, 01:41:38.4 - 01:42:37.4.

<sup>619</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:09:59.6- 00:11:34.0.

<sup>620</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 01:29:52.5 - 01:30:23.8

While I was attending a course at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo, I noticed something similar. While many of the participants were Muslim believers, during the coffee breaks, one table tended to be only hijabis.<sup>621</sup>

Amira also talks about friends being similar to her, while she explicitly mentions that they include some that are covered and some that aren't:

A lot of my friends, [...], they are still covered, I don't know, I guess you find people that are similar to you as well, so in Nahla actually, it is a mixture of women, some of them are not covered, some of them are covered, but still, in that kind of surrounding, where you can talk about [Islam], like my roommates, one is covered [and] one is not covered, and we talk about those things.<sup>622</sup>

Leijla no longer has friends that are not Muslim:

I used to be [friends with people of other religions], in high school [was] maybe the last time. And later, no, I had no contact, so to speak, with other faiths, that I could [have befriended people]. While I was in high school and in elementary school maybe, I had friends of other faiths, and I went to their homes [...] Other than that, no.

Prije sam bila [prijatelj s ljudima drugih vjera], dok sam bila u srednjoj školi možda posljednji put. A poslije ne, nisam imala nekog doticaja da kažem sa drugim vjeroispovijestima da bi mogla. Dok sam bila u srednjoj školi i u osnovnoj školi možda, imala sam prijateljice koje su druge vjeroispovijesti pa sam im da kažem kao išla kući eto kao na... A drugo ne.<sup>623</sup>

While she doesn't have any more friends from other religions, it is not something she is opposed to. Rather, she doesn't come in contact with potential friends so much. As a working mother of three who also practises regularly, her opportunities to meet non-Muslims are limited, although she mentions elsewhere the advantages of being in contact with non-religious people and also that some of her clients at work are not Muslim.

Elma places the emphasis on the value of being 'normal', a category that for her also includes having mixed friends:

Here in Sarajevo it is actually normal [...] that I also have friends that are somehow not Muslims, and we function normally, we talk about normal things, totally normal. And I don't know why anyone has a problem with that.

Hier in Sarajevo ist es eigentlich ganz normal, [...] dass ich auch Freunde habe [...] die nicht Muslime sind, und wir funktionieren ganz normal, wir reden über normale Sachen, ganz normal. Und ich weiß auch nicht wieso eigentlich jemand damit ein Problem hat.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>621</sup> I participated in the 'Diploma in Islamic Studies' programme at the University of Sarajevo from 2.2.-28.4. 2016.

<sup>622</sup> Interview, Armina, 1.10.2015, 00:45:08.2 - 00:45:25.4

<sup>623</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 00:07:55.7 - 00:08:17.5

<sup>624</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:36:12.5 - 00:36:45.1

She also talks about the challenges of her group of friends not being religious:

But actually, I am maybe the only one that is maybe religious, however you define that. I try to bring [religion] into my everyday life, although it is actually pretty hard if you aren't in a group of people like that. If the others aren't religious, it is a bit more difficult than if they are religious.

Aber eigentlich bin ich vielleicht die einzige die [...] religiös ist, wie man das auch sagen kann. Ich versuche das in meinen Alltag rein zu bringen, obwohl es eigentlich ziemlich schwer ist wenn Du nicht in so einer Gruppe Personen bist. Wenn die anderen nicht religiös sind ist das ein bisschen schwerer als wenn die doch religiös sind.<sup>625</sup>

Ena describes how she does then look for connection in pious spaces:

If somebody has the need to talk [about religion] I'm always open to it. But [...] I needed to make places where I can talk about it like after work. Last year [...] after work I had to go to the mosque (laughs), or to those gatherings, or any sort of lecture, any place where I can find people with whom I can talk about it. I really needed it because I had, [...] the need to learn stuff, and I had the need to share my experience [...] and [...] to get advice.<sup>626</sup>

This resonates with the phenomena described by Andreja Mesarič about pious Muslims searching out places of 'Islamic Sociability'.<sup>627</sup> Moving in social circles of people that are also religious thus makes it easier to maintain religiosity, as others also point out.

Overall, there are two somewhat contrasting strands when talking about friends. On the one hand, the women I spoke to propagate that it is a positive to be friends with different people. This is shown, for example, by visiting people of other religions during holidays. Having non-Muslim friends also came up as a quality of being 'normal', as well as an opportunity to have a good influence on non-practitioners. On the other hand, the importance of friends being 'similar' was also mentioned frequently. This does not automatically mean that friends need to also be practising, or even Muslims. Theoretically, the emphasis was rather placed on them being a 'good person'. However, when talking about this in more detail, there are clusters of friends who tend wear hijab, or not. One of the reasons given for this is the shared interest and the similarity in things people do. An area of life where all the women in my sample interact with non-practitioners is at work or university. Unlike partners or friends, co-workers, professors, or clients generally cannot be chosen on the basis of similarity.

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<sup>625</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:07:38.3 - 00:08:09.8

<sup>626</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 00:45:40.3 - 00:46:40.0

<sup>627</sup> Mesarič, "Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina'.

Thus, professional life offers an interesting field of positioning and practising, which will be outlined in the following section.

### 8.1.3 Negotiating practice at work and university

Professional life takes up a lot of time and also tends to shape our sense of who we are. Two key areas showed up around being a Muslim woman and working. The first is how important paid work is, and also how important it is to do it excellently. Another is how practice is handled at the workplace or university. Some women are quite open about it, while others prefer to keep their employment and religion separate. The focus here is on prayer, fasting, and to a lesser degree, exchanging with colleagues.

For the women I spoke to – again keeping in mind that my sample was selected for those working – being professionally active was a ‘given’. This is likely to do with Bosnia-Herzegovina’s socialist history, wherein women being part of the workforce was seen as desirable. Whether someone is visible as a practising Muslim or not makes a difference in the perception of potential employers, clients, and colleagues. While being ‘out’ about one’s religiosity can happen via not drinking alcohol, fasting during Ramadan, or taking time to pray, the most visible and ongoing sign for many women is wearing a headscarf.

For the women I spoke to, it is important that their practice does not have a negative influence on their professional life. In Đermana Šeta’s study on hijab-wearing women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it becomes very clear that hijabis are discriminated against in the workforce. This is ascribed to the fact that they are not seen as impartial. She also analyses that this leads to ‘self-discrimination’, meaning women with headscarf don’t put themselves in certain situations to avoid being discriminated against.<sup>628</sup>

Leijla talks about how she has clients from different backgrounds. She relates to the world coming from faith; this also applies to professional contexts, if people want to talk about religion:

This is primarily where my colleagues work with me who do not even wear a headscarf. [...] In my association, we have children who are of different faiths, of other nationalities. So, the approach is, just talking, talking about those professionally relevant things. There is the instance

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<sup>628</sup> Šeta, 128-129.

when a parent, [...] expresses a need for something concerning religion, then it can be said, I always have some, no matter what I say, I speak again from the context of faith about those things [...] but as far as talking about faith alone, it is not done directly. But with our approach, with our way of dealing, we want to show that Islam is more beautiful and so on.

Prvenstveno tu sa mnogom rade moje kolegice koje ne nose čak ni maramu. [...] U mom udruženju imamo djecu koja su druge vjere, druge nacionalnosti. Znači pristup jeste, samo se priča, razgovara o onim stručnim stvarima. Postoji ono znači kada roditelj, [...] iskaže neku potrebu za nešto što se tiče vjere, onda se može reći, ja uvijek imam neki, bez obzira šta govorim, govorim opet iz konteksta vjere. [...] tako te stvari ali što se tiče samog pozivanja u vjeru, to se ne radi direktno, nego svojim pristupom, svojim načinom ophođenja želimo pokazati da je Islam ljepši i tako.<sup>629</sup>

In other words, as a baseline, Leijla talks about professional topics separate from religion, but if someone talks about religion with her she answers from her understanding of being Muslim.

Entwined with the socialist heritage and capitalist necessity, my respondents also spoke about working as a religious obligation. It is seen as an important part of being a Muslim woman in society. Arnesa refers to theological precedents:

A woman has to be involved in society. In the first Muslim state, the first hospital was run by a woman, during Mohamed a.s. a woman ran the hospital, so now someone will [have the nerve to] tell me that she did not see any naked men.

Žena mora biti uključena u društvo. U prvoj muslimanskoj državi, prvu bolnicu je žena vodila, za vrijeme Muhmeda a.s. Žena je vodila bolnicu, pa će meni sad neko reći da ona nije vidjela nijednog golog muškarca.<sup>630</sup>

The precedent she cites implies in her interpretation that moral codes around sexuality should not prevent women from working. So, if it serves to contribute to society (as for example, in running a hospital) it is okay for her to see naked men, even though usually this would be prohibited. Leijla also explicitly makes the connection between being Muslim and working:

As for our association, so, our parents do not pay, I have six other people in my association who are employed, who work. Speech therapists, those who work with children with disabilities, psychologists, preschool teachers, and more. As you can see, I wear a niqab, it means I am Muslim.

Što se tiče našeg udruženja, znači naši roditelji ne plaćaju, ja tu u svom udruženju imam još šest osoba koje su zaposlene, koje rade. Logoped, defektolozi, psiholozi, profesori predškolskog odgoja i drugo. Kao što vidite, ja nosim nikab, znači muslimanka sam.<sup>631</sup>

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<sup>629</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 00:03:18.2 - 00:04:13.9.

<sup>630</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:27:31.9 - 01:27:48.5.

<sup>631</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 00:02:30.2 - 00:02:48.5

Aida talks about how her parents installed the importance in her of being able to take care of herself financially and to find personal fulfilment in professional life:

And [our parents] raised us so that we are self-sufficient, before everything else, that we learn how to take care of ourselves, that we aren't ever dependant on anyone else...in the instance where we have to marry, that we had to have a man with us [at all times], etc.. Instead of this, we learned to make money for ourselves, to find a job, to explore what we like, what we love.

I odgajao nas je tako da budemo same sebi dovoljne, prije svega, da naučimo same da se o sebi brinemo i staramo, da nismo nikad ovisne o nekom drugome, da kao da moramo da se udamo, da moramo da imamo muškarca uz sebe itd., nego da same naučimo da za sebe zaradimo novac, da nađemo posao, da istražimo šta je to što nam se sviđa, što volimo.<sup>632</sup>

Working, according to what her parents instilled in her, is a means of remaining autonomous, which is an important value according to this quote.

Elma, who works a full-time job and has a child, talks about how there can be a conflict between work and practising religion in terms of limited resources, for example during Ramadan.<sup>633</sup>

The idea that being a good Muslim means doing one's best in all areas of life also stretches to professional excellence as part of religious responsibility, as Ena elaborates clearly:

You live here because you have the responsibility to be the best human being you can be. And that's the only thing you need to do. You just need to try and work, and work. If you are a psychologist, be a psychologist, if you are [...], a mother, be a mother. If I am talking in this interview, for me it's just to talk, I don't know, answer the questions, the best way I possibly can.<sup>634</sup>

She also refers to being a mother and contributing in the interview, but importantly also to work. So, independent of what kind of work is done, there is the opportunity to make it part of one's religious practice by doing it well. Though she doesn't make it explicit, implicitly this is connected to being a *dobar čovjek* and how this concept permeates into directly religious questions.

Aida talks about limitations coming from the outside, not from the Muslim community but from wider society, that limits them:

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<sup>632</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 01:11:40.9 - 01:11:57.6

<sup>633</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:40:10.9 - 01:41:19.7.

<sup>634</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 01:16:19.8 - 01:17:15.3.

I have not seen any woman say that anyone forbade her something, like you can't do sports, or you can't, I don't know, go to school, or you can't have a PhD. Recently, there was a situation where a woman could not be a judge, but it was not [prohibited] by Muslims but by others, meaning members of other faiths who tried to ban the wearing of hijab in the courtroom as a religious marker, as [if to say there] can be no religious characteristics, hence neither can there be hijab; however, hijab is not a religious characteristic, it is part of identity, and I think that is the difference.

Nisam vidjela nijednu ženu da joj je sad nešto bilo zabranjeno kao ne možeš ti da se baviš sportom, ili ne možeš, ne znam, da se školuješ ili ne možeš ti biti doktor nauka. Nedavno jeste bila situacija da žena nije mogla da bude sudija, ali to nije bilo od strane muslimana nego drugih, znači pripadnika drugih vjeroispovijesti koji su pokušali da zabrane nošenje hidžaba u sudnici kao vjerskog obilježja, kao ne mogu nikakva vjerska obilježja, pa ne može ni hidžab, međutim hidžab nije vjersko obilježje, to je dio identiteta i ja mislim da je to ta razlika.<sup>635</sup>

While working or studying was a category in selecting my sample, practice was not. Rather I referred to belief as self-identified. So, when analysing how practice is conducted at the workplace, I have to keep in mind that not everyone has a practice or at least not in a regular way that would influence work. Overall, even for those that do pray regularly and/or fast, the effect on the professional life was reported to be minimal.

One topic that does come up in relation to work and university is having a space to pray. In her study on young Muslim women in Germany, Sigrid Nökel, noticed that whether to pray at the workplace or not was one of the key balancing acts between Islamic rules, one's own intention, and one's wider context. This requires weighing being a Muslim against social recognition, particularly in regard to professional ambition.<sup>636</sup> Elma talks about this, and also the option of ducking out to a mosque:

If I asked, maybe they would give me something, [...], we don't have any room at all, [...] so I can't do it anywhere [...]. Although I actually wanted to ask this year if I could go to the mosque during work because of Ramadan. So, not on the other days but because of Ramadan I would go, but I wanted to ask, I'm not sure what they think about it, even though my boss is actually religious, but he's a guy who doesn't want work and religion are somehow mixed up and that it so influenced the work. Which is actually normal, and I wouldn't do that either, but I thought I could at least ask.

Wenn ich nachfragen würde vielleicht würden sie mir auch irgendwas, [...] wir haben überhaupt keinen Raum der dafür geordnet ist, [...] deshalb, ich könnt es auch nirgendwo machen, [...] Obwohl ich eigentlich dieses Jahr nachfragen wollte ob ich zur Moschee gehen könnte, während der Arbeit, wegen Ramadan. Also nicht an den

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<sup>635</sup>Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 01:28:51.6 - 01:29:44.2.

<sup>636</sup>Nökel, 60.

anderen Tagen aber wegen Ramadan würde ich gehen, aber das wollte ich nachfragen, ich bin mir nicht sicher was sie darüber denken, obwohl mein Chef eigentlich religiös ist, aber er ist so ein Typ der nicht will das die Arbeit und Religion irgendwie vermixt sind, und dass es auf die Arbeit so influenced. Was eigentlich auch normal ist, und das würde ich auch nicht machen, aber ich dachte nachfragen kann ich ja.<sup>637</sup>

Even though Elma's boss is himself religious, she opted not to ask for a place to pray on the grounds of lack of space. She was also hesitant to ask about leaving the office to pray during Ramadan on the grounds of wanting to keep work and religion separate. This separation is something she portrays as 'normal', a quality that is of high value for Bosnian society in general and something Elma brings up a lot.

How open people are about praying regularly depends a lot on who they work with. Ena doesn't have conflicts at her workplace regarding prayer, but she does leave the office to pray:

I started to go the mosque [on break during] my work every day and everybody knew, I [...] would run to the mosque literally to make it in half an hour to pray and to come back but I really, really needed that half an hour.<sup>638</sup>

Amina is much more open about her practice at her workplace:

[My colleagues] know that I am religious, I even have my equipment for prayer, so I usually [...] pray, [...] and they sometimes talk about me as a preacher.<sup>639</sup>

She elaborates some more on the factors that mean that her workplace is religion-friendly, and how that shows:

Many people [at my office] are familiar with the religion and they are really young, so they really accept that, [...] so for example when we go for team buildings, they would always consider that there are people that are not drinking, and that they need to have their private rooms for prayer, [...] we would pay less for the drinks and food because we don't drink; drink[ing] is more expensive.<sup>640</sup>

The link she makes here between people being young and thus more accepting of religious people perhaps has to do with the increased religiosity since the war. The population who grew up seeing public or semi-public display of faith as an everyday occurrence is likely more accommodating than those who were raised during socialism.

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<sup>637</sup>Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:14:13.6 - 00:15:22.7

<sup>638</sup>Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 02:19:32.6 - 02:20:38.4

<sup>639</sup>Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:04:05.4 - 00:04:31.2

<sup>640</sup>Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:04:31.4 - 00:05:13.3

Alma, who has her own business as a dentist with her brother, is very open about praying:

There are two [rooms], so when I don't have a patient I go and pray and then I continue with my work and that's it. That's fine. (laughs) Yes, patients know that I pray. [...] I say to them 'Just wait [...] five minutes I need to do something, to pray'.<sup>641</sup>

So, if and how prayer takes place at work was reported as being handled quite differently by different women.<sup>642</sup> This ranges from not praying at work at all to stepping out to a mosque or praying during worktimes, more or less discreetly. While prayer is sometimes moved to other times or performed outside the office, as in Ena's case, fasting is usually noticed by colleagues. As discussed previously, fasting is also a practice that is performed by people who don't follow so many other religious requirements. Fasting around people who are not doing so themselves is seen as a challenge, but a positive one that is welcome. Amina says:

There are other people fasting as well, but they are not in my office, [...] but I don't have a problem with that, because part of fasting is being fine with people that, people eat food.<sup>643</sup>

Elma also talks about how she sees it as being on her to be okay with people eating, rather than those not fasting having to be discreet:

That's not the point that everyone takes their food and does something like a 'Secret Society', [...] so they don't have to do it, even though they do also sometimes say, 'Yes, sorry, Elma, I have to eat something here or drink something' but it doesn't matter. Actually, it really doesn't matter. Das ist ja nicht die Sache das alle ihr Essen wegnehmen und in irgendwie so Secret Society irgendwas machen, [...] deswegen müssen sie das auch nicht machen, obwohl sie auch manchmal sagen, 'Ja, sorry, Elma, ich muss jetzt was hier essen, oder ich trink was' aber ist egal. Aber ist eigentlich egal.<sup>644</sup>

In religious circles, it is considered rude to eat or drink in front of others during Ramadan, as outlined in more detail in the section about fasting above.

For Ena, it is not so much about the food but about other aspects that can be challenging during Ramadan:

[Working with other people] [...] it's just not possible to be like ok, I am clean 100% morally [because, for example, they are swearing] [...] I just had to accept that that was my, not struggle but, that was a plus for me

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<sup>641</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:02:38.5 - 00:03:06.8

<sup>642</sup> The same as Nökel noticed for Germany. Nökel, 73.

<sup>643</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:05:51.9 - 00:06:14.2

<sup>644</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:13:24.4 - 00:14:11.4

that I am working and fasting. It's plus, for me that is my thing because in Arabia they just lay [around] for a whole day or something like that.<sup>645</sup> In being confronted with other people who are swearing, she has the possibility to work more on herself than if she were in a setting where there is no need to work during Ramadan; surrounding oneself with different people.

Another aspect around work is how much religion is explicitly mentioned there, beyond the visible practice by for example wearing hijab, praying, or not eating. Ena expressly states that she sees her practice as something private:

I do work [at] a workplace [where] there are no Muslims at all, I don't talk about that there [...] I'm here to work, not to talk about my private stuff.<sup>646</sup>

Amina feels her identity as a Muslim strengthened through her colleagues, who she also spends time with privately:

Most of the time [I feel more Muslim than others] (laughs) [...] because my life over the past four to five years is mostly work, and mostly the same crowd I am hanging with, and most of them are not very religious, [...] they know the basics, they believe that there is God, but they just don't know the rules, they don't read about Islam or anything, they just know through hearsay.<sup>647</sup>

In contrast to those that are not practising, she is knowledgeable and also practises in the workplace.

So, several aspects come up around the professional areas, whether studying or employment, for young Muslim women in Sarajevo. The first is around being visible as a practitioner, which can be through wearing hijab, taking the time to pray, or not eating during Ramadan. The importance of work also emerged as a topic, with priority given to being a good person doing excellent work over following religious rules precisely. Then the question of taking the time to pray and where to do so at work was explored. Another practice, fasting during Ramadan, was also touched on, and different views on how to deal with this in a professional setting were outlined. While fasting and praying can be two ways that religious practice is visible to the outside world, by far the clearest marker is wearing a headscarf. This will be discussed, along with how women in Islam are seen in the next chapter around self-conception of women.

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<sup>645</sup>Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 02:54:03.5 - 02:57:24.8

<sup>646</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 00:44:58.5 - 00:45:33.9.

<sup>647</sup>Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 01:38:25.3 - 01:40:41.4.

## 8.2 Self-conception as woman: stereotypes, practice and lived experience

When discussing the self-positioning of Muslim women in Sarajevo, there are seemingly limitless directions the conversation could take. Several aspects of being a woman have already been discussed, such as the role of a mother and the view of women in socialism. There are many other directions that conversations about women and Islam would take. For example, two potentially interesting fields that lead too far away from the core questions of this research are feminism and sexuality. This section examines practices and beliefs around hijab and how young women in Sarajevo see the role of women in Islam.

This chapter was probably the most challenging to write in terms of how I managed the data generated from interviews and conversations. Although I approached the interviews in good faith, basically trusting what my interview partners said and valuing their perspectives, I was also aware that issues around hijab and women in Islam are more contentious than other topics.<sup>648</sup> I didn't get the impression that anyone was actually lying to me; however, I couldn't shake the feeling that certain topics were glossed over or presented from one perspective only. As discussed in the methods chapter, there is a well-known phenomenon in qualitative research of 'expected answers' being given. This was particularly evident for the topic of hijab. This could also be a sign that, as previous research has shown, 'women construct their identity in opposition to misconceptions that exist about Islam, particularly about women'.<sup>649</sup>

Overall, in my conversations about women and Islam, I found my interlocutors quite defensive. This defensiveness may have stemmed from the negative and orientalist view widespread in western Europe about Muslim women, which led to my interview partners' desires to convey a different, positive image to me.<sup>650</sup> Amongst her sample of young Muslim women in Germany, Sigrid Nökel

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<sup>648</sup> As is one of the core fundamentals of study of religions, see: Edith Franke, 'Kleines Fach – Große Aufgaben. Der Beitrag der Religionswissenschaft zu aktuellen Debatten um religiöse Konfliktlagen', in *Religionswissenschaft im Kontext der Asienwissenschaften: 99 Jahre religionswissenschaftliche Lehre und Forschung in Bonn*, ed. Manfred Hutter (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009), 15.

<sup>649</sup> Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*, 203.

<sup>650</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, 'Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others', *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002). The negative views on women in Islam more generally were also presented to me regularly when speaking about my research with people in Germany, the UK, or France.

describes aspirations regarding behaviour, noting that it was important to her sample that they come across as polite, friendly and well dressed. Such self-presentation was intended to counteract stereotypes related to scarcity of education and poor manners associated with guest workers. Nökel finds a 'vague consensus...[of] what adequate Islamic feminine behaviour is', a set of attributes that overlaps, with some differences, with the idea of 'being a good person', which has emerged as central in my findings.<sup>651</sup>

In the early phases of my research, I was hoping to avoid writing about headscarves at all, as after studying religion and participating in public events around Islam for years, I was somewhat saturated with the ever-repeating conversations. However, as hijab turned out to be the single most common code in all the interviews I conducted, the data demands its own sub-chapter. Hijab is perceived as the primary marker when it comes to being Muslim, and this is inherently gendered. There are different reasons to wear hijab or to choose not to, such as various expectations and preconceptions that women who choose to veil are somehow 'good'. First I will start with these notions, and then I will outline some aspects of being a woman in Islam as described by my interview partners.

### 8.2.1 Hijab: A practice charged with meaning

Different ideas around belonging and not belonging, around gender equality and being European (see below) come to a head with regards to the headscarf/hijab.

Muslim women are usually thought of as a woman wearing a headscarf, which is interpreted as a symbol of oppression amount a substantial part of the population in Western Europe, including some feminists. Although not all Muslim women wear hijab, it is a visible feature that identifies religious affiliation.

When discussing hijab, a number of different factors around being a Muslim woman come to the forefront. My reluctance to include it stems from the impression that in Germany and in other countries in 'the West', there is often

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<sup>651</sup> Nökel.

exaggerated importance, at times obsessively so, given to headscarves. Responding to the loaded symbolism of the practice in Europe, Fatima El Tayeb has named hijab the 'key symbol of Muslim difference'.<sup>652</sup> One example of many where I saw this being played out occurred when I visited the book launch of Benjamin Idriz's recent work about women and the Quran.<sup>653</sup> After he outlined various theological issues, Idriz examined and discussed them with several Muslim women on stage – some covered, some not – the packed floor was opened for questions. Rather than responding to the wide variety of theological issues raised, a series of proverbial old white men proceeded to comment on hijab, questioning the women's own interpretation of their choices and portraying themselves as saviours.

Women who wear a headscarf report different experiences than those who do not. Covered women are categorised as (religious) Muslim women both in Bosnia and in international contexts, which means that in the international, Western European environment, they are sometimes classified as different, not belonging, etc. These women particularly are often victims of Islamophobic attacks and experience discrimination in the workplace because they are classified as 'Other'.

I am aware that I also am at risk of having created a perceived hierarchy myself when writing about covered women as an outsider. This has been a concern to me, as I do not want to play in to patriarchal norms or take a colonialist view. To address this, I repeatedly brought into my consciousness the biases I may have. I held back in conversation around emotional topics raised during the fieldwork and am extra careful to examine my preconceptions when analysing topics in my research that carry a lot of value for me. Nonetheless, I am aware that I bring myself as a person into this academic endeavour and that I can't be entirely neutral.

One area that intersects with Islam constructed as the 'Other' to Europe is around the practice of wearing hijab. In response to this constructed othering, many women who wear a headscarf are particularly intent on demonstrating

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<sup>652</sup> El Tayeb, 83.

<sup>653</sup> Benjamin Idriz, *Der Koran und die Frauen - Ein Imam erklärt vergessene Seiten des Islam* (Gütersloh: Güterloher Verlagshaus 2019).

that they chose to do so themselves, that they have opinions, and are, in the words of many of my informants, 'normal'.

European Muslim women, who are not possible if one constructs an exclusivist contrast between East and West, Islam and Europe, exist in Bosnia-Herzegovina in large numbers. Women in Sarajevo are aware of this otherness discourse and use various strategies to position themselves against it, on the one hand with positive identification, on the other with demarcation. However, this was not characterised overall as difficult or requiring dissolution; tension or opposition was not present in their own perception. One's own kind of practice, having one's own position is called 'normal'. The normal, reasonable position, according to my interview partners, having is having a religious practice and theological position that they developed themselves. A crucial part of a positive identification strategy is presenting oneself as an active, acting subject, as opposed to the passive, oppressed object.

Interestingly, while claiming their own agency and activity, many still see Arab Muslim women as suppressed, clearly demarcating their difference through comments such as, 'you know, we are not like some Arab countries; we are women, but we still go to work and are normal and everything'.<sup>654</sup> In this way, the research reflects Milica Bakić-Hayden's concept of 'Nesting Orientalisms', particularly in regard to hierarchies of othering.<sup>655</sup> Bosnian Muslim women in my research thus project the idea of covering as a symbol of suppression onwards to Arabs. While the women in my sample rail against hijab being seen as a sign of backwardsness, they themselves use the same narratives when talking about niqab with regards to those women further in the East.

To accommodate spatial limitations, I will first provide some background information and then explore some key points. First, I will look into how many women in Sarajevo wear hijab and what styles of headscarf are popular. Then, I briefly discuss historical developments and the current debates around niqab. This is followed by looking into hijab as an ethnic marker and the relevance of showing one is Muslim. After that, I explore three main areas in detail. These consist of the high expectations women wearing hijab face, the importance of

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<sup>654</sup> Personal communication Amira, 1.10.2015.

<sup>655</sup> Bakić-Hayden. Here 921/22.

seeing covering as individual choice, and how wearing a headscarf is portrayed as the endpoint of a trajectory of being a believer. These topics are interconnected and influence one other.

Journalists, tourists, and visiting academics to Sarajevo often point out the number of hijabis they see.<sup>656</sup> For visitors, the number of women wearing a headscarf is also likely due to where they spend time. In the Ottoman old town of Sarajevo, many mosques, religious schools, and cafés don't serve alcohol, attracting practising Muslims from all over the city and even out of town.<sup>657</sup> Moving away from the very centre of Sarajevo, the number of covered women that can be observed is no larger than in major western European cities like Berlin, Amsterdam, or Paris. While for 2019 there is no hard data available, only a minority of practising Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina are covered, my personal observations suggest.

In addition to whether a woman is covered or not, the type of headscarf worn is also a potential signifier. As Reyhan Şahin pointed out in her research in Germany, the way a headscarf is tied, the amount of coverage provided, and the combination of the scarf with other clothes can communicate one's background, religious interpretation, and other crucial points.<sup>658</sup> In Sarajevo, the most common styles are what Şahin terms the 'headscarf-jeans-code'. A long-sleeved top reaching well below the waistline is combined with wide pants or a long skirt. Some younger women in Sarajevo, though none in my sample, also wear the 'headscarf-coat-code', which is associated with Turkey and particularly adopted by Turkish women of an older generation. These clothing styles are the same as the ones Şahin found in her research amongst young hijabis in Germany.<sup>659</sup> Beyond wearing the scarf itself, hijabis also adopt a wide variety of personal styles, which range from alternative, flowing hippie-ish attire, urban 'hipsters' wearing fashionable weird patterns, and the smart dress of lawyers or other professionals, who look like they wear pearl earrings under the headscarf.

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<sup>656</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>657</sup> Mesarič, "Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 588.

<sup>658</sup> Şahin.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid., 210-213.

In her study on wearing hijab in Sarajevo, Andreja Mesarič noted that there was a negative view of those women who wear 'dark colours and loose garments' by those 'who wear headscarves with European-style clothing' in the city.<sup>660</sup> I did not, however, find this reproduced in my research.

Several women in my sample wear modest clothes without covering their hair, something that won't be explored here in detail as it was not raised as a relevant topic during interviews. However, at the other end of what is considered modest, covering the face is a choice that is discussed by my informants in the interviews and wider fieldwork. Therefore, before going into the narratives of why the women in my sample covered or not and what their considerations were, I would like to do briefly delve into the practice of niqab in Sarajevo.

Since full face veils were banned in Yugoslavia 70 years ago, in 1950, and since then, the discourse against the practice has been fierce. During socialist times, the headscarf was considered backwards and not very modern, and women wearing hijab were restricted from certain government jobs.<sup>661</sup>

Today, many people, including those wearing hijab, describe face veiling as foreign (usually Middle Eastern), as 'not Bosnian', and as implicitly or explicitly as backwards and suppressed. Women wearing niqab are derogatorily referred to as 'ninjas' in conversation. While many women wearing niqab on the streets of Sarajevo are Arab tourists, there are definitely also some local women who cover their face. Despite various negative stereotypes around niqab and viewing it as 'Other', in the past Bosnia-Herzegovina also had endemic styles of dress that functioned similarly. Specifically, the traditional forms of *zar* and *feredža*, though neither exactly the same as burqa or niqab, offer an equivalent amount of covering. Even more than with rumours around hijab, for niqab the stereotype is perpetuated that local women who wear it are under influence of Muslims from the Middle East, either directly through relationships or money or indirectly through social media or online indoctrination. Thus, when discussing niqab, referring to the perception of Arab women is unavoidable. As discussed elsewhere, Muslim women I interviewed

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<sup>660</sup> Mesarič, 'Wearing Hijab in Sarajevo: Dress Practices and the Islamic Revival in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', 21.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid., 19.

often construct a strong boundary against Arab women and the perceived backwardness of their interpretation of Islam.

Zilka Spahić-Šiljak describes this rejection of Arab women for secular women in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, but this was also true for the believers in my sample. Spahić-Šiljak sees the distancing of local women from Muslim women from the Middle East as rooted in the negative view of hijabis in Europe. She claims that '[Non-observant women in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo] support the "othering" of women who are different, and claim the right to be arbiters of the relationship between religion and modernity.'<sup>662</sup>

One example of this was demonstrated in how Hasna talks, clearly showing that she views the wearing of niqab, and as what she sees as forced covering, as negative:

In Bosnia, it is brilliant [being a woman in Islam], but I think in the East it is not really good. Because they are still undereducated, and they still have to be covered if they don't like it, I mean covered by niqab, having everything on. [...] in *hijaz* [the Western part of Saudi Arabia where Mecca and Medina are located] it is also [...] part of the [tradition], it is not only part of the religion, so you can't really judge them for doing that, [...] I mean forcing them to do it is very bad, I guess. [...] I think that a woman in the East isn't really good. Especially for the education. She is still expected to just be at [home], waiting for her children.<sup>663</sup>

Hasna here makes the link to possibilities women have through education versus the expectation that they be the main homemakers.

Niqab is also described as being pushed upon women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as something extreme and forced.

For example, Amina says:

In my *mesheb* [particular Islamic school of thought], we need to cover as we go to prayer, so only face, hands and feet can be seen, so face isn't something strict, so it is a cultural thing from Eastern countries, and certain people that come here and [...] spread their views of religion, force that on women, and I understand women that feel that that is part of how they practise religion, but people are full of extremes, you know, either they are completely loose, off the hook of religion, or they just take EVERYTHING seriously.<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>662</sup> Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*, 164.

<sup>663</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:50:49.9 - 00:52:20.5.

<sup>664</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:18.1 - 00:00:18.2

Here, in Amina's words, the specific Eastern 'Other' is seen as negative, there is a perception of force, and also an interpretation that extremes are not something to strive for.

Thus, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, niqab is now viewed similarly to how hijab is viewed in other places such as Western Europe as Oriental and different, imagining that women that are so covered have no choice.

Only one of the women I spoke to, Leijla, wears niqab, and the interview with her was challenging to arrange. She only agreed to it after two different people approached her and vouched for me. Leijla had experienced some negative interactions with journalists and other sensationalist parties.

The topic of covering is seen as a defining point, similar to conversations around Islam in Western Europe. However, likely because many practising Muslim women in Sarajevo are covered themselves, the point is the degree of covering, not hijab in general. There is quite some rejection of wearing niqab, which is seen as unnecessary and part of an Arab tradition, rather than part of being Muslim.

Leijla offered further specifics on how she works and participates in society, by outlining why she founded an association which supports children with various difficulties:

[The reason is] for *dahwa*, that is, to show Islam in a more beautiful world, in fact, that a woman under the niqab, like me, can work, can function normally like a woman who has neither a headscarf nor a niqab or is of another faith or something similar (laughs).

Razlog [...] je bio dahvedski, to jeste da prikažem islam u ljepšem svijetu, u stvari, da žena pod nikabom, kao ja, može da radi, može da normalno funkcioniše kao i žena koja nema ni marame ni nikaba ili je druge vjere ili nešto slično (laughs).<sup>665</sup>

Through these words, it becomes clear that an important point in the discussion amongst Muslim women in Sarajevo is how much niqab limits agency. It also highlights the importance of labour in Bosnia-Herzegovina: 'functioning normally', and demonstrating one's ability to do so, is frequently equated with working. The interpretation here thus neither fits into an accommodationist or neo-fundamentalist frame, which can be seen elsewhere in the Balkans.<sup>666</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> Interview, Leijla 24.1.2017, 0:02:38.8-0:04:38.0.

<sup>666</sup> Endresen, 223.

There is a discrepancy between the reasons women give themselves for covering, and the public perception of why they cover. As demonstrated overwhelmingly in interviews and outlined below, women's reasons for covering are highly personal and individual. Meanwhile, from the outside, a woman's choice to wear a headscarf is often not seen as something personal; rather, it is put in to a political, public, and even nationalist frame. In the context of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where ethno-nationalist and religious identities are tightly entwined, this can be hard to disentangle. This has also been explored by other researchers working on Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, such as Andrejka Mesarič, Julianne Funk and Zilka Spahić-Šiljak.<sup>667</sup>

Zilka Spahić-Šiljak refers to the national/ethnic framing as follows:

Hijabi Bosniak Muslim women, in particular, serve as markers of the internal and external boundaries of the Bosniak nation. They are considered 'true believers' and 'keepers of morality' among Muslims, and form clear boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims through wearing the hijab and the code of conduct (*haya*) that accompanies it. Yet, they are engaged and participate actively in the social and cultural life of BiH.<sup>668</sup>

Here it is important to remember that for the women I spoke to, the most relevant boundary that came up was not between them and non-Bosniaks, but rather between them as believers and the so-called 'Muslims by name'. As will be outlined below, the aspect of needing to behave particularly well as a visible Muslim does come up. However, the women I spoke to did not frame ethical behaviour in clearly religious terms. The expectation of being a *dobar čovjek*, a good person, is seen as something largely independent of formal regulations. Thus, based on my findings I somewhat disagree with Spahić-Šiljak, who is an absolute expert on the topic. It is possible that while women wearing hijab explicitly distance themselves from politics, as shown above in the chapter on ethics, they are nonetheless used as symbols by people following a nationalist agenda.

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<sup>667</sup> Funk; Mesarič, 'Muslim Women's Dress Practices in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Localizing Islam through Everyday Lived Practice'; Spahić-Šiljak, *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid., 'Nation, Religion and Gender', in *Politicization of Religion, the Power of Symbolism - The Case of Former Yugoslavia and its Successor States*, ed. Gorana Ognjenović and Jasna Jozelić (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 187.

Andreja Mesarič refers to how 'different positionalities can be articulated at the same time (Kaiser 2001), in this case different intersections of being a woman, Muslim, Bosniak, Bosnian, and European'.<sup>669</sup> I did not see such subtleties in these different layers. For my interlocutors, wearing hijab is about being Muslim without bringing in other aspects of their identity, such as being Bosniak or European, as Mesarič suggests. It stands, however, that being Muslim can't be fully separated, in the Bosnian context, from the ethnic identity of being Bosniak. Julianne Funk, meanwhile, describes covered women as 'a symbol: her public expression of personal faith externally identifies her as a Muslim, no matter her reason for covering, her beliefs or her practices'.<sup>670</sup> Having now outlined the perspective of hijab as related to ethnicity, the next section is about why my informants themselves say they cover.

Some acknowledged hijab as a visible marker of being Muslim. Amina, for example, says, 'In Islam [...] our religion should be visible on the outside [...] you know hijab is a way of being modest and also of showing that you are a Muslim.'<sup>671</sup>

Meliha mentions elsewhere that she sees wearing hijab as religious requirement.<sup>672</sup> She also sees it as a way to communicate her being Muslim:

I covered because I didn't want to explain to people anymore I am this and that, I have faith, [...] I think that every one of my steps that is in public, sends people a signal or a story. That is why I feel safe and, how should I say, in my place.

Ich hab mich bedeckt weil ich den Menschen nicht immer erklären wollte ich bin das und das, ich bin gläubig, [...], deswegen denke ich das jeder meiner Schritte der in der Öffentlichkeit ist, [...] den Menschen ein Signal, oder eine Geschichte schickt. Deswegen fühle ich mich immer sicher und, wie soll ich sagen, auf meinem Platz.<sup>673</sup>

Arnesa also talks about hijab as a marker of being Muslim as a reason to cover, as well as acting as protection:

You put [the scarf] on in the street if you want people to know who you are, what you are, not to approach you and still know how they should treat you.

Staviš [maramu] kad izlaziš na ulicu ako hoćeš da ljudi znaku ko si, šta si, da ti ne prilaze i da ipak znaju kako se trebaju ponašati prema tobom..<sup>674</sup>

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<sup>669</sup> Mesarič, 'Wearing Hijab in Sarajevo: Dress Practices and the Islamic Revival in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', 15.

<sup>670</sup> Funk, 216.

<sup>671</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:02.1 - 00:00:02.3.

<sup>672</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:30:22.7 - 01:31:01.6.

<sup>673</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:57:33.6 - 00:58:04.6.

<sup>674</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:22:43.7 - 01:24:51.6.

When Amira spoke to her Imam about whether she should cover or not, he encouraged her own choice and suggested that the practice could bring greater forms of protection as well as challenges:

[the] only thing I can tell you, is [...] a scarf, [...] when people see you, they know some kind of rules, [...] they can approach you this way, that way, they know [...], what [...] your boundaries [are] so that is some kind of protection for you, but there are also other things that you are going to face, challenges as well.<sup>675</sup>

So, by publicly showing themselves as practising Muslims, the idea is that hijabis have 'protection' from unwanted sexual attention, an idea that has been corroborated by other research in the region.<sup>676</sup>

My interlocutors also spoke of hijab providing some construction of an in-group, of women with headscarf belonging together. One way in which this is affirmed is by the practice of greeting each other with 'Selam Aleijkum'. Uncovered women sometimes also greet those that are covered by saying 'Selam' or 'Selam Aleijkum', thus positioning themselves as practitioners.<sup>677</sup>

My informants were careful, in the conversations with me, not to judge others' intention with regards to faith and practice, a concern that was raised repeatedly during my fieldwork was that particularly young women would cover for 'the wrong reasons'. For example, previous research has shown that some women who don't wear hijab see it as being worn as a fashion accessory.<sup>678</sup>

In Western Europe, hijabis face both a variety of pre-conceptions from others as well as specific expectations for their behaviour. They often contend with comments on their knowledge of language, questions about their agency vis-à-vis that of their male relatives, and with surprise at their being educated.<sup>679</sup> In Bosnia-Herzegovina, in previous studies, covered women have reported that they are seen as backward, or as extremists and fundamentalists.<sup>680</sup> Others

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<sup>675</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:18:03.8 - 00:18:49.4.

<sup>676</sup> Đermana Šeta found in her research that there is an improvement in this regard after covering. Šeta, 106.

<sup>677</sup> Mesarić, "'Islamic cafés" and "Sharia dating:" Muslim youth, spaces of sociability, and partner relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina', 585-586. fieldnotes.

<sup>678</sup> Funk, 215.

<sup>679</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>680</sup> Funk, 216.

have found that women with headscarves face disadvantages on the labour market or that the parents of women who cover fear this will be the case.<sup>681</sup>

In my data, there are not so many clichés. High moral expectations feature prominently, but nothing about being seen as less qualified professionally. Likewise, Andreja Mesarič's finding that uncovered women see hijab as 'as something that is not compatible with the time (modernity) and place (Europe) they live in' was not reproduced by my own research.<sup>682</sup> Overall, the situation regarding hijab in Sarajevo is very different to that of Kosovo or Germany, and also to what other research has shown on Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Alma does report some disadvantages, but not first-hand:

I think in Bosnia people are discriminated because of hijab. I think many friends, many [of] my friends who are wearing hijab, they can't get [a] job easily, really. I have a friend [...] wearing hijab, but she couldn't get the job in bank so she gave up that job. But she is still covered. Yeah, so about the job, it is a problem here I think, little bit, not that much but little bit yes.<sup>683</sup>

Here it also bears consideration that the employment situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina is terrible, both for those covered and for those that aren't.

Alma states that the judgements about covered women prevented her friend from getting a job. Meanwhile, Arnesa is thinking about the advantages of not covering, because no one is judging her, and then they may be more open to seeing the faith through her. Thus the preconceptions of others, are seen in diverse ways by Muslim women in Sarajevo. Arnesa actually sees not wearing hijab as an advantage as to how people would perceive her as a practising Muslim:

[...] at university [...] the effect is stronger when I am uncovered and when I live by the principles of Islam and when someone sees that I have gone out to pray. This has a much greater effect on that person who is watching me [...] because they looked at me and had no prejudice, and when they saw that I was a decent person, and [...] I pray, I provide a better image of being Muslim in that sense.

[...] na fakultetu [...] jači je efekat kad sam ja nepokrivena i kad živim po principima Islama i kad neko vidi da sam otišla da klanjam. To puno veći efekat ostavlja na tu osobu koja me posmatra, [...], jer su me gledali i nisu imali predrasuda i onda kad vide da sam ispravna i da pri tome klanjem možda pravim ljepšu sliku tom muslimanu u tom smislu.<sup>684</sup>

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<sup>681</sup> Bilic, 176; Šeta.

<sup>682</sup> Mesarič, 'Wearing Hijab in Sarajevo: Dress Practices and the Islamic Revival in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', 20.

<sup>683</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:25:31.1 - 00:26:04.2.

<sup>684</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:26:54.7 - 00:27:40.0.

She thus also has the idea that by being a *dobar čovjek*, behaving well, and then demonstrating she is Muslim through prayer, she can make Islam seem attractive.

Amira also has an interesting perspective – when moving from her religious high school to university, she herself also had prejudices:

I was the only one covered at my department at university, and at first you could see those barriers between you and other people, because of my own prejudices and stereotypes of them, and their prejudices and stereotypes about me.<sup>685</sup>

So these preconceptions go in both directions. She goes on to say that once she got to know the uncovered people at her university, this changed. This is a recurring theme, how getting to know people as people makes a big difference in both how people are judged and how they judge.

There are thus a number of different reasons to cover, but in any case, the decision to do so emerged as a very significant one throughout my interviews. In large part, this seems to be connected to the added responsibility and expectations that come with wearing hijab. Women who cover, as explicitly Muslim, are held to a higher moral and religious code both by themselves and by others.

These higher expectations are reflective of the fact that wearing hijab is perceived, both by those who are covered and those that aren't, as a sign of firmer belief. This is reflected in some women who don't cover describing themselves as not being there 'yet'. The act of covering is thus clearly seen as a step on a trajectory to being more pious. The focus hereby is on the act of choice and of being motivated by internal drivers. Thus, in the following pages three interconnected sub-sections around hijab will be explored with data from interviews. The first is the higher expectations that are placed on covered women with regards to being a good person and an impeccable Muslim. The second is the emphasis placed on individual choice with regards to whether or not to cover. The third is how wearing hijab is viewed at a step along a trajectory of religious practice.

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<sup>685</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:41:29.2 - 00:41:50.1.

### 8.2.1.1 Expectations

Covering is seen as a personal choice, and there are expectations for behaviour connected to wearing hijab. Women that are covered are expected to behave in particular way, both by themselves and others. On the one hand, this is because they are visible as Muslims and thus perceived as representatives of Islam.<sup>686</sup> On the other hand, they are expressing a higher level of piety and are thus held to a higher standard in all sorts of ways, including behaviour. Amira makes this point very clearly: 'once you put on the scarf, you have rules you should respect'.<sup>687</sup>

What kind of behaviour is expected is outlined in the following pages, but it is important to note that the unwritten rules are comprehensive. They reflect the expectation of being a good person, and go beyond it.

Personally, I found some of these points quite disturbing – women, once they wear hijab, are seen as not quite human anymore but in higher sphere where no errors are made. The incredibly high expectations come from both those that are covered themselves and those that aren't. This also is a reason why some women shy away from covering, as it is also seen as a permanent decision. I also profited from these high expectations during my research, because covered women in particular went out of their way to help me, to be kind and supportive.

The internal process and higher level of piety, which are reflected in the scarf, also mean that certain behaviour is excluded. This behaviour is not just excluded from the outside, but is expected to come from an innate motivation. For example, Frenky, who herself isn't particularly pious – she drinks alcohol and likes to party – talks about young women in the following way:

Nowadays, [...] you can see very many girls, including younger ones, wearing the headscarf, [...] I'm just afraid that somehow it is worn for the wrong reasons, that's my opinion now, that may not be right, but those I know, with whom I had contact, or have spoken, because you can see that it is really not done right. Nowadays you can see, for example, those who have a boyfriend who also show that they have a boyfriend, so you should not wear a headscarf for much longer.

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<sup>686</sup> Mesarič, 'Wearing Hijab in Sarajevo: Dress Practices and the Islamic Revival in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', 14-15; Pieter Stockmans. "Muslim women in Sarajevo: 'Our starting point is a prejudice against us, this makes us stronger'."

<https://www.mo.be/en/interview/muslim-women-sarajevo-our-starting-point-prejudice-against-us-makes-us-stronger>, (accessed 26.4.2017).

<sup>687</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:10:45.2 - 00:10:50.8.

Heutzutage kann man wirklich [...] sehr viele Mädchen, auch jüngere, sehen [...] die Kopftuch tragen, [...] Ich hab nur Angst dass irgendwie aus den falschen Gründen getragen wird, das ist jetzt meine Meinung, das ist vielleicht nicht richtig, aber diejenigen die ich kenne, mit denen ich Kontakt hatte, oder gesprochen habe, da kann man sehen das es nicht wirklich richtig gemacht wird, heutzutage kann man zum Beispiel die sehen, die einen Freund haben, auch zeigt dass sie einen Freund haben, da sollte man dann eigentlich nicht mehr lange Kopftuch tragen.<sup>688</sup>

Frenky criticises not only having a boyfriend, which a woman with internal motivation shouldn't, but also that this is shown in the public sphere. That the transgression is public, that the 'forbidden' behaviour is shown, is seen as particularly bad.

Arnesa also talks about sexualised negative public behaviour, which for her must stem from the fact that women have put on the headscarf for external, rather than internal reasons:

This is often seen in Sarajevo, there are girls who are covered, what are the reasons why they are covered, I do not know because they are – sorry to say – but shaking their booty, I mean walking more seductively, and being covered. Well, why on earth are you covered? What's the point? You're covered because someone told you to put on that headscarf.

To se često u Sarajevu vidi, ima djevojaka koje su pokrivena, koji su razlozi zašto su pokrivena, ja ne znam jer one vrte guzicom da izvineš, mislim zavodnije hodaju, vrte se nešto a pokrivena. Pa džaba ti što si pokrivena. U tome je poenta. Ti si pokrivena jer je tebi neko rekao stavi tu maramu , a što hodaš sva utegnuta, to je kao uredu. Mislim, na nekim ženama se ne treba vidjeti ni dio tijela ali se vidi da hodaju zavodljivo, smiju se zavodljivo i takve stvari. Ipak je to malo...Ima žena koje nisu pokrivena, mislim da gola prođe ne bi je vidio jer se ne ponaša tako, ipak ima nekakvu skrušenost u sebi, znači smirenost i to. A ima žena koje su i pokrivena pa su ono razbacane na sve strane i svašta. Mislim, svakom njegovo, tako da ta marama ništa ne predstavlja.<sup>689</sup>

So, for Arnesa, the way someone behaves reflects their reasons for covering, and she draws conclusions that if the behaviour doesn't match what she expects, then it can't really come from internal motivation. Though she sees that she can't really know the motivation, she deduces that it can't be inherent, or they would behave differently.

Elma also talks about reasons to cover other than piety:

Some have done it for men [...] some try to get something out of poverty, a little more money, a better life, and they think if a man would take them, and if she has to cover herself, then okay, then she does that, if she can live [a better life] then.

Einige haben es wegen Männern gemacht, [...] manche versuchen aus Armut irgendwas anderes zu bekommen, ein bisschen mehr Geld, ein besseres Leben, und sie denken wenn

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<sup>688</sup> Interview, Frenky, 9.12.2015, 00:38:14.9 - 00:39:23.

<sup>689</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:22:43.7 - 01:24:51.6.

ein Mann sie nehmen würde, und wenn es sein muss dass sie sich bedecken muss dann ok, dann macht sie das, wenn sie dann besser leben kann.<sup>690</sup>

Throughout my interviews, the ideal reasons to cover were internal desire and personal faith, although for Elma, covering to have access to resources – as long as it is a woman's personal choice – is also acceptable.

For women with hijab, correct behaviour is seen as important in at least two ways, my research shows. Firstly, for them as individual Muslims and secondly as representatives of Islam. This meshes again quite well with my finding that people don't want to judge, or don't want to be perceived as judging, an inner quality. For women wearing hijab, there is a particular pressure to represent Islam in a positive way, as they are so visibly Muslim.

When looking at stories in the media about hijabis in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there is often a focus on their professional life. In 2012, when Amra Babić was elected mayor of Visoko while wearing hijab, it made news not only in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but globally.<sup>691</sup> In 2015, a group of parents protested a hijab-wearing kindergarten teacher being hired in Srebrenica.<sup>692</sup> In 2016, there was a wave of protests and online petitions when a law banning religious symbols from courts was implemented.<sup>693</sup> As is often the case with these kinds of laws, it was seen by Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina as specifically targeting hijab-wearing women. Women wearing hijab also report discrimination in the labour market more widely.<sup>694</sup>

The focus here is always on the appearance a Muslim, rather than belief or practice. Such visibility also impacts behaviour. Amina doesn't cover all the time. She usually puts on her headscarf at home already when going to mosque

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<sup>690</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:49:39.1 - 00:51:31.2.

<sup>691</sup> 'Bosnien: Premiere für kopftuchtragende Bürgermeisterin-Ökonomin Amra Babic übernimmt Amt in Visiko', *Der Standard* (2012), <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1348285524479/premiere-fuer-kopftuchtragende-buergermeisterin>, accessed 11.9.2019.

<sup>692</sup> 'Bojkot vrtića zbog vaspitačice koja nosi maramu', *Al Jazeera Balkans* (2015), <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/srebrenica-bojkot-vrtica-zbog-vaspitacice-koja-nosi-maramu>, accessed 1.7.2015.

<sup>693</sup> Mersiha Gadzo, 'Hijab-wearing women react to Bosnia court ban- Women employed in judicial institutions can no longer wear the hijab to work in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Al Jazeera* (2016), <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/02/hijab-wearing-women-react-bosnia-court-ban-160202133259025.html>, accessed 23.6.2016.

<sup>694</sup> Šeta, 126-130.

and sometimes wears it during the day. She talks about how it modifies her behaviour:

Hijab is something that is really taken out of context now, but it is promoting modesty and something cultural, modesty from the soul, and with your body, [...] when I put my scarf on, [...] I really, really feel that I wouldn't go to somewhere where people drink alcohol, where there is a lot of stuff that is prohibited, because somehow it guards me from doing those things.<sup>695</sup>

The reason she describes for being more in line with prescribed norms, such as not going to a bar, is not that she fears judgement, but that wearing hijab motivates her. It is impossible to discern to what extent disapproval at being seen there – which could also come from people drinking, like Frenky – plays into her motivation to adapt her behaviour.

Several women also explicitly mention how wearing a headscarf somehow transcends being an ordinary human. This then leads to some women not covering. For example Frenky says: 'I respect that [headscarf] too much to make [...] such mistakes, human mistakes' ('Ich respektiere das [Kopftuch] zu sehr da Fehler zu machen, solche Fehler, menschliche Fehler').<sup>696</sup>

Elma, who isn't covered, also speaks about merging the personality with the scarf:

I think that [wearing headscarf] is a really heavy responsibility, if you do it you should be really involved in it, that means not only the clothes, your style, your behaviour must be different, in the sense you should not entirely change, as a person, but carry this thing [the headscarf] with dignity, because I think that it is very important. Because it's not just a visual effect, but your entire person, in total, should [...] merge.

Ich denke dass [Kopftuch-Tragen] eine richtig schwere Verantwortung ist, wenn man es macht sollte man auch richtig daran beteiligt sein, das heisst nicht nur die Kleidung, Deine Art, Dein Benehmen muss auch anders sein, im Sinne Du sollst Dich nicht ganz verändern, als Person, aber mit Würde, dieses Teil tragen, denn ich denke dass es sehr wichtig ist. Denn es ist nicht nur ein visueller Effekt, sondern Deine ganze Person, insgesamt, sollte [...] sich verschmelzen.<sup>697</sup>

In the conversations around expectations, there is very little reference made to theology, it moves more to a value-based, moral plane, in line with the 'good person' concept.

Frenky talks about being worthy of wearing hijab:

That doesn't mean that you necessarily should wear headscarf; in the Quran it even says that it is better not to wear it if you aren't worthy.

Es heisst nicht das man unbedingt ein Kopftuch tragen soll, den Koran steht sogar

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<sup>695</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:05.9 - 00:00:05.9.

<sup>696</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 00:47:48.3 - 00:48:00.2.

<sup>697</sup> Interview, Elma, 11.5.2016, 00:28:23.2 - 00:29:21.0.

dass es besser ist es es nicht zu tragen, also wenn man dem nicht würdig ist.<sup>698</sup>

Other behaviours that are seen as inappropriate for a woman wearing hijab is having a nose piercing, smoking, and being unfriendly.<sup>699</sup> It is striking that the focus is very much on things that can be seen. Thus, although the expectations are around internal, moral aspects, what is evaluated is the external, visible behaviour. Meliha excludes eating ice cream in a cone:

When I covered I didn't think about it at all. Over time, of course you think, today I'm not doing a lot of things because I am covered. [...] Eating ice cream with a spoon is okay, but licking an ice cream and wearing a headscarf is immoral for me. For me. Als ich mich bedeckt habe habe ich darüber überhaupt nicht nachgedacht. Mit der Zeit denkt man natürlich, heute tue ich viele Dinge nicht weil ich ein Kopftuch trage. [...] Eis essen mit einem Löffel ist ok, aber ein Eis lecken und ein Kopftuch tragen ist für mich unmoralisch. Für mich.<sup>700</sup>

During the interview I didn't quite understand why, and the answer didn't help me to figure out if it was because it could be seen as sexual, or crude, or something else. Her description was:

I don't want to see a covered woman that is licking ice cream in the middle of the road, it isn't nice if you are walking and then licking ice cream or whatever, a lollipop or chewing gum. Stuff like that. Ich mag keine Bedeckte sehen die ein Eis leckt, mitten auf der Strasse, es ist nicht schön wenn man geht [...] und dann noch ein Eis leckt oder was weiss ich, ein Lolli oder ein Kaugummi kaut. So diese Sachen, also.<sup>701</sup>

Frenky uses the same phrase when referring to hijabis smoking:

It isn't really strictly forbidden, smoking when you wear a scarf, but I think it isn't nice to look at.

Es ist jetzt nicht strikt wirklich verboten, dass Du rauchst, wenn Du ein Tuch trägst, aber ich finde es nicht schön zum ansehen.<sup>702</sup>

Arnesa also uses this expression. She refers to the fact that eating during Ramadan is seen as inappropriate for hijabis, even if they are menstruating:

The only thing is, it is a bit ugly to see, in fact I am not covered, so I am not judged by people like that, but for example it is ugly to see a woman who is covered who eats in Ramadan. Although she may have [...] I mean, in Ramadan, [...] a woman when she gets a menstruation, she doesn't have to fast. But again, it is ugly to see a covered woman in the street and eating in Ramadan.

Jedino jest malo ružno i vidjeti, do duše ja nisam pokrivena pa me ne osuđuju ljudi tako, ali na primjer ružno je vidjeti ženu koja je pokrivena da u Ramazanu jede. Mada ona može imati [...] Mislim, u Ramazanu, [...] žena kad dobije menstruaciju, ona ne mora postiti. Ali opet, ružno je vidjeti na ulici ženu pokrivenu i da jede u Ramazanu.<sup>703</sup>

<sup>698</sup> Interview, Frenky, 9.12.2015, 00:04:57.5 - 00:05:10.7.

<sup>699</sup> Interview, Frenky, 9.12.2015, 00:48:36.1 - 00:49:10.0.

<sup>700</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:31:27.8-01:31:50.5.

<sup>701</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:31:52.9 - 01:32:16.5.

<sup>702</sup> Interview, Frenky, 9.12.2015, 00:49:10.1 - 00:49:20.5.

<sup>703</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:11:19.3 - 00:11:45.7.

So, even though Arnesa acknowledges that a woman might be exempt from fasting due to her period, she still doesn't like seeing a woman with headscarf eating during Ramadan. This is likely different than the expectation of not eating in front of other people out of respect. Rather, it shows the code that women who are covered should go beyond what is expected generally of practising Muslims. This is another example of the importance of representing the faith when covered: even if the woman eating during Ramadan might have a good reason, she shouldn't do so publicly.

For Aida, the expectations on behaviour is one of the reasons she is not ready to wear hijab:

I am not saying that that it would cut something from my life, it really wouldn't. I could still be equally active but...a few things I would have to really take care about. For example, I shouldn't go out to cafés where alcohol is served, for example. I think that is the only obstacle really, or I wouldn't be able to go to some big concerts, to festivals. I think I really see that as some loss now that it won't take anything away from my life, but that simply means that I have to be consistent in the things that I do, that is, perform all the prayers regularly. So to say, simply being worthy of what I represent.

Ne kažem da bi to mene uskratilo za nešto u životu, zaista ne bi. Sve bih iste aktivnosti imala ali... mada na neke stvari bih morala baš da pazim. Npr. ne bi mogla ulaziti u kafiće u kojima se toči alkohol npr. Onda ne znam, mislim da je to jedina prepreka u stvari, ili onda ne bi mogla ići na neke velike koncerte, na festivale. Mislim ja to stvarno ne vidim kao neki gubitak, sad da će to meni oduzeti nešto od života, ali to znači da jednostavno moram biti konzistentnija u stvarima koje radim, znači sve molitve obavljati redovno. Znači, jednostavno biti dostojana onog što predstavljam je li.<sup>704</sup>

Emina refers to how more distant family members had some negative views about covering at a young age:

The wider family [was saying] what a pity, young girl ... you are young, how will you enjoy it...they think that I cannot enjoy it with a scarf, they have prejudices...they think that if you live a religious life you have something to do give up, that's how they experience it.

Šira familije [je rekla] ono šteta, mlada djevojka...mlada si šta će ti to, treba da uživas..oni misle da ja ne mogu uživati sa marame, imaju predrasude...misle da ako zivis vjerski zivot moraš nečega da se odreknes, tako oni to doživljavaju.<sup>705</sup>

All of the above perspectives can lead to women choosing not to cover, as they don't see themselves meeting such high expectations. Another common thread that emerged from fieldwork is that personal choice is seen by my interlocutors as absolutely crucial. Having now outlined what types of comportment and

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<sup>704</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2015, 00:14:56.8 - 00:15:52.5.

<sup>705</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:27:05.3 - 00:27:40.4.

actions are demanded from hijabis, the next pages will focus on the topic of choice – whether to cover, when, and even how.

#### 8.2.1.2 The fundamental factor of choice

In conversations about Muslim women, in my experience from Germany and other countries, there is a certain polarisation around hijab, with one side focusing on perceived coercion to cover and the other on bodily autonomy. The Western European fixation on women supposedly being forced to veil is contrasted by the insistence of my interview partners that wearing hijab or not wearing hijab is very much their own choice. This has also been shown by other research.<sup>706</sup> While several reasons for veiling were cited by my interlocutors, no one referred to pressure from partners, family, or community. This may be due to the reflection on me, the interviewer, being from Western Europe and thus (rightly) assumed to be in favour of equality and agency. However, as the ethos of study of religion dictates, I am in favour of taking what my interview partners say at face value.<sup>707</sup>

As outlined with other moments of practice, starting to wear hijab often has a narrative where choice plays a role. According to Andreja Mesarič, this 'opt-in system to becoming a Muslim', which includes various religious practices, amongst them veiling, is typical of the Islamic revival.<sup>708</sup>

Overall, there was a range amongst the interview partners around dressing and covering in general, with some not following any clothing restrictions, others wearing modest clothes without the headscarf, several who wore hijab, and one covering her face with niqab. However, they all had opinions on wearing hijab, whether they themselves wore it or not. The strong focus on the right to choose was also consistent across my interviews. In the next chapter, I will show how some saw the possibility to choose whether to cover or not as something typical for Europe. There are those who considered covering not mandatory or relevant for themselves, those who considered covering eventually, and those who are

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<sup>706</sup> Šeta, 105.

<sup>707</sup> Franke, 'Kleines Fach – Große Aufgaben. Der Beitrag der Religionswissenschaft zu aktuellen Debatten um religiöse Konfliktlagen', 15.

<sup>708</sup> Mesarič, 'Wearing Hijab in Sarajevo: Dress Practices and the Islamic Revival in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', 13.

already covered. Of those who were considering at the time of the interview, some eventually covered in the years later. One removed her headscarf. This is not the place to go into theological discussions on the requirement (or not) of wearing the headscarf; what is relevant to me is how it is perceived by women in the field. Following are some quotes that show this range.

First, Amina explicitly presented the importance of covering being one's personal decision, saying, 'I think people who are coming into religion and decide to wear hijab or beard or whatever, it is their own decision.'<sup>709</sup> Later, she elaborated, placing the focus on behaviour while distinctly separating behaviour from external markers:

You know you are now in [this] energetic form, but compared to eternity [...] it is such a short period of existence, that I really don't like to talk about 'should you wear this or that'; it is so irrelevant. [...] It is really important how you feel and what you do for others, [...] be as kind as possible, [...] to somehow help others to feel better and to survive easier [...] I think that is important about the religion. To be that kind of person. And not to worry about, 'do I tell you "Selam Alejk" or hello when I go to your home', you know. So, if you want to wear a beard, [or] go naked in public, that's who you are. I do [however] agree that some of those things are important for development of the community.<sup>710</sup>

On the other hand, she does see covering as required, saying that the theological need to wear a headscarf is firmer than men wearing a beard: 'Like wearing hijab, wearing hijab is strong, women have to wear hijab, men should wear a beard, so that is the difference'.<sup>711</sup>

So, Amina prioritises behaviour over the outwardly visible practice of covering and at the same time sees covering as both required, in the sense that one has to do it and a choice, in that it shouldn't be forced but rather come from the inside. Alenka Bartulović also analyses her sample of young Muslim women in Bosnia and Herzegovina as making 'specific adjustment[s] of Islamic rules to personal preferences', even against fatwas of the Islamic Community.<sup>712</sup>

The view that hijab is very much a personal decision even stretches to religious officials. Amira talks about the advice her Imam gave her when she was considering wearing hijab: 'Just listen to yourself [...] he said that to me, like,

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<sup>709</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 1:49:23.4 – 1:51:23.6.

<sup>710</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:03.9 - 00:00:04.1.

<sup>711</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:03.7 - 00:00:03.7.

<sup>712</sup> Bartulović, 290.

you are the only one that is going to wear it, think about it'.<sup>713</sup>

Inter-generational processes also often play out around covering. Several women spoke about their elder female relatives (grandmothers or others) being covered. However, they always portray them as covered out of tradition, in contrast to their contemporaries, who cover from choice. One example is Meliha:

My grandmother is covered, but she is traditionally covered, not out of religious conviction, but because here, [...] older women cover their heads.

Meine Großmutter ist bedeckt, aber sie ist traditionell bedeckt, nicht von religiösen Überzeugungen, sondern weil es bei uns hier, [...] ältere Frauen sich den Kopf bedecken.<sup>714</sup>

Several other women also spoke about their people, usually grandmothers being 'traditionally' covered.<sup>715</sup> Many of those women who are covered actually report how their families were not in favour of them covering, with mothers often being actively against it.<sup>716</sup> This likely has to do with these mothers growing up in Yugoslavian socialism. The grandmothers cover for traditional reasons, my informants say, but their mothers are often against their daughters doing the same from a believer motivation. Thus, young Muslim women in Sarajevo who consider themselves believers also draw a boundary against covering in the way 'Muslims by name' would, out of tradition, and how their cohort does, out of choice.

As with other elements of religious practice, the hijab in Sarajevo is seen as personal choice and an individual decision, findings that have been well established by others.<sup>717</sup> This phenomenon was also repeatedly confirmed in my research.

Aida talks about wearing hijab as explicitly part of the identity of Muslim women:

I think we are not so conservative [...] that I have to cover, that I have to marry by the time I reach a certain age, [...] I mean, these are cultural differences that have nothing to do with Islam now, [...] it's a matter of

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<sup>713</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:18:03.8 - 00:18:49.4.

<sup>714</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:13:33.5 - 00:13:46.2.

<sup>715</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:08:43.6 - 00:09:07.8, Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, 00:52:40.1 - 00:53:12.1, Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:29:26.3 - 00:30:14.0, Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 00:27:47.6 - 00:28:13.4.

<sup>716</sup> Interview, Leijla 24.1.2017, 0:28:08.4 - 0:29:01.1, Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:30:22.7 - 01:31:01.6.

<sup>717</sup> Funk, 217.

personal choice, it's all part of the identity of a Muslim woman, to cover herself.

Mislim da nismo toliko konzervativni [...] da se ja moram pokriti, da se moram udati do te i te godine, [...] to su sad već, ja mislim, kulturološke razlike koje nemaju veze sa islamom i ne znam, smatram da je to stvar ličnog izbora i da kada žena, mislim to je sve dio identiteta žene muslimanke, da se pokrije je li tako.<sup>718</sup>

While she sees it as part of a Muslim woman's identity, she also stresses that it is cultural and not a religious obligation, and that it is a matter of deciding for oneself.

When Elma came out to her friend as a practising Muslim, the conversation turned to matters of veiling. This connects to the drawing of boundaries against those that are perceived as different when it comes to practice.

My friend, he is gay, and he felt really bad, he thought I would think something bad about him now [because I am Muslim]. And he said, 'Yes, but I thought you have to wear a burqa'. [I told him,] 'Yes, I don't have to, if I want to I can, but I don't practise extremely'.

Mein Freund, der ist homosexuell, und er hat sich richtig schlecht gefühlt, er dachte das ich jetzt etwas Schlechtes über ihn denke [weil ich Muslimin bin]. Und er hat gesagt 'Ja, aber ich dachte Du musst eine Burka tragen' 'Ja, muss ich nicht, wenn ich will kann ich, aber muss ich nicht, ich praktiziere aber nicht extrem.'<sup>719</sup>

So, it is important to her to emphasise the aspect of personal choice here too, and she also draws an equivalence to wearing a full-face veil and practising 'extremely', while highlighting her own practice as 'normal'. Elma also links her practicing 'not extremely' and 'being normal' to how her feelings about her friend being gay didn't change when she started to become more pious, as he fears.

Ena was also not covered at the time of the interview but was very distinct about her interpretation of veiling as required.

People make it complicated [...], for me, hijab is so clear. [...] cover your hair, cover your shy parts of the body, don't be, [...] sexy or whatever [...]. Be for a husband, but not for everybody. It's for your sake. It's really for your sake. And that's it, if it's white or red it doesn't say or that it supposed to be black or white, it's, you have the space there.<sup>720</sup>

So, she doesn't see the decision about if it is required to cover, but rather how, with certain sexually attractive parts of the body being hidden being relevant, but what colour the headscarf has not being important.

Belma, on the other hand, has an outlying perspective on the theological reasons for wearing hijab. While she also emphasises personal choice, she links the origin of covering to climatic conditions:

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<sup>718</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 00:12:49.1 - 00:14:14.1.

<sup>719</sup> Interview, Alma, 7.5.2016, 01:22:03.7 - 01:22:28.6.

<sup>720</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 02:48:32.7 - 02:49:14.6.

I think it is anyone's right if you wear a headscarf or not, or how you are dressed, but I don't think it has anything to do with Islam. [...] I think it has a lot more to do with the climate in Arabia, with the sand, and that is really a pragmatic reason. [...] For the women, it was important that they were somehow protected from sand and from wind, that's why they had these clothes, but there is no need [...] in the rest of the world, where there is no sand and no wind, to wear that, but if they want to, out of the reasons they say, I don't have anything against that, they should go ahead. But for me it is not Islamic.

Ich halte es für...jedermanns Recht ob man ein Kopftuch hat oder nicht oder wie man angezogen ist, aber ich denke nicht dass das übrehaupt was mit Islam zu tun hat. [...] ich denke es hat viel mehr mir Klima in Arabien zu tun, [...] mit dem Sand, und das ist wirklich ein pragmatischer Grund. [...] für die Frauen [war es] wichtig [...] dass sie irgendwie vom Sand und vom Wind beschützt waren, deswegen hatten sie diese Klamotten, aber das ist kein Bedarf [...] in der Rest der Welt, wo es keinen Sand und keinen Wind [gibt] das zu tragen, aber [wenn] sie das aus Gründen wollen die sie nennen, da habe ich also nichts einzuwenden, sollen sie auch tun. Aber für mich ist das nicht islamisch.<sup>721</sup>

Because of the significance of the decision to cover, several women referred to having to be of a certain age before being ready to take the step. Hasna draws a boundary between herself and Arab women around covering, because of the perceived lack of choice from starting to veil early in life and the amount of coverage, as referred to above when talking about niqab:

[Regarding how women cover in the East,] mostly people [in Bosnia] actually think it is too much, I am not supportive of that, or covering their children very early [...] it is not something very dramatic about covering, but I think somebody should make [...] her own decision about doing it. [...] I mean, it is not some big step but it could mean something for them later on, because uncovering, I guess, is harder than covering, so somebody would have to make that decision they would probably have some issues in the family, and with friends, in the community.<sup>722</sup>

So, she makes a direct link between the possibility of deciding to wear hijab (or not) and the position of women in Islam and society generally. By mentioning that children who are too young to choose themselves are covered, and how hard it is to uncover, she further emphasises the importance of personal choice. While there are different reasons given for covering, and there is no single opinion of whether it is required or not, this last section demonstrated how the idea that the practice must be someone's own choice is key. This includes that hijab is not worn out of tradition and that no one is forced to wear it. Once this choice is made, it is viewed as something that can't be taken back, which will

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<sup>721</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 02:06:08.3 - 02:07:13.9

<sup>722</sup> Interview, Hasna, 3.1.2017, 00:50:49.9 - 00:52:20.5.

be explored in the next section, along with how the headscarf is tied up with an imagined progression of faith.

### 8.2.1.3 'That's what I'm going towards': Hijab and trajectories of practice

Throughout my interviews, it became clear that starting to wear hijab is seen as a significant step on the trajectory of becoming more pious. In this section, I will explore how covering is seen as irreversible and how women who wear a headscarf and those that do not talk about their decision.

A contributing factor to the significance of the decision to veil/wear a hijab is that it is seen as irreversible. While in my sample, congruently for other global developments in the modernist vein, there is an emphasis on choice, covering does have particular significance because of the perceived permanence for the whole life and ongoing nature. It is supposed to be a life-long practice that stems from internal motivation. Following are some quotes from my interlocutors that demonstrate their perceived finality of the decision.

For example, when Elma was asked if she has considered wearing hijab, she answered with some nuanced judgement:

I know a friend who was married, and when she divorced, she took it off, and she actually just did it for him. This is really wrong; you should not do that.

Ich kenn eine Freundin die verheiratet war, und als die sich geschieden hat hat sie es abgekomen, und sie hat es auch eigentlich nur wegen ihm gemacht. Was eigentlich richtig falsch ist, man soll das nicht machen.<sup>723</sup>

Although there is a strong value in not judging others for their practice, around hijab, judgement is quite common. Wearing it only for fashion or to please a partner, so for outside reasons, is broadly seen as negative. Such external factors are also seen as potential reasons for hijab being taken off again.

Both those women who are covered and those who aren't agreed on the significance of the step of covering, and that it should be forever. This also plays into why those considering covering make very sure they are 'ready', as the decision is seen as irreversible. The added responsibility of the expectation of confirming to a higher moral standard also plays into women taking their time in deciding.

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<sup>723</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:49:39.1 – 00:51:31.2.

This is how Amina, who does not wear hijab, talks about the factor that “covering should be for life has influenced her own decision:

I am really, really close to [wearing a scarf on my head] [...] But you know, here in Bosnia we do that, once you cover your head you are covered for life, [...] practising modesty, in everyday situations, in every aspect, [...] for woman to start wearing hijab here is really difficult, because once you are covered, society [...] would make fun of you if they would ever see you without your cover, [...], in my family, a girl, after losing her father she was [...], emotional, she started wearing hijab but it was mostly, because it was a trend for her, and once she decided not to dress like that, ALL family was making fun of her, there was a lot of talk behind her back, so women who want to cover themselves really take a long time to do that, because they are like, not strong enough to put up with the pressure.<sup>724</sup>

While also referring to the expectations that make it challenging, Amina emphasises that one needs to be very certain of being ready to start veiling or risk ridicule. This certainty, it is implied, should also come from a motivation other than sorrow or fashion.

Elma also speaks negatively about women who start to cover before they are really mature enough. This is her answer when asked if she has considered wearing hijab:

Yes, I have. I would not have a problem with [...] how other people would see me, but whether I'm worthy of it, in that sense. I do not think everyone should do that [wear hijab]. And it's not just because of the visuality that you [...] cover your hair, but more, because it's a really important decision. I know girls who have covered themselves and uncovered themselves again, [...] and I think that's really bad. Why did you do it anyway? Then do not do it, then do it sometime, when you're 50 or something, but not at 20, at 20 you do not know who you are, not at all.

Ja, hab ich ja. Ich hätte kein Problem damit [...] wie mich andere Menschen sehen würden, sondern ob ich dafür, ob ich würdig bin, in diesem Sinne. Ich denke das soll nicht jeder machen. Und es ist nicht nur wegen der Visualität, dass Du [...] Deine Haare bedeckst, sondern mehr, [weil] es eine wirklich wichtige Entscheidung ist. Ich kenne Mädchen die sich bedeckt haben und sich wieder abbedeckt haben, [...] und ich denke dass das richtig schlimm ist. Warum hast Du es überhaupt getan? Dann mach es gar nicht, dann mach es irgendwann, wenn du 50 bist oder so, aber nicht mit 20, mit 20 weißt Du nicht wer Du bist, überhaupt gar nicht.<sup>725</sup>

So, while the decision to put on hijab is seen as personal by Elma and others in my sample, and not something that should be influenced by the outside, once this decision is taken, it is fixed. The possibility that de-veiling may also be a personal choice is not considered, but rather condemned. If someone removes

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<sup>724</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 1:42:42.3 - 1:47:39.0.

<sup>725</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:49:39.1 - 00:51:31.2.

the hijab, this is seen as an indication that she put it in too hastily or at too young an age.

It is also possible that covering is also seen as such a significant step because it shows a higher degree of religiosity. As outlined above, fulfilling the expectations as 'a not quite human', an 'ultimate good person', can't be reversed. This stems from an idea that the inherent motivation of maturity in faith can't slide back. Hijab was seen as a marker for being particularly religious by most people I spoke to in interviews and during my fieldwork.<sup>726</sup>

Aida talks about how she sees the meaning of hijab:

I mean it's not like, say, a nun in Christianity, [...] they agree to a different lifestyle, [...], while for Muslim women it means they are a little more firm in faith, and everything else remains open to them. So, to get educated and married [...], and I don't think I've reached that level of understanding yet, but I think the day will surely come, [...] when I will wear the hijab as well, that's what I'm going towards.

Mislim to nije kao recimo opatica u kršćanstvu, časna sestra, jer one sa svojim pokrivanjem pristaju na drugi stil života, [...] dok u žena muslimanki to znači da su malo čvršće u vjeri, a sve ostalo im ostaje otvoreno. Znači i da se školuju, i da se udaju, [...]. I ja mislim da još uvijek nisam došla na taj nivo shvatanja, ali mislim da će sigurno doći dan, mislim nadam se da će doći dan, kada ću i ja nositi hidžab, ka tome idem.<sup>727</sup>

Highlighting the contrast to Christian nuns, Aida also points out that covered women can participate in society fully but that they are more pious. She also conveys a sense of movement, not exactly a goal, but an inadvertent outcome which she hasn't reached 'yet'.

Belma talks about a girl she went to school with like this:

[She] really was someone who could not control herself, and now [...] has a headscarf, and [...] has become totally religious [...] a transition [...] from being a woman who went to the Love Parade at that time or wanted to go to someone with a headscarf is really a big difference.

[sie] war wirklich so eine die sich nicht beherrschen konnte, und jetzt [...] hat [...] ein Kopftuch, und [...] ist total religiös geworden [...] ein Übergang [...] von einer Frau die damals zur Loveparade gegangen ist oder gehen wollte zu jemandem mit Kopftuch ist schon ein großer Unterschied.<sup>728</sup>

So, the journey Belma presents is a trajectory, from someone who cannot control herself and likes going to a street rave to someone that wears headscarf and is religious, implying that she now does control herself.

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<sup>726</sup> In contrast to Mesarič, 'Wearing Hijab in Sarajevo: Dress Practices and the Islamic Revival in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', 20. Mesarič notes that wearing headscarf is not seen as a sign of being more or less religious.

<sup>727</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 00:12:49.1 - 00:14:14.1.

<sup>728</sup> Interview, Belma 22.4.2016, 01:40:35.9 - 01:42:05.3.

For Elma, wearing hijab is also about having knowledge about Islam:

And [...] also, [now] that I know a lot more about Islam or the practice of Islam, I think you shouldn't wear a headscarf first and then try to discover Islam, but the other way round. That's my opinion.

Und [...] auch dass ich sehr viel mehr über Islam oder über die Praktizierung von Islam weiß, ich denke man muss nicht erst Kopftuch tragen und dann erst versuchen Islam zu entdecken, sondern anders herum. Das ist meine Meinung.<sup>729</sup>

So, she also sees the practice as a marker of having arrived at a certain level of knowledge, as a marker along this trajectory of piety.

The women who wear hijab thus also talk about the decision to cover as significant in that they consider it for a long period of time. Emina's deliberation took several years: 'For the headscarf [the decision took] two or three years to wear all the time, so it wasn't exactly overnight' ('Za maramu neke dvije tri godine da se odlučim da stalno nosim, tako da nije to bilo baš preko noći').<sup>730</sup>

Amira goes into more detail about what aspects she was thinking about at the time, when she was fourteen years old:

I was thinking [...], it is a huge decision, for the rest of my life [...]. It was really difficult, I knew I was going to lose some of my friends, I knew I was going to have difficulties in life, I knew I had to sit down [...] and think about the purpose of life, and what I want to do with my life, that was really stressful at the time.<sup>731</sup>

The magnitude of the decision is framed with the fact that it will affect her for years to come, as well as bringing certain social implications.

Ena also talks about when the moment will come for her. In contrast to most of the others, she actually doesn't frame it as challenging, but as something that comes with ease.

[Starting to wear headscarf] is a process for me, [...] I am just making a conscious decision not to wear it. [...] make it easy for yourself, don't make it hard; if you can't you just can't. [...] When I feel it, [I will wear it]. So that's it. [...] I know [...] the day will come, definitely, because I have decided [...] to do it and I have the need to do it, and the love for it, and the reasons are there and everything. I just have to do it, like the action is left. So, I just know it will come, I don't know [...] when [...].<sup>732</sup>

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<sup>729</sup> Interview, Elma, 11.5.2016, 00:30:05.5 - 00:31:06.3.

<sup>730</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:54:07.4 - 00:54:26.3.

<sup>731</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:18:03.8 - 00:18:49.4.

<sup>732</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 02:41:06.9 - 02:44:10.3.

From how Ena talks about this process, the choice is not something directed from the mind but rather that will come from the inside. As something that should be motivated by inner factors, this is appropriate.

This choice is perceived as coming at a point in the religious journey when other forms of practice, such as prayer, have already been established. Emina mentions how she eased into wearing hijab regularly in order not to challenge her family too much:

I began to pray, [...] and then after [...] two, three years, [...] I began to feel the need [...] to cover. [when you] pray, [it] is an obligation, so sometimes you don't wear it, sometimes you do, [...] as if I had two identities, it was my worst period in my life, like a double life. [...] That was to get the family used to it.

Počela [sam] klanjati, [...] i onda posle stalno, nekako sam dvije tri godine klanjala i počela sam osjećati potrebu za tim, potrebu da se pokrijem. Em što sad klanjaš, a to je obaveza, pa je nekad ne nosiš, [...] nekad da, [...] kao da imam 2 identiteta, to mi je najružniji period u životu, kao dvostruki život. [...] Eto to je da naviknem porodicu.<sup>733</sup>

This is also a good section to show how hijab is towards the end of a trajectory of piety – praying regularly tends to take root earlier, and for many, covering does come up eventually. Like others who said that they don't feel ready yet, there also is an element of progression. Emina also describes it as very challenging with the shifting identity to a woman that always wears hijab. Sanja Bilic, in her research in the UK and Bosnia-Herzegovina, refers to this as 'natural progression in [...] spiritual growth'.<sup>734</sup>

Elma does not consider covering, partly because she sees a high level of knowledge as being required as well as a strong desire:

I think [...] here in Sarajevo that's actually okay, you can [cover], but I think I would not do that, I would not wear a headscarf, I think that you really need to know a lot, and you, must prepare properly, and it must come right from the heart.

Ich denk [...] hier in Sarajevo ist das eigentlich richtig ok, man kann [ja Kopftuch tragen] aber ich denke ich würde das nicht machen, ich würde kein Kopftuch tragen, ich denke das man dafür richtig viel wissen muss, und man dafür, man muss sich richtig [...] vorbereiten, und es muss richtig aus dem Herzen kommen.<sup>735</sup>

Amongst those who are covered, as well as some who are considering, there is what Julianne Funk called a 'paradoxical sounding combination of personal choice and religious duty'.<sup>736</sup> This is particularly true for the understanding of

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<sup>733</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5. 2016, 00:49:31.0 - 00:51:00.1.

<sup>734</sup> Bilic, 153.

<sup>735</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 00:47:54.6 - 00:49:33.8.

<sup>736</sup> Funk, 214.

basing decisions on conscious choice, following rules not because this is what parents or wider culture propagates, but from one's own understanding. The quotes show how this is negotiated with regard to personal piety.

After some background around hijab, I focused on the three interconnected areas of expectations, choice, and how hijab is seen along a trajectory of faith. For the step of covering to be seen as 'real' along the trajectory of piety, my analysis shows that it is seen as key that it is worn out of choice and that there are high expectations around behaviour that must be met.

### 8.2.2 Diverse viewpoints on women in Islam

During the interviews I conducted, I also tried to ask about how my informants perceive their own role and that of women in Islam generally. The responses were quite vague compared to those on hijab or other questions on practice. For women who self-describe as believers and have developed opinions on hijab and other aspects of practice, the role of women in Islam was not key. The main topics that came up were around the role of women in society in general, institutional roles, the specific situation in mosques, and that women have benefits that come with Islam, particularly financial independence. There was also an attempt to disentangle what is portrayed as the cultural, negative norms for women from 'real' Islam amongst the women I spoke to.

The situation of women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, not just Muslim women, is quite dire on a number of metrics.<sup>737</sup> Elma reflects on women generally not being in a great position in the region and distances religion from culture:

With us there is this tradition that actually has nothing to do with the religion, but with the Balkans generally, that women are oppressed anyway, [...] that [oppression] is present in every religion here.

Bei uns ist es so dass [es] diese Tradition [gibt], die eigentlich nichts mit der Religion zu tun hat, sondern mit dem Balkan allgemein, dass die Frau sowieso unterdrückt ist, [...] das ist in jeder Religion hier da.<sup>738</sup>

Leijla talks about lack of participation of women in various areas of life:

Well, in general, for women in Bosnia it is not fair to say, it doesn't bother me personally, but a lot of up-to-date women who want to be in all spheres just like men, to be completely equal, it really is annoying to

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<sup>737</sup> Dalila Mirović, Inela Hadžić, and Edita Miftari, Annual Report on the State of Women's Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2014', in *Human Rights Papers* (Sarajevo: Sarajevo Open Centre, CURE Foundation, Women's Network BiH, 2015).

<sup>738</sup> Interview, Elma, 7.5.2016, 01:41:52.9 - 01:43:29.1.

them. To start with the political sphere of life [...] there are very few [...] women [who] are in politics. [...] we have great discrimination against women in Bosnia-Herzegovina in general, of all religions.

Pa općenito za žene u Bosni nije neka da kažem, meni to lično ne smeta ali dosta žena suvremenih koje žele da budu u svim sferama kao i muškarci, da budu potpuno ravnopravni, jako smeta. Da krenemo sa političke sfere života, našeg života, je jako mal broj ljudi, žena je u politici. [...] imamo velike diskriminacije po pitanju žena u Bosni općenito svih vjeroispovijesti.<sup>739</sup>

This point ties into other research that the religious elites of all religions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as in the region more generally, are quite conservative, including in their perspective on women.<sup>740</sup> Belma also sees the rights of women in Bosnia-Herzegovina as something that is separate from religion.

When you speak about Bosnia, then you also have to consider the tradition [...] that is more of a societal tradition, not necessarily one that has to do with Islam. [...] Women [have] fewer rights than men anyway for all intents and purposes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and what that has to do with religion is also something that should be questioned. With regards to my position [as a woman in Islam] that requires a partner, that would be that Islamic, then I could talk about it [...]. I would say that I wouldn't want to live according to Sharia, but I think [...] I have [...] fewer rights and more frustration with men and in a man's world, independently of religion. Generally.

Wenn man über Bosnien redet, dann muss man auch die Tradition einbeziehen, [...] was eher eine gesellschaftliche Tradition ist, nicht unbedingt nur eine die mit Islam zu tun hat. [...] Frauen [haben] sowieso in jeder Hinsicht in Bosnien-Herzegowina [...] weniger Rechte als Männer, und was jetzt mit Religion zu tun hat und was nicht ist dann auch wieder zu erfragen. Was meine Position betrifft, [als Frau im Islam], das setzt einen Partner voraus, der so islamisch wäre, und dann könnte ich darüber reden, [...] ich würde sagen dass ich nicht nach den Vorgaben von Sheriat leben wollen [würde], aber ich denke [...] ich habe [...] weniger Rechte und mehr Frust mit Männern, und in der Männerwelt, unabhängig von der Religion. Also allgemein.<sup>741</sup>

Belma sees a religious partner as key to how the situation is for Muslim women, so as something relational not to society or the religious community overall, but dependant on a partnership.

Independently of their level of piety, the women I interviewed were careful to connect the negative situation for women in the region to reasons other than religion. This is particularly relevant, as much Islamophobia in the West is framed as protecting women, as outlined above. It is also a further indication of the distinction that is made from what is constructed as culture and tradition, and thus negative, versus the positive 'real' Islam.

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<sup>739</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:51:35:7 - 0:52:38.1.

<sup>740</sup> Christian Moe, 'A Sultan in Brussels? European Hopes and Fears of Bosnian Muslims', *Südosteuropa* 55, no. 4 (2007): 386.

<sup>741</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2016, 02:30:23.2 - 02:32:18.6.

When Emina acknowledges that there are some interpretations of Islam that are less positive for women, it is also possible that this is something cultural or localised in her view:

Now there is a lot of difference in Islam, really, and those different interpretations in Islam, woman in Islam is something I like, as I am part of this faith, I think it's the most beautiful position [to be in] but there are also many interpretations that are ugly and that I don't like, and that is a fact.

Pa sad ima dosta razlike u islamu stvarno i onih različitih interpretacija u islamu, žena u islamu se meni sviđa čim sam ja dio te vjere, mislim da je to najljepši položaj ali da isto tako ima puno interpretacija koje su ružne i ne sviđaju mi se i to je činjenica.<sup>742</sup>

Arnesa also sees religion being lived differently in various locations and comes to the conclusion that 'Bosnia actually is the most beautiful combination of Islam when it comes to women' ('Bosni uopšte je najljepša kombinacija Islama što se tiče žene').<sup>743</sup>

This could also be an instance of a 'wanted response' or a distinguishing against Western Europe on the one hand, where Islam is not very present, and Arabic countries on the other, which were seen overwhelmingly by my participants as stifling for women.

Ena focuses on another aspect that she sees as very positive for women in Islam:

Well again, I can only speak [...] for my experience [...] Islam gave me so much confidence and so much dignity. And I would always emphasise the dignity and the space to grow and the space to develop and you really feel like a queen in Islam. [...] Like a diamond. That's the role that's given to women in Islam and that's what it is and there's no other role, whatever the media and whatever everybody is saying. It's just like it is, and what you feel when you become Muslim and when you become [a] practising Muslim, and that's the only impression I get.<sup>744</sup>

She explicitly mentions the media, while most others have presented it implicitly, in how religion is portrayed as not just negative. Overall, the role of women is seen as less of a matter of choice compared to other aspects of religion.

Emina sees women of faith in Sarajevo as having great freedom, and as markers of this refers to career and of being independent of men's opinion:

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<sup>742</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 01:23:53.1 - 01:24:25.3.

<sup>743</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:07:45.0 - 01:07:49.5.

<sup>744</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 02:11:21.8 - 02:12:24.3.

I see that women are here somehow, [...], so much in faith but so educated somehow, their professional careers are like that, [...]; I have never seen a woman so empowered and ready and that she manages to shape her life as she pleases. They have very great freedom [here in Sarajevo for], women. Even women in Belgrade are not like that, even though they think they are. They are slaves to being what men want women to be. Here they are as they are as they should be according to faith. I see them as happy and spiritually empowered, mature, successful in their careers and families, and socially active. This is rarely seen.

Vidim da su žene ovdje nekako, [...] toliko u vjeri ali toliko su nekako edukovane, profesionalna karijera im je onako, [...] nisam nigdje vidjela da je žena ovako osnažena i spremna i da uspijeva da oblikuje svoj život kako ona želi. Ima jako velike slobode žena. Ni žene u Beogradu nisu takve, iako misle da jesu. One robuju tome kakve da budu kakve muškarci žele da budu. Ovdje budu kakve trebaju po vjeri. Vidim da su sretne i duhovno osnažene, zrele, uspješne u karijeri i porodici, i još društveno aktivne. To se stvarno rijetko viđa.<sup>745</sup>

This could connect back to some debates about hijab as protecting from the male gaze and actually giving women more freedom to take charge of their own life without performing sexual attractiveness. However, Emina does not explicitly mention hijab here. It also ties back to the idea of being a good person, with Emina describing women as how they should be faith as excellent in different areas of life.

Formally, women are not very present in religious institutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and from the women I spoke to, there was also not much of a push for that to change. This may be reflected in the overall lack of reference to institutions by my respondents (other than Meliha); that is, institutions were generally not seen by my informants as that important to religious life. When talking about religious knowledge and influences, women did not refer to the official structures much either. The only woman who did mention institutions was Meliha, who is herself a religious teacher at a school and has a high level of formal religious education. She is aware of some global and local developments and reflects on them:

So, I know where my place is and where my place is not, for example what Amina Wahdud did in America, I would not dream of doing that, to lead the jumma prayer for men and women. [...] I think it is not only in Islam, it is all over the world, [that] the position of the woman [is] not in the foreground, particularly because traditionally it is not seen that way. Lately, the Islamic Community are working on getting the woman out more. So traditionally, the woman is always at home, with the children, and it was [like that in the Islamic Community] up to the new Grand Mufti [...]. There were never concrete steps; the women, for example, somewhere in the Islamic Community never

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<sup>745</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 02:00:55.9 - 02:02:30.1.

work as a director she always is the one making coffee, or working as a secretary, so typical women's work. And in recent times, since we have the new Grand Mufti, Ms. Šusko [...] is chairwoman of the institute, Ms. Djermana [...] who has something to say in the Islamic Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina or something. So over time, something happens. But I think it's not just because of the Community and because of the men, but because the women were too overwhelmed, they believe too much in their role as ... mother, that's why they've always done everything at home, and if so they have had time they worked or put themselves in the foreground, I think the problem is fifty-fifty [...].

Also ich weiß wo mein Platz nicht ist, und wo mein Platz ist, zum Beispiel was Amina Wahdud in Amerika gemacht hat, das würde mir nicht im Traum einfallen das ich das Jummah Gebet für Männer und Frauen [leite]. [...] ich denke mir es ist nicht nur im Islam es ist überall auf der Welt, [so dass] die Position der Frau [...] nicht im Vordergrund [ist] weil es vor allem so traditionell gesehen ist, und in der Islam-Gemeinschaft in der letzten Zeit arbeiten sie daran dass die Frau mehr rauskommt. Also traditionell ist die Frau immer zu Hause, mit den Kindern, und es war bis zum neuen Großmufti auch so in der Islam-Gemeinschaft, [...] aber es waren nie konkrete Schritte, dass die Frau zum Beispiel irgendwo in der Islam-Gemeinschaft arbeitet als Direktorin also sie arbeitet immer als Kaffeekocherin, oder Sekretärin, so typische Frauenarbeit. Und in der letzten Zeit, seitdem wir den neuen Großmufti haben ist die Frau Šusko. [...] Vorsitzende des Instituts, die Frau Đermana [...] die was zu sagen hat in der islamischen Gemeinschaft in Bosnien oder so. Also mit der Zeit tut sich etwas. Aber ich denke es ist nicht nur wegen der Gemeinschaft ist und wegen den Männern, sondern die Frauen waren zu überfordert, die glauben zu stark an ihre Rolle als...Mutter, deswegen haben sie immer alles getan dass zu Hause alles in Ordnung ist, und wenn sie Zeit hatten haben sie gearbeitet haben oder sich in Vordergrund gestellt, ich denke mir mal 50-50 ist es das Problem [...].<sup>746</sup>

Meliha goes on to say that while she herself would not want to be a leader, she is happy to see how other women are in positions where they really have influence. Dževada Šuško was at that time head of the 'Institute for the Bosniak Islamic Tradition' and Đermana Šeta was responsible for developing a women's structure throughout the hierarchy of the official Islamic Community. Both women she mentions in this excerpt spent a lot of time outside of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as another person she refers to:

Another example from the USA, and that was a woman from the Balkans, [...] she did a Friday prayer only for women [...] she conceptualised it in a way that after the jummah prayer you can talk about it with her or other women [...] she chose a topic [...] That is a good thing that you could maybe also do here.

Ein anderes Beispiel aus den USA, und das war eine Frau die aus Balkan ist, [...] sie hat ein [...] Freitagsgebet, nur für Frauen gemacht [...] sie hat es so konzipiert, dass man nach dem Jummah Gebet mit ihr oder den anderen Frauen darüber reden kann [...] sie [hat] ein Thema ausgesucht [...]. Das ist etwas Gutes was man vielleicht hier machen könnte.<sup>747</sup>

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<sup>746</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:59:19.8 - 01:01:44.3.

<sup>747</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:02:54.3 - 01:03:39.1.

I tried to find more information on this woman she refers to, but couldn't verify it through internet research or speaking to experts. However, it still stands as an interesting example of what Meliha, quite a mainstream Muslim woman who herself works as a teacher of Islam, finds desirable. She also references Fatima Mernissi and her hopes that eventually, women in Bosnia-Herzegovina will also engage more with religion as a science.<sup>748</sup>

Along with participation in institutions and their role in families, mosques are a topic of negotiation for women in Islam. Specifically, my informants discussed how much space women have in the mosque, where this space is, and that it is separated in the first place. Globally, this is also a flashpoint, as such projects as 'Side Entrance' on social media show.<sup>749</sup>

In Sarajevo, women generally do not attend Friday prayers (jummah) and it is even sometimes frowned upon if they go, with the argument that space in the mosque is limited. The argument is that the available spaces should be left to men. This excludes women from relevant networking and community building events as well as official religious knowledge. At the large Careva mosque, there is a separate room for women with a live video link to the sermon.

There is also a gendered public-private division. In the private sphere, particularly with regard to children, women are responsible for the implementation of Islam, as was outlined in the section on family. Jummah, which also has the role of networking and community building, is a public oasis of male dominance.<sup>750</sup> Within these gendered stereotypes, it is unclear if women are glad to not have all religious duties. Another topic related to mosques is the gender division during prayer. Without prompting by me, several women spoke about how they see it as positive that women and men are separated during this practice. For example, Hasna says:

It could be distracting actually, to be next to [...] some guy in the mosque praying, [...] when we are among women we are all looking the same, [...] we are all covered, so we actually don't notice people around [us], you are just part of the community, you are praying. But when you are mixed you would pay more attention to people around you rather than your prayers, I think. Maybe it would actually be discriminating for

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<sup>748</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:04:06.6 - 01:04:57.5.

<sup>749</sup> "Side Entrance." <https://sideentrance.tumblr.com/>, (accessed 9.10.2019).

<sup>750</sup> For more on the role of jummah see: Funk.

women if we were mixed or the women would be in front, I guess.<sup>751</sup>

Similarly, Alma explores it as follows:

I like [that women are separated]. It is very fine because I don't know, with woman you feel like you are women. [...] You are much more relaxed, you know. But when you are around the guys, know the guys are watching, checking out, you are beautiful, you are not beautiful, and I don't know. I like being around women.<sup>752</sup>

Meliha, who also spoke about international developments and women in institutions Bosnia-Herzegovina, refers to the physical set-up in mosques as 'natural'.

For me, it is natural that a man is an Imam, that the first rows are reserved for men in the mosque and the last for women. For me that is logical, and you don't need to correct anything, that is why I wouldn't think of doing that.

Für mich ist das Natürliche das ein Mann ein Imam ist, dass die ersten Reihen für die Männer reserviert sind in der Moschee, und die letzten für die Frauen. Das ist für mich ganz logisch, und man braucht dann nichts zu korrigieren, deswegen würde es mir nicht einfallen.<sup>753</sup>

While women aren't very present in mosques and are separate when they are, there was also no push to change it, at least among the women I spoke to. As stated earlier, this could be related to the fact that the Islamic Community is not that important for guidance, and that rather direct teachings found online or books are key to shaping my informants' understanding of Islam.

Islam generally is also talked about as positive for women, along with the separation in mosques. Amina goes into this in some detail, in particular outlining the foundation period of Islam as positive:

Muhammed was the first feminist, [the] first thing that [he] introduced [were] women's rights, [...] I don't like the fact that people put an equal sign between lesbians and feminism, because those are completely different things. And I as a Muslim think everyone should have their own opinion and [sexual] orientation, and everything, but I how I see feminism is protecting women's rights. [...] In Bosnia, Europe, they are not that bad, [not that] against [these rights]. [...] And I am happy to say that Islam covers [...] most of the rights that women are fighting for; Islam gives them.<sup>754</sup>

Muhammed, seen as the ideal man and thus definitely a good man in the sense that was so key in the field, is also portrayed as feminist. Thus, the negative reality of patriarchy is in a way also assigned to culture, and not religion.

Another point that several women brought up as positive in Islam was that of

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<sup>751</sup> Interview, Hasna 3.1.2017, 00:53:29.0 - 00:54:01.6.

<sup>752</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:42:41.6 - 00:43:16.2.

<sup>753</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:02:36.3 - 01:02:54.3

<sup>754</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 1:40:10.0-1:42:00.1.

financial obligations of husbands to their wives:

When you are marrying a woman, you need to set up a certain amount of money that you have to give to her immediately, so if she divorces you, she will be settled. So, she can say the amount of money she wants. So those kinds of rights, they are only now in the last forty years or fifty years being brought to these democratic societies. But women had a lot of rights in Islam. And one funny example, I don't know if you are aware of that, if men and women are working, the money the woman earns is hers alone. And the money the man earns is for supporting the family. So, [men] have less rights than we do, in Islam. So, it is such a complex religion on the social, legal, and spiritual level, bringing a lot of things.<sup>755</sup>

Alma also refers to money as key in the relationship between husband and wife:

I think [the] woman is very protected in Islam and if you have a [religious] person next to you who is your husband; he knows how to treat a woman, so you are very protected [...] from anyone around you. You know, no one will kick you [...] because your husband is there. So, you are protected in that way. Also, we are protected from him, he knows that woman in Islam is, he must treat you very nice, [...] he must help you in the house, go make money, give you money, and so [on] [...], just because he is [a] religious person.<sup>756</sup>

The financial set-up is also key for Leijla:

That a man is obliged in Islam, [...] to provide his wife with food, a roof [over her head], and clothes [is fascinating to me]. And all the woman's income that a woman earns, if a woman works and goes to work, is [according] to Sharia, [she is not obliged] to share one pfenning, not a single Euro, no Mark [the currency in Bosnia], except to spend that money on herself. Not even on her children. So that's how far Islam went; [...] in Islam, a woman can work, but she doesn't have to support her family, although you will hardly find a woman that spends all that money on herself.

Da je muškarac dužan u Islamu, [...] da obezbijedi ženi hranu, krov i odjeću [što je meni fascinantna stvar]. A sva ženina primanja koja žena zaradi, ako žena radi i ide na posao, šerijatom nije dužna ni feninga jednog, niti jednog eura niti jedne marke da da osim za sebe da troši te pare. Čak ni djeci. Znači to je koliko je Islam išao, [...], može da radi, u Islamu žena može da radi, ali nema potrebu da izdržava porodicu iako slabo koju ženu da ćete naći da će sve te pare potrošiti na sebe.<sup>757</sup>

The right to manage one's own finances and to have the option of being independent is thus presented as a key aspect of women's rights. The option of being able to work is also pointed out.

While when talking about hijab, there is a strong narrative of religiously based empowerment, it also comes with a lot of social sanctions such as not smoking,

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<sup>755</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 0:45:12.6-0:48:35.4.

<sup>756</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 00:26:30.2: - 00:27:19.6.

<sup>757</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:50:02.5-0:51:35.7.

having boyfriends, or eating ice cream. In contrast, here there is a focus on financial independence and not on working out ambivalences of the expected behaviour for pious women. The emphasis is on choice around financial issues, including whether to work, rather than how expectations and rules may be limiting.

Reflections about the role of women in Islam did not often come up as relevant during the research; it is not a topic that is very relevant in the field. The first area that could be teased out of the data is the negative situation of women in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the wider region irrespective of religion. Then, referring to the only women who raised this topic, I explored the role of women in Islamic Institutions. When it comes to the space in mosque there was a little more interest, but still not much, and no one expressed any desire to change this situation. Finally, I portrayed how Islam, particularly what is perceived as Islam divorced from cultural practices, is seen as beneficial for women, particularly financially.

After exploring hijab as a highly relevant category and other aspects around women in Islam, the next section brings together how Muslim women in Sarajevo position themselves in context and how they construct themselves in several selected relationships.

### 8.3 Negotiating belonging: Sarajevo, Europe, and the global ummah

In the field I studied, it was repeatedly pointed out that one's relationship to those of other religions is an important part of being Muslim. This could be a specifically Bosnian phenomenon, where historically, being part of multi-religious and multi-ethnic region was seen as a positive distinguisher.<sup>758</sup> Indeed, this positive association with belonging to a religiously diverse community was echoed in my fieldwork. For my informants, who all self-identify and categorise themselves as *vjernici*, 'believers', it was generally more important to distinguish themselves from 'Muslims by name', who are perceived as not practising, than identifying as separate from other religions in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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<sup>758</sup> Lučić, 107. This self-image, of course, catastrophically collapsed to a large degree during the 1990s due to war and genocide.

Sarajevo particularly is perceived as a special place, at least in my view and the view of my research partners. Thus, I will outline how the city is seen and navigated by the women I spoke to. I will also analyse how these women view and position themselves with regard to Europe and, finally with regard to the global ummah. A frequent narrative around religious practice and the situation of being a young Muslim woman in Sarajevo was around choice. My interlocutors stressed the importance of not being forced to be religious or to practise again and again when recounting key situations. The importance of choice also came up in imagining a distinction to Muslims of the Middle East or other regions of the world. This interpretation of religion by my research participants can be seen as modernist and individualised. The findings around this type of religiosity are thus a contribution to the field of study of religions. The aspect of having great self-confidence to question religious leaders and to draw on individual decisions as key is really striking. The other key finding is the importance that women in the field place on being a ‘good person’, which is seen as more relevant than adhering strictly to religious doctrine.

The ethnic category of Bosniak, which is closely connected to being Muslim, is often defined through differentiation, as in not being Orthodox (and thus Serb) or Catholic (and thus Croat).<sup>759</sup> This is different for the believers in my sample, as they focus more on religious practice as well as faith, always pointing out that this cannot be judged from the outside. So, differentiating between perceived types of Muslims emerged as more important than differentiating between ethnic or religious affiliations.

Thus, there is sometimes a negative view by people I was in touch with in Sarajevo of being too outwardly focused or performative with one’s practice. This could include using Islamic greetings, wearing eye-catching clothing like turbans or pants ending above the ankles, or even wearing hijab for women and for men, going to mosque. While Islam, like any religion, can only exist in the context of people practising it, there was an overall desire from the women I spoke to deculture Islam.<sup>760</sup> This finding adds to previous research: Islam in

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<sup>759</sup> See the chapter on history and context above.

<sup>760</sup> I don’t use ‘deculturation’ in the theoretically elaborated sense of Olivier Roy and those following him but rather in a pragmatic sense, meaning an idea of Islam as free from culture and tradition.

the Balkans is often seen as ethno-national, in contrast to mainly diaspora communities in Western Europe that are seen as universal and decultured.<sup>761</sup> On the other hand, deculturation is associated with neo-fundamentalist and Salafi interpretations of Islam, which was also not the case in Sarajevo.<sup>762</sup>

The women I spoke to construct boundaries, for example to local nominal Muslims and to Arab Muslims, and thus distinguish themselves. Amongst my sample, there is an idealised view of the global ummah without the influence of local customs, which is perceived as negative, be they Bosnian or Middle Eastern. This, then, is imagined as some utopian purity, as a 'true Islam'. However, there is no particular focus on correct ritual practice or on closing off against those that have a different practice, and there is also a distinct lack of missionary drive or organisation. Thus, most of the people I spoke to in the field cannot be seen as neo-fundamentalist as classified by Olivier Roy.<sup>763</sup>

There are different influences from other areas of the world in Sarajevo. I will particularly look at the perception of Europe and the European Union, and of Arabs. Bosnia-Herzegovina is sometimes seen as part of Europe and sometimes not; this is also discussed. These influences, the Western European and Arab, are examined by women in Sarajevo and are sometimes taken on gladly, sometimes pushed away. Thus, in this final chapter, I will outline how women position themselves in Sarajevo, with regards to Europe and in relation to the global ummah, imagined free of local influences.

### 8.3.1 Sarajevo as a specific urban space

Sarajevo as an urban centre and capital city does allow for a lot of individuality and multitudes of positioning. As the city is more densely populated than a rural area, there are also more Muslims of faith, and it is easier than in other contexts to find a group of like-minded people.

Baščaršija, the old centre of Sarajevo, is a place of yearning for South-Slavic-speaking Muslims from everywhere. As mentioned above, I once got lost while hiking in the mountains between Montenegro and Albania and was taken in by

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<sup>761</sup> For example: Merdjanova, 108.

<sup>762</sup> Endresen, 234-236.

<sup>763</sup> Roy, 243-247.

three generations of women. In their tiny kitchen hut, there was an image of Gazi-Husrev Beg Mosque, and they spoke about their dream of experiencing Ramadan in Sarajevo once in their life.<sup>764</sup>

Many of the women I spoke to who live in Sarajevo like spending time in the old town. Ena describes Baščaršija in a very illustrative way:

[When I was] twenty-one to twenty-two [years old] and I discovered Islam [...] I met those people who would hang out [...] a lot on Čaršija. So, I replace[d] that life before with [...] smoking shisha on Čaršija (laughs). But [...] that really was a good period for me [...] just sitting [...] it became just a part where [...] I had to go every day just for at least an hour to be on Čaršija, [...], there is always life going on over there. [...] I still love it, [...] I just love to go for a coffee on Čaršija.<sup>765</sup>

She describes the old town as a specifically Muslim-friendly space, one that was important for her religious self-production. Sarajevo is imagined both as a place to connect to Ottoman history and Islam, to find Muslim infrastructure, and at the same time as a symbol of different faiths living together in harmony. The idea that Sarajevo is a culturally, religiously, and ethnically mixed city is very strong amongst young Muslim women of faith. Being in a context with different religions is crucial to their identity. Being tolerant and open is an important value for my interview partners, and thus they frown upon the ethno-political, nationalist use of religion for politics. Frenky characterises her hometown thus:

As a Muslim city, Sarajevo is kind of more liberal than in other cities, a large part of the people [...] are actually Muslims, but, [...] people try to live kind of normal here, somehow. Sarajevo wouldn't be Sarajevo if this mixture did not exist, [...] And the whole history that has shaped us, [...] I find it interesting that you can find different religious houses [of worship] in one place, yes, I actually find this mixture, if we could somehow make something positive out of it, but we can't do that, because we, I always have the feeling that we don't do that.

Als muslimische Stadt, in Sarajevo ist das jetzt schon eher liberal als in anderen Städten, ein Großteil der Menschen in Sarajevo ist eigentlich Muslime, aber, [...] man eben hier versucht so normal zu leben, irgendwie. Sarajevo wäre nicht Sarajevo, wenn diese Mischung nicht existieren würde, [...]. Und die ganze Geschichte, die uns geprägt hat, [...] ich finde es schon interessant dass man an einem Ort verschiedene Religionshäuser finden kann, ja ich finde diese Mischung eigentlich, wenn wir irgendwie daraus etwas Positives machen könnten, was wir aber nicht machen können, weil wir, ich hab immer das Gefühl das wir das nicht machen.<sup>766</sup>

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<sup>764</sup> Fieldnotes, 28.8.2015.

<sup>765</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 3:04:41.5-3:07:13.2.

<sup>766</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 0:34.35.3 - 0:35:01.6

Frenky thus sees that the full potential of Sarajevo as a multi-religious city is not reached, that it could be something a lot more valuable than how it is expressed now.

For the women I interviewed, special significance lies in the fact that it is perceived as a religiously mixed city. Thus the city, especially the Ottoman old town, offers a framework in which diverse cultural connotations and self-positioning are possible. Sarajevo is thus a field in which women position themselves, a place with cultural connotations that are reflective of personal identity. Zooming out, around Europe the frame becomes more unclear, as will be shown in the next section.

### 8.3.2 Distinguishing and identifying: 'Being European'

While one's positioning and identification as Muslim has many facets, from faith, to practice, to the political role of Islam, 'being European' came across in my interviews in a much less defined way. It also tended to be mentioned by the interviewees more casually. The topics that relate to this thematic field emerged from the data are manifold. One dominant topic was the view that Bosnia-Herzegovina was European in a primarily geographical sense, which brought up some perspectives in a development/colonial paradigm, as well as the idea that 'Europe' is generally equated with Central or Northern Europe, rather than looking south or east. Another large cluster of topics centred around what are perceived as European values and lifestyles, followed by perspectives on the EU, and the equivalence of Europe to the EU. Finally, the topic of European Islam and/or Europe as Christian came up.

Europe is a concept that is grasped and understood in many different ways, both by my interviewees and in wider research. Europe's eastern borders in particular tend to be disputed today, both in Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere. On the one hand, in talks during my fieldwork in Sarajevo, one's own status as being European was often emphasised, especially in the opposition to an imagined 'East'. However, on the other hand, interviewees often described travelling or working in Austria or Sweden as 'in Europe', in contrast to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Despite these conceptual difficulties, which are defined in more detail below from the field, a 'European Islam' can be observed in Sarajevo. As

outlined in the chapter dealing with history and context above, the idea of Bosnian Islam as 'European Islam' is also promoted by a number of different actors.

During my interviews, there was some identification with Europe in a sense that was both positive and inclusive of oneself as European, as outlined below. Additionally, there was also some identification as 'European' that was not necessarily positive, but rather negatively positioned against an imagined, Eastern 'Other'. These research participants specifically delineated themselves as not-Arab, and thus European, their reactionary focus being upon what they are not.

When asked about their associations, feelings and relationships to Europe, many of my interview partners initially were somewhat disinterested. In general, they were much more casual and blasé in their feelings about any European identity compared to that as a Muslim. Their European identity was sometimes framed as geographical and often was drawn in contrast to perceived 'Others' – not just Arabs, but also other 'Others'.

This fits very well with the theory of Milica Bakić-Hayden, who put forward the concept of 'Nesting Orientalisms'.<sup>767</sup> She proposes that within former Yugoslavia, a hierarchy is constructed that differentiates between those that were part of the Habsburg Empire and those ruled by the Ottomans. These delineations are further drawn along religious lines: Within former Ottoman territories, 'eastern Orthodox peoples perceive themselves as more European than those who assumed identities of European Muslims and who further distinguish themselves from the ultimate Orientals, non-Europeans'.<sup>768</sup> This process of othering and orientalising within former Yugoslavia takes many forms: Piro Rexhepi, for example, has identified the phenomenon of portraying practising Muslims in the Balkans as dangerous per se, simply because of their perceived connection to the Middle East and thus danger to/in Europe.<sup>769</sup>

The fact that that identities are multi-layered, fluid and situational, was explicitly acknowledged by some interview partners in talking about their positionality.

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<sup>767</sup> Bakić-Hayden.

<sup>768</sup> Ibid., 921-922.

<sup>769</sup> Rexhepi, 'Unmapping Islam in Eastern Europe: Periodization and Muslim Subjectivities in the Balkans', 65-66.

This is relevant in particular when taking into consideration that aspects such as Muslim vs. European and European vs. Balkan are also constructed as opposites in general public discourse, for example in Germany.

The identification with Europe, or as European, during my fieldwork was not consistent, even within one person, much less across my sample or let alone society as a whole. Additionally, my informants sometimes included Bosnia-Herzegovina within Europe and sometimes excluded it. Most of the women I spoke to self-identify as European, even though it is not an important part of their identity. 'Being European' was not initially a criterium when selecting interview partners, unlike working or studying and identifying as 'believer'. Thus, the results of how they see European-ness may be different when selecting for people who specifically identify as 'European' as key point in their identity.

When speaking about perceived cultural aspects that are critiqued or seen as positive, there is a constant change, even by one person much less in the entire group, about whether they see themselves as presenting these cultural aspects or not. My informants were not very consistent in their responses regarding 'being European', as will be shown.

The relationship with Europe as either an overarching construct or something that is in opposition to being from the Balkans, or being Muslim, is not straightforward. Some informants used 'Europe' within a casual reference to the geographical region. When asked what her associations with 'Europe' are, Elma says:

Actually, not only the EU, but mainly the continent, because I studied geography, that's why [...] I think about it simply as the Old Continent.

Eigentlich nicht nur die EU, sondern hauptsächlich der Kontinent, weil ich Geographie studiert habe, deswegen [...] denke ich darüber so nach [der] Alte Kontinent einfach.<sup>770</sup>

It was typical to refer to Bosnia's geographical placement in Europe, but without necessarily ascribing cultural or other importance to it. Ena says: 'I would call myself Bosnian first and then European. But European, it's okay for me'.<sup>771</sup> The following quote from Meliha exemplifies how, while seeing herself as living in Europe, an identity of 'being European' is ascribed to her from the outside:

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<sup>770</sup> Interview, Elma, 11.5.2016, 00:02:05.3 - 00:02:22.0.

<sup>771</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 0:57:29.1-0:57:58.2.

For me, Europe is nothing special. That I should feel European. So, I don't know. I know that I am here in Europe, but [...] I don't give Europe any meaning, that's the problem. Because when I was in Syria during my study trip, they always thought, 'you are European', although for me I am only Bosnian and there are many countries in this continent, and my country is Bosnia. It is like saying that I live in a room which actually in a house, so for me it is natural that [Bosnia] belongs to Europe, but I don't feel like it is very important for my life.

Für mich ist Europa nichts Besonderes. Damit ich mich als Europäerin empfinden sollte. Deswegen weiß ich nicht. Ich weiß das ich hier in Europa bin, aber [...] Europa schenke ich keine Bedeutung, das ist das Problem. Denn als ich während meiner Studienreise in Syrien war, haben die immer gedacht Ihr seid Europäerin, obwohl für mich ich bin nur Bosnierin und in diesem Kontinent gibt es ganz viele Länder, und mein Land ist Bosnien. [...] Das ist als ob man sagt, ich lebe in einem Zimmer was eigentlich in einem Haus ist, also ist für mich selbstverständlich, dass es zu Europa ist, aber ich empfinde sie nicht als irgendetwas was sehr wichtig für mein Leben ist.<sup>772</sup>

Some women also reflect on Europe in a development paradigm; this can be both positive, in terms of rights and opportunity, or negative, referring to colonialism. Amina talks about how being European is not so relevant for her, but she appreciates the advantages:

I really don't like to identify myself with anything (laughs), but I like to live in Europe, because when I look at other parts of the world, they aren't really happy with how the world stands, and I think we are really ahead of Asia, or most of the part of Asia, and the development there, Africa, South America, all those areas are really struggling for human rights, technology, development, so being in Europe is...good. But I don't like the fact that we are not helping, we are just getting ahead and let[ting] them follow us. I don't like what Europe used to be, you know, the foundations.<sup>773</sup>

She goes on to say that by 'foundations', she means colonialism and that democracy is being forcibly spread. Amina criticises how Western Europeans see themselves in a way that connects to colonial history, while still seeing an economic hierarchy as positive and wanting to be included. So, she expresses an unfavourable view of Europe that coexists with wanting to profit from higher income:

(Sighs) I see Europe as [...] I see it as an origin of white man, who likes to be right – because there are so many people that were harmed by Europeans through history, and I don't like that mindset that Europeans, so many Europeans, especially Western Europeans, they like to see themselves as a higher race or something...but still, they are leading the development, so, I would like to be part of that society.<sup>774</sup>

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<sup>772</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:14:19.3 - 01:16:50.3.

<sup>773</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:14.6 - 00:00:14.7.

<sup>774</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:14.5 - 00:00:14.6.

She refers to Europeans in general first but then specifies Western Europeans. In the imagination of Europe, the ideas that come up are not just of the European Union, but of stereotypes associated with Central and Northern Europe. Negative views around Europe expressed by my informants include that it is 'too rushed' (Ena),<sup>775</sup> 'too neat' (Ena),<sup>776</sup> and 'cold' (Meliha),<sup>777</sup> but at the same time, Europe is generally perceived as having a better political and economic situation.

Sometimes during interviews, my informants drew a connection to Spain and Italy as having similar economic challenges. Belma, who is part of an international academic network dealing with Europe, sees some similarities between Southern Europeans and Bosnians:

For example, with Italians and with Spaniards, with Southern Europeans, I think they deal with almost the same problems as people in Bosnia. Unemployment, and unemployment also means that somehow, somewhere you find your way.

Zum Beispiel mit Italienern und mit Spaniern, mit Südeuropäern, ich denke die beschäftigen fast dieselben Probleme wie Leute in Bosnien. Arbeitslosigkeit, und Arbeitslosigkeit heißt auch dass man irgendwie, irgendwo seinen Weg findet.<sup>778</sup>

She goes on to describe a scene of private conflict she witnessed in the centre of the old town in Sarajevo, something she describes as embarrassing because the neighbours and tourists could see it, and that this is a situation which should happen at home. For her, this is something not-European, but 'maybe somehow Italian, I can imagine that in Italy, in Southern Italy' ('vielleicht irgendwie italienisch, ich kann mir so was in Italien vorstellen, in Süditalien').<sup>779</sup> This reflects the idea of people from the Balkans being unbridled and wild, uncontrolled and less 'civilised'. Whereas the unrealistic view of the imagined Europe is seen as more controlled, organised, and economically successful, which does not necessarily reflect the reality, anywhere. Belma refers to an idealised view of Europe, that is more oriented towards the norms in or at least stereotypes of central and northern Europe and implicitly excludes the East and Mediterranean.

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<sup>775</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 1:00:26.4 - 1:00:40.1.

<sup>776</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 1:24:42.6 - 1:25:44.0.

<sup>777</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 1:17:45.2 - 1:18:15.6.

<sup>778</sup> Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, 00:34:16.4 - 00:34:39.5.

<sup>779</sup> Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, 00:36:05.0 - 00:37:42.2.

Besides Europe as a geographic locale and Europe as a set of (idealised) stereotypes, there were several instances where women explicitly referred to identity, either their own or of Europeans, or that of themselves as Europeans. Belma explicitly speaks about a Slavic identity distinct from Turkey and Western Europe. From the rest of what she says, it sounds like she is mainly referring to former Yugoslavia, which is also a major reference point of identification when speaking about the Balkans.

I think it does matter that we Bosnians are Slavs. There is this Slavic affiliation which distinguishes them from the Turks, and which brings them closer to the Serbs and the Croats, and such a Slavic identity is also distinguished from the Western European identity. So, this Slavic identity plays a role. Very much.

Ich denke es spielt schon eine Rolle das wir Bosnier Slawen sind. Es gibt diese slawische Zugehörigkeit die sie dann unterscheidet von den Türken, und die sie dann näher bringt zu den Serben und den Kroaten, und so ein slawische Identität die man auch von der Westeuropäischen Identität unterscheidet. Also diese slawische Identität spielt eine Rolle. Sehr viel.<sup>780</sup>

While this is an identity built (also) on difference, distinguishing from other areas horizontally, there is also a distinction and identification which works vertically, with units of belonging need not be necessarily distinct. So, for me personally, I can identify as Bavarian, German, and European, without them being in conflict.

This is also reproduced by some young Bosnians, for example when Elma speaks about how she is European and loves her country:

I [think] that I think more European in some way, although I am also a very great patriot. I LOVE this country, although it has a lot of problems, [...] last night I watched the Eurovision and I felt really bad that we didn't get further, although the song wasn't that special for me now, and the performance wasn't that [great] either, [...] [I] like [...] the country and the people, but I also see myself as European.

Ich [denke], dass ich mehr irgendwie Europäisch nachdenke, obwohl ich auch ein sehr großer, [...]Patriot bin. Ich LIEBE dieses Land, obwohl es richtig viele Probleme hat, [...], gestern Abend habe ich die Eurovision gekuckt und habe mich richtig schlecht gefühlt dass wir nicht weiter gekommen sind, obwohl das Lied für mich jetzt nicht so speziell war, und die Performance war auch nicht so, [...] [ich] mag [...] auch richtig das Land und die Menschen, aber ich sehe mich auch als Europäerin.<sup>781</sup>

The feeling of being European also can appear in opposition to non-European-ness. My informants discussed this in detail with regard to Arabs, where being Arab often also had negative connotations. Being not-Arab, and European, was

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<sup>780</sup> Interview, Belma, 22.4.2017, 02:19:28.8 - 02:20:09.3.

<sup>781</sup> Interview, Elma, 11.5.2016,00:10:50.7 - 00:11:54.3.

seen as positive by most of my interview partners. It can also happen in encounters with others than Arabs, as this example from Amina's dinner during Ramadan with diplomatic personnel from Malaysia demonstrates:

My sister was invited [...] to the [...] vice-ambassador or something like that. [and] she invited me [...] to join her, and there was a lot of their food that we wouldn't even know. And that is kind of the thing that comes to mind where I felt European, that I didn't know how to eat things, what those things were, of course since it was *bajram* and they were Muslims it was all halal food, but I really didn't know whether I would like it or not. Because I was really asking myself, 'what [is] that', [...] and I would look at those people eating with the hands, and it is like a custom in Malaysia to eat with your hands, and you know, so that was a fun thing, that I felt, like, 'European' (laughs).<sup>782</sup>

So, Amina noted that she felt distinctly European at this time in contrast to Malaysia, due to their very different cultural practices. For people I spoke to during my fieldwork, Bosnia-Herzegovina was sometimes included in Europe, sometimes excluded.<sup>783</sup>

I outline in the next paragraphs what the women I spoke to see as European values and European lifestyle. When asked about her European-ness, Leijla refers to the fact that Bosnia-Herzegovina is in Europe, although she is not a fan of the aspects she considers belonging to it :

Well, that's normal, I live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnia is a part of Europe (laughs). But it when it comes to some sides of the European life, I am not a supporter of it.

Pa normalno živim u Bosni i Hercegovini, Bosna pripada Evropi i da (laughs). Ali što se tiče nekih strana života evropskog, nisam pobornik tome tako da.<sup>784</sup>

So, Leijla draws a clear distinction between living in Europe and being European. In her discussions of what constitutes these sides of the 'European life' that she found less positive, the concept of freedom emerged as particularly salient. She sees it as having negative and positive components:

So much freedom. Freedom about some things that are as good and not as good. How much they brought good, and not. And again, on the other

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<sup>782</sup> Interview, Amina, 1.1.2017, 00:00:15.7 - 00:00:15.9.

<sup>783</sup> I had also considered structuring the section on Europe around what are perceived as positive vs. negative parts of European culture by my interviewees, but I decided against it. Many values are not easily put in one on or the other box, even by people talking about them, much less from my perspective. Reflecting on my positionality, I personally see freedom, having split accounts between partners and night clubs as something positive. These are all mentioned as negative aspects of what is perceived as European by the interlocutors. Thus, as a researcher who also develops results based on data from the field, the negative/positive distinction would be challenging.

<sup>784</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:35:16.2 - 0:35:30.3.

hand, when I think of Europe, then I mean the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina, how it can contribute to greater employment, greater stability of the state, bigger, better [political] parties, and at the same time we have many negative sides brought about by Europe and European life.

Pa puno slobode. Slobode po pitanju nekih stvari koje koliko su dobre toliko i nisu. Koliko su donijele dobra toliko i nisu. A opet s druge strane, kad pomislim Evropa onda mislim na cijelu Bosnu i Hercegovinu, kako može doprinijeti većem zaposlenju, većoj sabilnosti države, veće, bolje neke strane, a u isto vrijeme imamo i dosta negativnih strana koje donosi Evropa i evropski život.<sup>785</sup>

For her, the main positive aspect of being 'European' is economic stability, whereas she views other certain ways of life as 'not as good'; in Leijla's own words, being 'European' was, 'so to say, negative and positive' ('Znači pozitivno i negativno').<sup>786</sup>

Ena also doesn't like what she refers to as the 'lifestyle' she sees as European, and calls Europe hypocritical because of the discrepancy between focusing on individualism on the one hand and disregarding individuals:

Hypocrisy is [...] the word for me. [...] All that story about democracy and bla, bla. [...] A lot of story but it's different [in reality] [...] I just see an emphasis on the individualism, a lot of it, but I don't see the respect for the individual. And also there is good stuff, I mean I am European also, I am also hypocritical, [...] I don't see myself as someone who is not proud of it, yeah, I don't have like clear picture on Europe or something. But I don't like the lifestyle and see it like that. I just don't like the lifestyle.<sup>787</sup>

Ena sees a cultural difference in the approach to social relations and time:

There is no coffee [in Europe] (both laugh). No, there is coffee but there is no, there is too much rush. In Bosnia we have coffee when you have to stop...[...] No, but we do have it for five hours sometimes. That's too much. But you know, those two hours, that's what I miss in Europe, you know. That stopping, that *ćeif*, a word that we have in Bosnia.<sup>788</sup>

This is also an aspect which foreigners from Western Europe wanting to do business in Bosnia-Herzegovina find something negative; so, the same action can be interpreted in very different ways, one of which is that people from the Balkans are more perceived as being more unfocused and unreliable.<sup>789</sup>

Meliha, when talking about Bosnia-Herzegovina, explicitly includes it in Europe, but makes a nuance around being emotional:

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<sup>785</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:35:30.3 - 0:36:08.7.

<sup>786</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:41:26.8 - 0:42:08.7.

<sup>787</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 0:57.58.2 - 1:00:26.4.

<sup>788</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 1:00:26.4 - 1:00:40.1.

<sup>789</sup> Fieldnotes, 28.5.2016.

A country in Europe which has a soul. Which I don't see with typical Euro...EU countries, I see them as cold, without feelings, although I am not that driven by feelings either.

Ein Land in Europa was eine Seele hat. Was ich nicht von typischen Euro...von EU Ländern halte, die empfinde ich irgendwie als kalt, ohne Gefühle, obwohl ich auch nicht so gefühlbedingt bin.<sup>790</sup>

For Arnesa, the main difference to Western Countries – she doesn't speak of Europe here – are social, family relations.

And now, when I look at Western countries, there are families in Western countries where it is not desirable for a girl to walk half-naked in the street [...], or, for example, has a husband and wife family they share the money, he has his money, she has her money and only live together in the house and such things. Or relationships without marriage are allowed, and so, these are things that are in Islam unacceptable. Islam is completely in the protection of women.

I sad kad gledam zapadne zemlje, u zapadnim zemljama ima porodica u kojima nije poželjno da djevojka hoda polugola na ulici [...], ili na primjer ima porodica muž i žena dijele novac, on ima svoj novac, ona ima svoj novac i samo žive zajedno u kući i takve stvari. Ili veza bez braka je dozvoljena i tako, to su stvari koje su u Islamu nedopustive. Islam je u potpunosti u zaštiti žene.<sup>791</sup>

So, she sees the gender relations which are widespread in the West are something negative for women.

There are also examples of seeing Europe as positive. Aida sees Europe as an association that is built on accepting other people, and then lists a number of categories on which this acceptance is based:

I see it as a great community that will actually accept other people no matter what they are, regardless of what kind of culture, which nation, that it is in fact a community that should be tolerant towards each other, and to provide everyone with equal opportunities. So, regardless of who is involved, and now not only within the framework of culture and religion, but also within the framework of male-female relations. So where can women have their voice, that they can do whatever they want, travel, do whatever they want, and so on. I mean, now I do not know for sure how real the situation is, there are wars that are presented as such, many say that it is so, some will say that it is not the case, but I really see Europe in that way.

Ja to vidim kao jednu veliku zajednicu koja će u stvari prihvatiti druge ljude bez obzira kakvi su, bez obzira koje su kulture, koje nacije, da je to u stvari zajednica koja bi trebala da bude tolerantna prema drugom i drugačijem i da pruži svima jednake mogućnosti. Znači bez obzira o kome se radi i sada ne samo u okviru kulture i religije, nego i u okviru muško-ženskih odnosa. Znači gdje i žene mogu imati svoj glas, da i one mogu da se bave čime god požele, da putuju, da rade šta god žele da rade, i tako. Mislim, sad ne znam zaista koliko je to stvarna situacija, postoje stvari koje se

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<sup>790</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:17:45.2 - 01:18:15.3.

<sup>791</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:08:08.4 - 01:08:44.1.

predstavljaju kao takvima, mnogi kažu da to jeste tako, neki će reći da to nekad nije tako, ali ja zaista na taj način vidim Evropu.<sup>792</sup>

So, for her – in contrast to Arnesa – the opportunities women have in Western Europe, or are presented as having, are positive.

Wanting to travel and being open to different cultures is also seen as a key facet of European identity. Several women addressed that it makes you European if you have seen different things and also are interested in other places and cultures.

Aida questions in what way I ask her about being European:

European, in what way European? As a person of wide understanding, as a person for whom it is important to be educated? In that way? [...] In that way I think I am European. A person that wants to always see more, that wants to travel the world, that wants to know ever more people, that never stops learning no matter what my profession is. That there will always be many things with which I will occupy myself, that I get involved in various projects related to whatever [...] [the] main thing [is] that I enrich my life.

Evropljanka, na koji način Evropljanka? Kao osoba širokih shvatanja, kao osoba kojoj je bitno da se obrazuje? Je li na taj način? Pa mislim da u tom smislu jesam Evropljanka. Osoba koja želi da što više vidi, da proputuje svijetom, da upozna što više ljudi, da nikad ne prestane učiti bez obzira koja je moja profesija. Da uvijek postoje mnoge stvari kojima ću se baviti, da se uključim u razne projekte vezano za bilo šta, znači apsolutno nije ni bitno samo da svoj život što više obogatim i to je to.<sup>793</sup>

Elma also sees having lived in other places and having experienced different types of life as key for her being European. When asked if she sees herself as such, she answers:

In some ways, yes, because I lived in Germany...if I only had lived here, then no, I don't think so; I have maybe seen more, and more different ways of life, that's why I think I could be more integrated in Europe, but if I only had lived in Sarajevo the whole time, then I think not.

Teilweise schon, weil ich in Deutschland gelebt habe...wenn ich hier nur gelebt hätte, nein, denke ich nicht, [...] ich hab vielleicht mehr gesehen und mehrere Arten von Leben gesehen, deswegen denke ich dass ich mehr integriert sein könnte, in Europa, [...]aber wenn ich nur in Sarajevo gelebt hätte die ganze Zeit dann denke ich nicht.<sup>794</sup>

When asked if she feels European, Alma combines the geographical idea of Europe with other ideas associated with 'European-ness':

Yes, of course. I live in Europe, I must. I don't know, I am very tolerant to everyone, to any religion, and I like to travel also. I have been I think in all Europe.<sup>795</sup>

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<sup>792</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 0:34:24.8-0:35:32.9.

<sup>793</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 0:33:08.7 – 0:33:26.5.

<sup>794</sup> Interview, Elma, 11.5.2017, 00:01:21.0 - 00:01:57.6.

<sup>795</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017,0:36:00.6 – 0:36:19.0.

The aspect of being tolerant is quite prominent as a typical European value amongst the women I spoke to.

For example, Frenky refers to tolerance and notes that it can be 'felt' in Sarajevo:

What should [being] a European woman mean to me? Tolerance, that really [is] everything, that the ethnic groups, religions, what do I know, that there are actually bigger problems, that should not be a problem and therefore you should not actually make a problem. I think that somehow, I have no idea, tolerance can really be felt in Sarajevo.

Was sollte für mich Europäerin [sein] bedeuten? Toleranz, dass wirklich alles, das die Ethnien, Religionen, was weiß ich, dass es eigentlich größere Probleme gibt, das soll kein Problem sein und darum eigentlich darf man kein Problem machen. Ich denke dass irgendwie, keine Ahnung, Toleranz kann man in Sarajevo wirklich spüren.<sup>796</sup>

Elma also sees being liberal as something that makes her European, and contrasts this to being religious, although she also adds that it is a good combination to be liberal and religious. From the context, her interpretation of liberal seems to be synonymous with seeing different perspectives.

Yes, I do think that I am more of a European, because I am maybe more liberal, although I am also religious; I don't think it is a bad combination. I think it is a good combination, I always think that a story has two or more sides, and that you should examine everything first before coming to an opinion.

Ja, ich denke schon, mehr als Europa-rin (*sic*) weil ich vielleicht mehr liberal bin, obwohl ich auch religiös bin, ich denke nicht dass das eine schlechte Kombination ist, ich denke dass das eine gute Kombination ist, ich denke immer, daß eine Geschichte zwei oder mehrere Seiten hat, und dass man alles, also erstmal sehen soll, und dann erst sich ein Urteil daraus macht.<sup>797</sup>

For Amira, a central part of being in Europe is the absence of force, particularly as it refers to religious issues:

I'm really, really happy that I am living here, [...] even though Bosnia is not really like that kind of Europe, like those other countries, but still, you are in Europe, you are not in Asia, you are not in Africa or something like that, here, [...] you can choose what to do, like your faith, [...] nobody is forcing you, the system isn't forcing you[...] to do anything, and I am really happy about that.<sup>798</sup>

So, the aspects that are also seen as typical for a Muslim of faith - choosing the practice oneself and being kind and open, are also seen as typical for being European. Following this logic, being a European actually makes someone a better Muslim. There are a wide range of values associated with being

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<sup>796</sup> Interview, Frenky, 12.9.2015, 00:39:34.8 - 00:40:08.5.

<sup>797</sup> Interview, Elma, 11.5.2017, 00:08:57.1 - 00:10:45.2.

<sup>798</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:26:56.9 - 00:27:56.1.

European from the people in the field, which range from something to aspire to and something to reject.

From the interviews, it is clear that European values in general are not constructed in opposition to being Bosnian or being Muslim.

The above-described feelings of 'being European' stark contrast to understanding 'European-ness' as designating membership in the EU, where there is a binary exclusion of Bosnia-Herzegovina. When the interview partners did create a boundary between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Europe, the boundary is often to the European Union and there specifically around the freedom of work and travel. There is often a hierarchical, defensive understanding of the relationship. For example, Arnela says that 'people in the European Union think they are the most advanced on the planet' ('Ljudi koji su u Evropskoj Uniji smatraju da su oni najnapredniji ljudi na planeti, mislim').<sup>799</sup>

There is an interpretation that once (generally not if, but with a clear understanding that it will happen) Bosnia-Herzegovina joins the EU, the political, economic, and social situation will vastly improve. Upon gaining this status, there is the idea that there will be no more dysfunctional politics and more economic stability. However, there also are some concerns about the excessive number of rules and, for Leijla particularly, the potential difficulties of wearing niqab in public. Being in the European Union, however, is generally seen as economically advantageous, and the freedom of movement is cited as one of the main benefits of being European in the sense of joining the EU.

Overall, the informants demonstrated a level of optimism regarding eventual EU membership, despite the high economic and juridical barriers to membership. Additionally, when describing their imagined future of an EU-member Bosnia-Herzegovina, my informants tended to articulate its economic progress along the lines of countries with strong economies like Germany or Sweden, rather than with the likes of Bulgaria or Spain. In reality, although some support would likely be forthcoming, especially along the lines of improved infrastructure, EU status is unlikely to be the healer of everything, as my informants sometimes portrayed it. Indeed, the women I spoke to are

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<sup>799</sup> Interview, Arnela, 5.5.2016, 01:41:25.8 - 01:42:04.9.

generally positive toward the prospect of Bosnia-Herzegovina joining the EU. Alma's statement is quite typical of the general view, which was generally positive without being overly enthusiastic:

European Union. I think it's very nice. It's fine, totally. I consider it very nice. I wish that Bosnia [will] enter that part one year, but which year, I don't know.<sup>800</sup>

Belma's answer to my question about her feeling European or not was very pragmatic and focused on freedom of movement:

I don't know if it will help me to feel more European, but I would definitely be happy if I could travel to the countries of Europe without a passport, or travel within the countries of Europe. Europe, the European Union, and the countries that are already members are, if you compare them with Bosnia, in a much better position, economically, politically and yes, administratively. To be European is to be able to travel without a passport without being able to travel in the countries of the EU, among other things, and many other things that Bosnia now lacks, and, yes, well, for which I do not see that they are coming, and I identify myself with that, so that it is simply that it is a Bosnian life that I have, not a European one.

Ich weiß nicht ob das viel bringt das ich mich europäischer fühle, aber ich würde mich auf jeden Fall freuen wenn ich ohne Pass in die Länder Europas reisen kann, oder in den Ländern Europas reisen könnte. Europa, Europäische Union und die Länder die schon Mitglieder sind, sind schon, wenn man sie mit Bosnien vergleicht in einer viel besseren Lage, wirtschaftlich, politisch, und ja, also, administrativ. Europäisch zu sein heißt ohne Pass ohne in den Ländern EUs reisen zu können, unter anderem auch, und ganz viele andere Sachen die Bosnien inzwischen fehlen, und, ja, also, für die ich nicht sehe, dass sie kommen, und ich identifiziere mich damit, also dass es einfach, dass es ein Bosnisches Leben ist das ich habe, kein europäisches.<sup>801</sup>

Unlike some other informants, Belma explicitly sees her life as not European, contrasting her situation in Bosnia directly with having freedom to travel and other advantages of the EU.

Ena doesn't see the EU as having achieved much beyond the freedom of movement, but she credits the European Union with successful peace-building projects, though she talks about it in a slightly ironic way:

I just think it's so important [...] to hear different stories, to be there for each other, to talk, [...] I really believed in that European Union story that you know. Let's just go to the camp, Serbs and Muslims, and hang out, bla bla bla. It's funny, but I really believe in that.<sup>802</sup>

Here, she is referring to the efforts of EU-funded projects, which take place with participants from within the country and internationals. Some are specifically

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<sup>800</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017,0:36:47.2 – 0:36:59.8.

<sup>801</sup> Interview, Belma, 27.4.2016, 00:27:21.0 - 00:30:07.5.

<sup>802</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5.2016, 3:09:40.7 - 3:13:16.7.

targeted around peacebuilding and inter-cultural connections, others have topics such as cultural heritage, leadership for women, environmental protection or others. I repeatedly heard in Sarajevo how to receive funding it is important to include an inter-ethnic element, which informants did not always find productive, as it enforces ethnic categories. Ena, however, seems to like it.

Leijla sees the potential of economic stability as positive, but also talks about negative consequences if Bosnia-Herzegovina were to join the EU.

I think it would bring much of the good to the same part of the bad side. So, I'm returning again to economic security, economic stability; I think it would be better, as far as it goes, that there would be greater employment and so on, and as far as the negative side is concerned, I think by the very belief that there are many negative sides in terms of joining the European Union.

Mislim da bi bilo velikim dijelom dobro donijela isto manjim dijelom loše strane. Znači ovaj, opet se vraćam na ekonomsku sigurnost, ekonomsku stabilnost; mislim da bi bila bolja, što se tiče, da bi bilo veće zapošljenje i tako te stvari, a što se tiče opet negativne strane, mislim po samu vjeru da ima dosta negativnih strana po pitanju ulaska u Evropsku Uniju.<sup>803</sup>

Her concern, as a woman that wears niqab, is around restrictive laws being introduced:

Well, like what, for example, I'm kind of alone, whether it's media speculation or not just practitioners are accepted in European countries and I think that everything that would be more of a concern for the European Union, in order to introduce some of the laws that for me would not fit.

Pa kao šta, primjera, nekako dosta sam, da li je to medijska špekulacija ili da nisu bas praktikanti prihvaćeni u evropskim zemljama i mislim da bi sve što bi se više težilo Evropskoj Uniji, da bi se uvodili ti neki zakoni koji recimo meni ne bi odgovarali.<sup>804</sup>

Overall, the view of the EU is pragmatic, encompassing freedom of movement, the right to work, and also fear around restrictive regulations concerning Muslim women's clothes.

Another area that is relevant when talking about the positioning of young Muslim women in Sarajevo is around religion, both with regard to Islam in Europe and Europe as Christian. The idea of 'European Islam' not really something that comes up on the ground, although various academic and religious leaders from Bosnia-Herzegovina do draw capital from it, as

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<sup>803</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:42:08.7-0:42:51.2.

<sup>804</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:42:51.2-0:43:22.1.

mentioned elsewhere. 'European Islam' hardly emerges of its own accord in the conversations and is not important for the self-positioning of the interviewees, but rather is brought to them from the outside, by myself as the interviewer or by political and religious actors for whom it is relevant.

Ena talks about the difference of how Islam is seen in Europe depending upon when Islam first spread in the region:

In Islam in Europe, there is [a] tendency of conversion to Islam, that's how I see it and definitely there's different approach than in countries that have [had] Islam for five [hundred], I don't know, many years, or Turkey, or I don't know.<sup>805</sup>

Meliha, on the other hand, does bring up the Muslim heritage present in Europe:

Yes, if you look at Spain, where Islam was already there [...] hundreds of years ago, or Bosnia, the Balkan Peninsula or something like that, where the Muslims 500 years ago [have been] here, or Bulgaria, where it still exists, but in truth at second glance it's not as Christian as one might think. [Europe is] not just Christian, that's what I mean.

Ja, wenn man Spanien wahrnimmt, wo Islam schon [...] vor Hunderten Jahren da war, oder Bosnien, balkanische Halbinsel oder so, wo die Muslimischen 500 Jahre hier [sind], oder Bulgarien, wo es das noch immer gibt, aber in der Wahrheit ist es auf den zweiten Blick nicht so christlich wie man das immer so denkt. Ist nicht nur christlich, das meine ich.<sup>806</sup>

The idea of Europe as Christian also was mentioned several times. Both in Western Europe and also in other parts of the world, 'white' women are assumed to be Christian. This was mentioned by several people I spoke to in the field and is also congruent with my observations outside Bosnia-Herzegovina. This is particularly true for those not wearing hijab.<sup>807</sup>

The idea of Europe as Christian is also transferred to an imagination of the European Union being explicitly Christian amongst young Muslim women in Sarajevo, as the following quotes show. While there have been discussions about the Christian heritage of Europe, particularly when Turkey was more likely to eventually join, there is no EU-as-Christian policy.

However, Arnesa, for example, has different ideas:

Well it says so in the constitution of the European Union that is a union of Christian countries.

Pa to piše u Ustavu Evropske Unije, [...] da je to [...] unija koju čine kršćanske zemlje.<sup>808</sup>

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<sup>805</sup> Interview, Ena, 13.5. 2016, 2:06:10.5 – 2:06:37.5.

<sup>806</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:20:06.1 - 01:20:38.5.

<sup>807</sup> 'White' hijabis are, as anecdotal evidence suggests, perceived as converts.

<sup>808</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:46:41.4 - 01:46:51.3.

The passage she is most likely referring to is the following section of the preamble of the consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union (TEU):

Drawing Inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.<sup>809</sup>

This does not refer to Christianity, however, it is imagined as such by Arnesa, as the quote above shows. Aida does not refer to the rest of Europe as Christian per se, but as mono-religious. She contrasts this with her perspective of Bosnia-Herzegovina as multi-religious:

For example, maybe for some cultures in Europe it would be strange if, I don't know, a large number of Muslims arrived, like now during the refugee crisis. But for example, if a large number of Buddhists or a large number of Catholics arrived [and] came to us, that would be completely normal.

Npr. možda je nekoj kulturi u Evropi čudno kada dođe, ne znam, veliki broj muslimana odjednom pošto je sad ova izbjeglička kriza, ali npr. kada bi nama došao veliki broj budista ili veliki broj katolika nama bi bilo to sasvim normalno.<sup>810</sup>

Implicitly, she also sees these other European countries as Christian, or at least as not Muslim. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, there already are a large number of Catholics. So, having a large number of Catholics arriving being in the same category as a large number of Buddhists seems inconsistent, as there already are many Catholics in the country. Overall, other, Western European countries are characterised as Christian dominated among the respondents.

The idea that Muslims of Sarajevo are particular and interesting is pushed more from the outside than from within. The outside here refers to Western media and academics, and the inside are the people who live there. As was already outlined in the chapter dealing with history and context, this relationship between outside and inside is complex. However, when examining the situation in the field, be it in the interviews or participant observation, questions of belonging (or not) to Europe are just not seen as particularly interesting. This ranges from seeing belonging as purely geographical to examining European values more closely. Efficiency and freedom are generally seen typically European attributes, but so is being rushed, coldness, and having looser

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<sup>809</sup> Official Journal 115, Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union , in 12008M/TXT (2008).

<sup>810</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 0:21:12.6-0:22:30.7.

morals, particularly with regards to sexuality. A distinction is made emphatically to the European Union, but this also has direct and often negative consequences on possibilities to live and work. The perspective on Europe as Christian, and the position of Islam in Europe, is more complex. This includes the aspect that, as elaborated above, tolerance is seen as a 'typically' European value, which coincides with my informants' understanding of Islam as tolerant. The next section will focus even more on a topic closely aligned to my informants' status as Muslim believers: how they view the relationship between local and global interpretations of Islam.

### 8.3.3 The ummah and tensions between local and global

My research overwhelmingly indicated that young Muslim women in Sarajevo identify with a global ummah, imagined as independent from culture and tradition. This means that they try to distinguish between aspects of faith they consider 'pure' and reject those they view as being influenced by some culture. This occurs both against perceived Arabic influences and what they see as local influences.

Alma's quote exemplifies the tension between seeing only one Islam as universal but also acknowledging that local differences play a role:

I think Bosnians are much more liberal, you know. But in general, Islam is one Islam, there is no two ways of Islam, there can't be Bosnian Islam, Arabian Islam, and so [on]. But then, tradition affects religion very much in our countries.<sup>811</sup>

Constructing an universal Islam, imagined free from local culture and traditions also happens through rejection of aspects that are seen as culturally Arab, I noticed in my research. There is some resistance against seeing Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina as some sort of 'Bosnian Islam' and drawing a boundary between Bosnian Islamic practice and belief and that of Arabs or other Muslims:

I do not think [there are regional differences]. The essence of Islam refers to prayer, that is, the prayer that is everywhere in the world the same, and when we turn to one Kibla, we are all one Messenger, one Lord Allah, one Book, and all the other things to say here are seen here. The external difference is not so important in Islam.

Ma mislim da nije. Suština Islama se odnosi na klanjanje, to jeste molitvu koja je svagdje u svijetu ista i mi se svi kada klanjamo okrećemo prema jednoj Kibli, svima

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<sup>811</sup> Interview, Alma, 2.1.2017, 0:27:46.0-0:28:53.3.

nam je jedan Poslanik, jedan Gospodar Allah, jedna Knjiga, a sve druge stvari oko koje da kažem vidimo tu vanjsku razliku nisu toliko bitne u Islamu.<sup>812</sup>

What is seen as worth aspiring to, therefore, is a de-cultured Islam, imagined as 'pure'. There is also a strong rejection of the identity of being a customary or nominal Muslim. Much of the positioning as Muslim and as European actually happens through demarcation: as a Muslim against the ethnic identity that is prevalent locally, and as a European against those further East.

To my informants, an ideal, de-cultured Islam that is imagined as pure should thus be neither influenced by Bosnian nor by Arab culture. The relevance of this comparison with others came through in many of my interviews. For example, Emina, when asked about Europe, starts talking about Arabs:

Now if you say Europe, we know each other better, they are closer to our way of life than Arab countries, because [Europeans] are really open, and there I don't know how much we could understand each other.

To je kad kažeš Evropa, bolje se poznamo, bliži su nam načinu života nego arapske zemlje, jer [Evropljani] su otvoreniji dosta, a tamo ne znam koliko bi se mogli razumjeti.<sup>813</sup>

Such a perspective is quite typical. On the one hand, it positions one against non-practising cultural Muslims, or those displaying their practice for political advantage; on the other hand, it also constructs a boundary against Arabs and Middle Easterners more generally. Interestingly, Turks are not mentioned at all. During Yugoslav time and before that, the delineation of Bosnian Muslims against Albanians as Eastern and backward was not uncommon.<sup>814</sup> While there are elements of this in the rejection of Arabs, in the interviews I conducted, there is an added complexity around the perception of Arabs as living in the heartland of Islam and having a deeper, more correct understanding of Islam. It is also complex because of the perceived economic influence of Arabs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and that in the Nesting Orientalism paradigm, Europe is seen as superior.<sup>815</sup>

There is also a certain defensiveness around being perceived, by Arabs themselves and others, as less Muslim. I also observed some defensiveness, and a desire to be seen as Muslims indigenous to Europe, and not in Europe because of migration or conversion. This becomes particularly important when

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<sup>812</sup> Interview, Leijla, 24.1.2017, 0:45:01.6-0:46:34.6.

<sup>813</sup> Interview, Emina, 4.5.2016, 00:11:22.8 - 00:10:05.

<sup>814</sup> Piro Rexhepi, forthcoming.

<sup>815</sup> Bakić-Hayden.

Arabs or other migrants in Western Europe question the Muslim-ness of Bosnian Muslims. It is then repeated that there is a 500 years tradition of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina and that 'Europe is not that Christian'.<sup>816</sup>

When talking about how people from Muslim-majority countries see Bosnians as Europeans, the women in my sample frequently expressed a sort of defensiveness, possibly out of the fear of not being seen as Muslim enough or not being taken seriously. Amira says, for example:

[People say] those European Muslims, they are not real Muslims, and right, for example, [...] my friends from Turkey, a lot of times, I could hear like, oh, you are Bosnian, that is different.<sup>817</sup>

Meliha talks about having been in Syria to learn Arabic in the past and how people were surprised that she studies at the faculty of Islamic Studies:

It is always incomprehensible to the Arabs, for example, how one can be a Muslim from Europe and a Muslim with 500 years of tradition. We [have] told them that this faculty has [existed] for six centuries, the Arabs are [...] not NOT believing it, but they don't take it so seriously.

Das ist immer zum Beispiel für die Araber unverständlich, wie man ein Muslim aus Europa sein kann, und ein Muslim mit 500 Jahren Tradition. [...] Wir [haben] ihnen gesagt, dass [es] diese Fakultät schon [seit] sechs Jahrhunderten [gibt] die Araber sind so [...], nicht es nicht glauben, aber sie nehmen es nicht so ernst.<sup>818</sup>

This desire to be seen as properly Muslim in a somewhat hierarchical way compared to Arabs, conflicts with the tendency by women in my sample, to look down on women further East, with negative stereotypes of Arabic women. The idea of being able to decide, as European women, themselves if they practise religion or not, and how, is contrasted with an imagined suppressed Arab woman. A contrast is made about Bosnia-Herzegovina, where there is freedom to choose whether to practise religion, and countries to the East where suppression is imagined. Amira, who is covered herself, talks about her ideas on wearing the hijab in the Middle East:

Like in Saudi Arabia, where you have to wear it, I believe nobody has that [...] right to tell you what to do; I believe it should be your own choice, and people who don't feel it, they don't feel it, don't force them!<sup>819</sup>

The focus on choice as a key value was thus put forward by the women I interviewed. Arnesa makes the distinction that women specifically in Bosnia-

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<sup>816</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:20:06.1 - 01:20:38.5.

<sup>817</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2016, 00:23:37.5 - 00:23:57.6.

<sup>818</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 01:18:27.6 - 01:19:16.

<sup>819</sup> Interview, Amira, 1.10.2015, 00:27:37 - 00:27:56.

Herzegovina take care of the family but are also active outside, while she sees women in Arab countries locked up behind walls and only talking to each other, which she also sees as detrimental to their religious practice:

[Women in Bosnia] are free to make social contributions, but at the same time they are dedicated to the family. What does that mean? [...] family is [...] a woman's burden, [...]. For this reason, it is much stronger in our country, because it is not the same, [...] it is not the same in Arab countries when the woman is closed in four walls, so innocently there are four women, it is also the same reality show, close someone in the four walls and then they make some stories of themselves [...] Islam is nowhere.

[Zene u Bosni] su slobodne da društveno doprinose, ali u isto vrijeme su posvećene porodici. Šta to znači? [...] parodic[a] je to ženin teret, [...] Iz tog razloga je kod nas to puno jače, jer nije to isto, [...] u arapskim zemljama nije isto kad je žena zatvorena u četiri zida, pa nebitno neka su i četiri žene, ipak je to isto reality show, zatvorite nekoga u četiri zida i onda one same od sebe prave neke priče, [...] , a nigdje Islama tu nema.

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Aida also talks about how some aspects that are seen as part of Islam are actually just in the Arab context. Specifically, she again mentions covering and marrying by a certain age as indicators of being more conservative:

[In] the Middle East, the Arab world, they understood Islam a little differently, a little more conservative, few things were removed from the context. I can say that they took some things because they like it so much; that does not necessarily mean that it's so in Islam, and then there are some misconceptions about the Muslims. However, Islam is really a religion that has contributed so much to the world, contributed to the world whose principle is to read, explore, to know your whole life no matter how you live, how you live and think that, I think we are not so conversational in the sense now that I have been imposed on me that I have to cover myself, that I must marry you and that year, that I must...[etc.].

Na primjer Bliski Istok, arapski svijet, oni su malo drugačije shvatili islam, malo konzervativnije, malo su neke stvari izvadili iz konteksta, čitavog dijela je li. Mogu reći da su neke stvari uzeli zato što se njima tako sviđa, a da ne mora nužno značiti da je to tako u islamu; i onda dolazi do nekih pogrešnih shvatanja muslimana. Međutim, islam je zaista religija koja je toliko doprinijela svijetu čije je načelo da se čita, istražuje, da se spoznaje čitav život bez obzira koliko živiš, na koji način živiš i mislim da, mislim da nismo toliko konverzativni u smislu sada da je meni nametnuto da se ja moram pokriti, da se moram udati do te i te godine, da moram...<sup>821</sup>

In the above excerpt, she forcefully draws a line between aspects that are cultural, which she identifies as Arab, and which she suggests lead to views of Muslims as 'others' but are not, in reality, based on Islam. Amongst my interlocutors, there was generally an idea that Arabs were being forced to adopt

<sup>820</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:06:03.5 - 01:07:17.8.

<sup>821</sup> Interview, Aida, 11.5.2016, 0:11:50.5 – 0:14:17.9.

elements of practice and belief, whereas Bosnians, as Europeans, could be more individualistic and freer to choose. This focus on freedom to choose could well be a global phenomenon; however, this is not the focus of my study, but rather something that could be studied in more detail elsewhere.

The idea of free choice comes up again and again in my interviews. It is emphasised repeatedly that the turning to Islam, and for some also the putting on of the hijab other forms of practice, must be a free decision, and may not be forced. Religion, in the sense of being a proper Muslim, is therefore seen as a more modern, individual approach based in a global ummah rather than the family or nation by my interlocutors. Meliha also talks about it is the fact that people are not forced that makes Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina unusual:

Where else can you find a country where Muslims have been natives for 500 years, but that is not an Islamic country, like Iran, Saudija [sic] or something like that. Here you have the freedom to believe or not to believe. You can do what you want and for me the people who believe here are honest, they have the choice and they do what they think is best. Where it can, how shall I put it, in other countries, for example in Saudija you have to be a believer, in Iran also.

Wo hat man denn noch ein Land wo die Muslime so 500 Jahre Einheimische sind, aber das ist kein islamisches Land, wie zum Beispiel der Iran, Saudija [...] oder so. Man hat hier die Freiheit dass man glaubt oder nicht glaubt. Man kann tun was man möchte und für mich sind die Leute die hier gläubig sind ehrlich, sie haben die Wahl und sie tun das wo sie denken dass es das beste ist. Wo sie in anderen Ländern, wie soll ich das sagen, verstellen kann, zum Beispiel in Saudija musst Du gläubig sein, im Iran auch.<sup>822</sup>

So, actually, in Meliha's view, being European can be seen as helpful to being a better Muslim. Arnesa argues in a similar way:

So, with us it is a little freer, and for that reason Islam is stronger in my opinion, the essence is stronger, but then there are fewer people who are really in Islam, because religion is freedom in itself. But when someone is allowed to do what he wants, without punishing him, then he starts taking advantage of it.

Tako da kod nas je to malo slobodnije, i iz tog razloga je Islam po meni jači, suština je jača, ali ima onda manje ljudi koji su stvarno u Islamu, jer vjera je sama po sebi sloboda. Ali kad se nekome pusti na pravo da radi šta hoće, bez da ga kažnjava, onda to počne iskorištavati.<sup>823</sup>

So, for them, it is key that people choose to practise Islam. This is not just about the state not interfering, although it definitely covers that as well, as well as religious institutions and individuals not having that much power. Rather, it is

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<sup>822</sup> Interview, Meliha, 28.4.2016, 00:49:04.6 - 00:49:53.0.

<sup>823</sup> Interview, Arnesa, 5.5.2016, 01:06:03.5 - 01:07:17.8.

the perception that society in Bosnia-Herzegovina generally allows for more freedom with regard to one's intensity of practice.

Being Muslim is seen as a choice and a journey, which involves not just the outside markers of Islam in practice, but also that one is a good person and has innate motivation. Through placing importance both on being different from local traditions and from Middle Eastern hegemonic interpretations of Islam, young Muslim women in Sarajevo craft their own interpretation of what being a good Muslim means. In this, independently of their intensity of practice, they don't fit into the following dichotomies: European vs. Muslim, neo-fundamental vs. traditional, or pious vs. open.

In analysing how young Muslim women in Sarajevo position themselves in different contexts, various aspects became clear. In the city of Sarajevo, many of the women I spoke to particularly relate to the Ottoman past by spending time in the old town, where there is also infrastructure catering to believers in the form of mosques, cafés that don't serve alcohol, and other locations. There are also other different influences from around the world in Sarajevo; I looked at the perception of Europe/the European Union and of Arabs. Bosnia-Herzegovina is sometimes seen as part of Europe and sometimes not, a point that my informants responded to in a variety of ways. Certain points, particularly the idea of freedom of movement and choice, are taken on gladly by women in Sarajevo. Other things, particularly some values that are perceived as European are pushed away by some women while being embraced by others. With regard to orienting oneself towards the global ummah, there is a view by most women in my sample that there is an idealised, pure, and de-cultured form of Islam. This is imagined as being free from locally traditional influences but also from Arab interpretations. This is a view which has been described as being prevalent amongst the diaspora in Western Europe and one result of my research is that it can be found in Sarajevo as well.<sup>824</sup>

## 9 Conclusion

To embed this clearly focused empirical study in a larger academic and social context, it is important to acknowledge how the analysis can contribute. This

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<sup>824</sup> Bendixsen; Nökel; Göle.

study leads to a deeper understanding of forms of contemporary Islam in Europe that are often absent from larger conversations about Islam in the wider Western public. Examining the lived religious practice of Muslim women in a South Eastern European, post-socialist metropolis is particularly productive from the perspective of study of religions, because various historical, political, cultural, and religious influences converge here. It is an valuable example of recent formations and developments of Islam in Europe that offers fresh insights to broader debates concerning women, religion, gender, and modernity.

To answer how twenty- to thirty-five-year-old Muslim working women and students in Sarajevo live their faith in everyday life, what their religious practice looks like, and what role the value of being a good person and free choice play in their self-positioning, this study drew on a wealth of empirical data. Additionally, this data was supported and rarefied by in-depth information on historical background and context of the region.

Amongst academics and inhabitants of the country alike, interpretations of the historical development in the region as well as the assessment of the role of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina diverge considerably. Grappling with this diversity of thought required an approach that centred the perceptions, experiences, and beliefs of Sarajevans themselves. Specifically, the cornerstone of my study was the views and lived forms of Islamic practice and the religious self-positioning of Muslim women; therefore, I focused on those aspects that are seen as particularly key to those research participants in the field.

For the context of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I examined the relationship between religion and ethno-national categories, Muslim customs, Turkish and Arab influences, and Islamic institutions. I also looked into some aspects of Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of Europe. For the theoretical frame, I referred to academic debates that are relevant to my work and inform the analysis of my data. These fall into three main areas: the first is the discussion of young Muslim Europeans and their ideals of a de-ethnicised, global Islam, which also emerged as salient amongst my sample. Secondly, there was the constructions of the 'Other' bound up in Orientalism and Balkanism, and, thirdly, various debates around Bosnian Islam. As I took a Grounded Theory-inspired

approach, my starting point was the empirical data and the aspects that were relevant to people I met in the field. My approach, as outlined in the methods chapter, was guided by my goal of gathering in-depth empirical data; therefore, I used mainly semi-structured interviews. Through the interviews, I gained insights into the socialisation of the women and thus could better understand the life stories which lead up to their self-positioning at the time we spoke. It also became clear that there were key moments for some that were foundational for becoming Muslim.

Then, I present and analyse my findings from my research in the field, which covers a rich tapestry of experience, practice, and narrations of belief and faith. I began with outlining some of my informants' influences in childhood and youth, noting the impact of certain practising family members (most often women), as well as a wide variety of schooling experiences. Next, I examined where the women in my sample acquire information on religion. I found through my research that, to my participants, local religious experts largely don't play a salient role in informing their religious knowledge and that their main sources of information were instead the internet and books. A large emphasis was placed on hunting for trustworthy information on the internet, and much value was placed on the power of books to allow for critical thinking and educating oneself in Islamic theology and practice. The importance of written mediums to one's self-education rather than Bosnian Islamic institutions shows how young, female believers in Sarajevo tend to connect to an imagined global ummah rather than the local traditions. Then, I analysed the narratives around key moments of 'Becoming Muslim', both with regards to spiritual awakenings and a change in practice. A particularly dominant trend was a description of a crucial moment in which their belief and self-positioning as Muslims entirely changed. This was often accompanied by particularly meaning-laden times of the year, such as Bajram, or with particular shifts in practice, such as beginning to pray regularly or wear hijab. This was followed by one of the key discoveries of my research: that, in order to be a good Muslim, the importance of living an ethical life is seen as more important to my participants than strictly following norms of religious practice.

For the section on practice, I started with different ways of engaging with the Quran, both as a source for guidance on decisions in different ways, and as a meditative practice in reading the Arabic original without understanding. As a next practice, I looked at fasting for Ramadan, as well as consumption patterns in general. The Holy Month serves to re-affirm identity, not just for believers, and is a special social time. I also teased out how the negotiations around eating or not could play out. For not eating pork, I showed that this becomes particularly important when travelling in non-Muslim-majority regions of Bosnia-Herzegovina or countries internationally. With regard to alcohol, there is a range of behaviour regarding whether it is consumed or not and if women spent time in spaces where alcohol is served. For prayer, the last practice I discussed in detail, there is a strong focus on the personal choice and the spiritual benefits over being a religious obligation.

In addition to religious practice, it was an important concern to look at the topics of work and love and to ask to what extent religious self-understanding plays a role here. For dating and marriage, it became clear that similarity in values is an important category when choosing a partner, while for friends, it is relevant that they are good people but they could be of different religions. Under friendship, I also looked at the importance of congratulating people of other religions on their holidays. In the workplace and at university, the women I interviewed emphasised the importance of performing excellently, as being a good person (*dobar čovjek*) dictates. I also regarded how practice is handled, with a range on how much it is kept private or is declared publicly. This is particularly relevant for prayer and fasting.

To better understand how young Muslim women in Sarajevo position themselves in society, I placed my focus on their self-conception as women. As hijab, the Muslim headscarf, was raised as a topic frequently during interviews and in other fieldwork, it merited its own extensive subsection. The main topics around covering, which are inter-connected, were the expectations placed on covered women, the importance of choice in wearing it (or not), and how it is seen as an advanced point on the trajectory of practice. With regard to women in Islam, theological questions were not seen as so relevant by research participants. Instead, they focused on Islam in comparison to other social

identities, and within their own geographical context: they mentioned how Islam is actually good for women, and particularly how being in Europe they had much freedom, independent of religion.

An important aspect in this study was furthermore how women in Sarajevo position themselves in a post-socialist society with European Islam, and how this is interwoven with other world religions based on local traditions. When thinking about the idea of 'Europe', many women took a primarily geographical and/or administrative view. 'European identity', thus, was frequently more about being located on the European continent or, contrastingly, not having the same travel privileges as citizens of EU member states.

In the end, key findings were brought together– that there is a strong focus on the global ummah in opposition to local Muslims by name, that 'choice' is a key category, and that the value of being a good person tends to frequently come up. Through the in-depth interviews with women in the field, a rich tapestry emerged that characterised the many shades of belief, practice, and 'being Muslim' in post-war Sarajevo.

My research findings on young Muslim women in Sarajevo adds to debates on European Islam with the strong similarities to the values and behaviour to European Muslims in France, Germany, or other Western European countries. The results can add a further perspective on contemporary Islam, the role of women, and research on Bosnia-Herzegovina. Some of the factors that I also found have been analysed as stemming from a migration or diaspora experience, such as deculturation, individualisation, a focus on choice, and orientation toward a global ummah over parents' traditions. Other scholars who work in the framework of Islam in Western Europe have attributed these qualities to a migration or diaspora experience; however, my work in Sarajevo has found similar phenomena, thus challenging this paradigm. The women I worked with in the field bore striking similarities to other young Muslim women living in (Western) Europe, even though Bosnian Muslims living in Sarajevo do not belong to a diaspora. Instead, somewhat surprisingly, the largest differences could be found between the women I interviewed and pre-war, rural, and older Muslims in Bosnia. Thus, there seems to be a generational and

urban-rural shift at hand rather than a change based on national or geographical frame.

Additionally, my research has shown that the dichotomy constructed between 'Islam' and 'the West' was not relevant on the ground and that asking Muslim women in Sarajevo how they felt about being Muslim and European generated limited traction. One aspect via which a connection emerged through interviews was the strong emphasis on personal choice. My interlocutors articulated that freedom to choose was not only fundamental to their practice, but also as a very European value, particularly in contrast to their perceptions of the Middle East. Furthermore, this aspect of choice was seen as key in being a good Muslim, to having a believer identity rather than taking on traditional forms of practice in an unquestioning way.

I found a strong focus on one's internal self, on not judging others for their behaviour, and on emphasising faith and ethical behaviour rather than dogma. What was surprising to me was how little interest there was in the idea of being Muslim and European and what a high priority working or studying well had. I also found it striking how consistent the values and views expressed are across the spectrum of believers I spoke to.

There are thus several directions in which further research could be conducted building on what I have found. This could be an analysis of other non-diaspora contexts, possibly outside Europe, to see if my findings are reproduced there. It would also be interesting to examine the interplay between diaspora and non-diaspora contexts, particularly with regards to (social) media and identity construction. Here, a focus could be what role this (social) media plays in shaping an idea of a global ummah free from localised cultural influences. What languages are used in these contexts would also be an interesting dimension of such research.

Within the context of Bosnia-Herzegovina, another area of inquiry could be how rural, uneducated, and/or male Muslims live their faith and position themselves. It also could be productive to look at the strong value of 'being normal' with regard to religion and being a good person; both of these could also be examined in a cross-religious perspective. Another aspect that came up and that would be interesting to expand on in the everyday positioning through

greeting, what phrase is used by whom in which contexts. Personally, I would also love to find out more about the role of not-eating-pork in identity construction and the gendered nature of drinking rakija, as well as different forms of hiking or trekking for ethnic and religious groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This is relevant from the perspective of study of religions as it enriches the research on Islam in Europe, the changing nature of religion, and individualised practice in modernity.

As the research field I worked in concerned humans, and humans are immeasurably complex, there are many directions which could be further explored. I trust that my efforts have contributed to enlarging the field of knowledge in a meaningful way and look forward to future results, debates, and findings.

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