Muslim Women in the UK and Bosnia:

Religious Identities in Contrasting Contexts

Sanja Bilic

PhD

The University of York

Centre for Women's Studies

September, 2013

Abstract

This thesis explores Muslim women's religious identities and the processes through which they construct and narrate these identities by comparing Bosnian and UK Muslim women. Disproportionate political and media attention on Muslim women in Europe has in turn prompted an increase in academic interest. However, most academic research neglects the experiences of the indigenous European Muslim women thereby maintaining the image of the foreign 'other'. This research forges a more inclusive approach by considering the views of indigenous European Muslim women. The study is based on interviews with 20 Muslim women, four focus groups and observation of the activities of three Muslim women's organisations. I subscribe to a feminist perspective where participants' voices are privileged and, since I belong to both communities, the complexities of my positionality were constantly reflected upon during the course of the research. My analysis is organised around three main themes that emerged from my participants' accounts of religious identity: family life, hijab and women's organisations. Family was identified as an important factor in these women's early perceptions of Islam. However, violent events – the war in Bosnia and the effects of 9/11 and 7/7 in the UK – affected women's reflections on what it means to be a Muslim woman in Europe, initiating independent re-evaluation of religious identity. This process was transformative, often resulting in a decision to wear the hijab and/or to seek out spaces that encourage a positive sense of Muslim identity such as women's organisations. During the process of constructing their religious identities, women, in both countries, faced challenges from the societies they live in and also from their families. Their agency is constantly questioned. I argue that two contrasting socio-cultural and historical contexts affect the diversity of lived experiences of the Muslim women and the way they organise, while the similarities, inspired by their faith, lie in skilful negotiation of their religious identities in face of many challenges.

Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgments

When I felt helpless, desperate and weary, I always found comfort and peace in words from the Holy Qur'an: '*Inna ma'a al'usri yusran'* (Surely, with the hardship, there is relief). The most praise is for Allah (God), the Most High, the Merciful, the Sustainer of all things, for making the impossible possible in the course of my PhD journey. All that is good in this piece of work came from only one source – Allah – the Infinite. All mistakes, misunderstandings and imperfections are mine and I hope that I will be forgiven for them. I am sure that it was only by Allah's will that I was put on this rocky path in order to gain a better knowledge of my Creator, *Al-Khaliq*. Therefore, I am grateful for all experiences (positive and negative) and people (kind and no so kind) that have assisted me along the way.

This research would not have been possible without help and assistance of many individuals. I am forever grateful to my dearest mother, who has selflessly given me continuous support, love and inspiration. Her fortitude and positivity, even when times were really hard, encouraged me to persevere and do my best. I thank my beautiful sons Zain and Qais, who provided joy and sunshine even during the days of gloomiest English weather and their patience while 'mama is doing her work' for, what seemed like, a very long time. I hope they will forgive me for often being absent minded while working on my PhD. My father's dedication and work ethic has always been an inspiration to me but his help, while I was in Bosnia, to facilitate my fieldwork and take on the multiple roles of driver, child minder, counsellor and research advisor (possibly, for the first and only time in his life), was invaluable. I also wish to thank my 'third' parent, Robert Newstead, for his understated but persistent thoughtfulness, generosity, kindness and feedback on my ideas. Humorous yet helpful conversations with my younger brother, Sanjin, provided much needed lift at difficult points of my PhD; the funny lyrics of turbo-folk Bosnian song he used to 'motivate' me will (for better or worse) always stay with me.

I would like to thank all the Muslim women who took part in this research, in both Bosnia and the UK, who gave up their precious free time and trusted me with their

words. They would, after a day at work or study, spend (often) hours talking to me from their hearts, just hoping to give a better understanding of their faith. All of them had a positive influence on me and their words were continuous source of motivation to me, especially at times when I was struggling to write (which was often).

On the 'Bosnian side': I am grateful to Sehija Dedić of Centre for Education and Research 'Nahla' and Sadika Avdić of Women's Educational Organisation 'Kewser' who both, from the very start, supported and facilitated this research. Fatima Žutić, from the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo, probably the most knowledgeable and kindest librarian I have ever come across, for helping me find literature in Bosnian language. Also from the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo, I thank Prof. dr. Ismet Bušatlić for agreeing to meet me despite of his busy schedule and offering his valuable knowledge on history of Bosnian Muslim women; Dina Sijamhodžić-Nadarević and Mujesira Zimić-Gljiva for a beneficial discussion of their personal and professional experiences as Muslim women. I am grateful to Dr. Zilka Spahić-Šiljak for her input and encouragement during the initial stages of my research. Time spent at *Bosanska Sumejja'*s office in Tuzla, talking to Razija Tosunbegović and Meliha Terzić and their experiences of working with (and for the benefit of) women was truly inspirational. Another very special individual who inspired me and to whom I would like to thank is Melika Salihbeg Bosnawi, a woman of great intelligence, courage and an amazing taste in music. I would also like to pay my respect, posthumously, to wonderful Medina Jusić-Sofić, who offered advice on my research methodology and took part in my pilot study.

On the 'UK side': I am very grateful to my supervisor Prof. Stevi Jackson whose approach, at the final stages, was like a breath of fresh air to me. She remained calm, supportive and positive throughout a very challenging time but, most of all, she believed in me. I know that, without her help, I would have been very difficult to complete my writing-up process. I am also grateful for all the help and assistance offered by my original supervisor, Prof. Haleh Afshar, she opened this path to me and her advice was very useful throughout my study. I wish to thank all of the staff at the Centre for Women's Studies at University of York for their support and, in particular, Dr. Ann

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of York. All the work is original and has not been published elsewhere.

Introduction

The Winged Horse

When I was writing my acknowledgments, I deliberated for a considerable time on whether I should include 'the religious bit'. After all, my faith has been central to my life since I made the decision to become a Muslim about 17 years ago. Since 1996, all of my decisions and my daily life have been structured around and informed by Islam. That is where I find peace and the inspiration to be a better human being in relation to myself and others. Therefore, it was my faith and my experience of it that motivated me to conduct this study, which focuses on Muslim women like myself. Throughout the research process, I constantly corroborated ideas and theories applying my understanding of 'Islamic ethics',[1] in conduct and approach as well as intent. In particular, *Ihsan,*[2] one of the (interlinked) dimensions of Islamic faith and considered to be 'a pinnacle' of Islamic ethics (Siddiqui, 1997:425), is concerned with how to align one's motivations and intentions with one's actions and understandings. Put simply, it is a way of 'taking one's inner faith (*iman*) and showing it in both deed and action, a sense of social responsibility borne from religious convictions' (Maqsood, 1994:41). I felt that not discussing the personal religious experiences motivating this research would give an incomplete picture and come across as contradictory, when in reality, there was no contradiction: my actions are reflections of my inner striving to be aware of God[3]'s presence and love at all times. Why, then, should I be deliberating about 'the religious bit'? Is there a latent sense of embarrassment?

---

[1] I understand that the issues relating to ethics in Islam are complex and involve theological, legal and philosophical considerations which are beyond the scope of this study. Siddiqui's (1997) view is that 'Islamic ethics as a discipline does not exist' (p.423) but what is characterised as Islamic ethics involves four aspects, based on Qur'an and Hadith (collection of sayings of Prophet Mohammed p.b.u.h): *Iman*, *Islam*, *Taqwa* and *Ihsan* (p. 424).

[2] *Ihsan* is a verb derived from the Arabic word '*husn*' which means 'beautiful' or being 'most suitable'; it encapsulates a number of positive qualities ('harmony', 'goodness', 'fitting'); as a verb it means 'to do what is beautiful' (Murata and Chittick 1994:268-269).

[3] God (in Arabic *Allah*), according to Islamic teachings, based on Qur'an, is considered genderless, all powerful and unlike anything else that human intelligence can perceive. As such, human language can never fully contain/describe *Allah* with just one word. To reflect this, throughout this thesis, I will try and use 'Allah' or 'God' rather than 'He' except when the limits of English language do not allow me to do so.

Here I am, trying to be a serious PhD researcher, calling on God? What is next? Believing that a winged horse flew to heaven?! Yes, I deliberated, but – no – I am not ashamed of calling on God and believing that, perhaps, a winged horse flew to heaven.[4]

My deliberation was caused by two events in 2013. In April 2013, Mehdi Hasan's (Oxford educated, successful journalist, broadcaster, presenter and a Muslim) professional position, as a (then) senior editor of the *New Statesman*, was challenged by the well-known British academic (and self-proclaimed atheist) Professor Richard Dawkins when he stated on *twitter:*[5]

> Mehdi Hasan admits to believing Muhamed [sic] flew to heaven on a winged horse. And New Statesman sees fit to print him as a serious journalist.

The statement caused a lively online debate, with people both agreeing and disagreeing with Dawkins. Those who found nothing wrong with the statement deliberated how 'lack of rationality' can affect one's professionalism and how, despite Hasan's history of 'coherent journalism', his work should be taken with 'scepticism'.

Five months later, the second event marked the return of 'winged horse' discourse. In September 2013, UK politicians Jeremy Browne MP and Sarah Wollaston MP, aided by papers such as *The Sun* (which even proposed a four point plan on their cover page[6]), called for a national debate on the face veil (*niqab*) over security issues. This was just after Birmingham Metropolitan College, following a very successful social media

---

[4] The mention of a winged horse (*Buraq)* is connected with the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) into heaven - *Mi'raj*. According to this story, the Prophet is visited by two archangels who provide for him *Buraq* so that he can travel (fly) to the 'Farthest Mosque,' which, according to Muslims, is Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. Also called the 'Night Journey', it is a primary model for Sufi accounts of mysticism (Sullivan 1999). As, explained in *Encyclopædia Britannica*: 'Mi'rāj has been a constant source of speculation among Muslims. Some state that the ascension was merely a dream; others speculate that only Muhammad's soul entered heaven, while his body remained on earth'. http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/384897/Miraj Accessed on 24/09/2013
[5] http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/04/21/richard-dawkins-mehdi-hasan_n_3127629.html Accessed on 01/05/2013
[6] http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/sun_says/5142016/The-Sun-Says-Religious-belief-cannot-trump-the-law-of-the-land-with-regard-to-veils.html Accessed on 20/09/2013 Spoken word poet, Shabbir Hassan, expressed his view on this by publishing a poem in which he says: 'Page one wants the ban But take a look at page three'

campaign organised by students (the majority of whom were Muslim women), revoked[7] a decision to ban the *niqab*. In an attempt to provide a perspective from a British citizen who wears a *niqab*, the *Independent* published an article titled '*I wear the niqab, let me speak on my own behalf*', where Sahar Al Faifi, a molecular geneticist by profession, expressed her views and experiences of the *niqab*:

> I wear the niqab as a personal act of worship, and I deeply believe that it brings me closer to God, the Creator. I find the niqab liberating and dignifying; it gives me a sense of strength. People I engage with judge me for my intellect and action; not necessarily for the way I look or dress. Niqab enables me to be, simply, human.[8]

The great majority of comments that followed were, at best, unsupportive or unappreciative of Al Faifi's efforts to 'speak on [her] own behalf' but this particular comment, by a certain 'JonDonnis'[9] particularly troubled me and was another reason for my deliberation:

> For someone who claims to be educated and intelligent etc, I find it incredible that she believes that a man (Mohammed) ascended to heaven on a winged horse! She is a biologist yet she does not believe the human race descended from the same ancestors as the Ape. Hell this woman believes in a magical man living in the sky! Can we really take anything she says seriously? She says in her article "oppressed, uneducated, passive, kept behind closed doors and not integrated within British society" Well she has obviously been so indoctrinated with religious nonsense from a young age, that despite her "education" she is incapable of understanding the realities of the world. Wear your Islamic robes, but please don't pretend you are doing so out of some kind of intelligently made

---

[7] http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/birmingham-college-forced-into-uturn-over-muslim-veil-ban-following-outcry-8814502.html Accessed on 13/09/2013
[8] http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/i-wear-the-niqab-let-me-speak-on-my-own-behalf-8824243.html Accessed on 20/09/2013
[9] Same as the previous source, please see the 'comments' section.

choice. "oppressed, uneducated, passive, kept behind closed doors and not integrated within British society" You kinda [sic] are I am afraid[10]

I purposefully refer to this debate surrounding religiosity as the 'winged horse discourse'[11] because I want to draw attention to comparable attitudes held in British society today. It appears that a person cannot be religious and express that publicly, whether through words or visual signifiers, without running the risk of having his or her intelligence, professionalism and ability to make informed decisions questioned. This made me pause and consider how much of my own spirituality I should discuss, for fear of the prospect that I may not be taken seriously, or worse, that the voices of women who took part in this research would be tinged with scepticism. Does every religious individual need to exercise a degree of self-censorship if they are to be taken seriously? How much religion/spirituality is acceptable?

Beckford and Demerath, commenting on the increased visibility of religion against 'long standing expectations that religion would merely wither away as modernization progressed', argued that if anything can be said about religion in the 21st century, it is 'that there is a lot of religion around'(2007:1). While the resurgence of 'traditional' religions as well as new forms of religion and spirituality in the 20th and 21st centuries has been noted, it has been marked as 'dramatic both in its nature and in its political consequences' Davie, Woodhead and Heelas, 2003:2). Two examples given (among others) to illustrate this dramatic nature are important for this research: the war in the former Yugoslavia (as an example of reassertion of ethno-religious identities) and the impact of 'Islamic' activity during and post 11th September 2001 (ibid). Some feminist scholars have also offered their response to this 'return of religion' (Alcoff and Caputo, 2011:2) emphasizing how women can be used 'as today's pawns in the geopolitical debates over the meaning and value of culture, tradition and religion' and reminding

---

[10] In 2010, Dawkins also expressed how seeing a woman in *niqab* fills him with 'visceral revulsion' while liking this particular way of dressing to 'a full bin liner'[10]. For a moment I wondered if 'JonDonnis' is actually Dawkins but reading other comments, which contained similar rhetoric, persuaded me that it was not so. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/10/richard-dawkins-likens-bu_n_676868.html Accessed on 22/09/2013

[11] Foucauldian (1976) use of the term 'discourse' as the ways of thinking about and constructing knowledge of the world around us, focusing on what is produced through discourse (Rahman and Jackson 2010:42)

readers of parallels between today's 'motivation of a kind of perverse gallantry' to liberate women (particularly Muslim women) and the 'liberation' of Indian women by their British colonisers – 'white men are saving brown women from brown men' – as discussed by Spivak in her 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988). In Europe today, the subaltern cannot speak if that subaltern wears the *niqab*; her voice is nullified and her choices disregarded by 'JonDonnis' and many others like him: governments, media, commentators, authors, academics. What, then, of Mehdi Hasan, who is male and does not wear the *niqab*? 'Or is it 'cos I am Muslim?' – one might ask. 'To state the question is, to suggest, at once, a preliminary answer. The fact that I ask it is in itself significant', Simone de Beauvoir remarked in her classic text *The Second Sex* (1953/1972).[12] Richardson comments that these 'manifestations of anxiety and intolerance contribute to the absence of Muslims from public life, including politics and government, senior positions in business and commerce, and in culture and the arts' and how this absence 'from public life contributes, in its turn, to the continuing prevalence of anxiety and intolerance' (2012).[13] Therefore, being a Muslim in today's Europe can lead to more than just being ridiculed for your beliefs, and, being a Muslim woman, makes that even more likely. Chris Allen (2013), who has researched Islamophobia and anti-Muslim phenomena over the past decade, stresses that it is not all about numbers and statistics[14] and focusing just on numbers is problematic:

> Focusing solely on 'numbers' alone is a distraction. You cannot put a value on the damage done by prejudice, discrimination, bigotry and hate, quite irrespective of whether 'numbers' of incidents are on a rise or in decline (ibid).

In June 2013 a pregnant 21-year-old woman, wearing the *niqab*, in France was violently attacked by two men who 'ripped the veil' from her head and tore part of her clothing' and, as a result of the severity of injuries, she miscarried her unborn child,[15] In August 2013 another pregnant woman wearing a headscarf was harassed and assaulted, this time

---

[12] Taken from *Women's studies: essential readings*. New York University Press, 1993. p. 438
[13] http://www.insted.co.uk/anti-muslim-racism.pdf Accessed on 21/09/2013
[14] http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-chris-allen/islamophobia-uk-media_b_3377525.html Accessed on 12/09/2013
[15] http://www.thelocal.fr/20130618/muslim-woman-miscarries-after-veil-attack#disqus_thread Accessed on 12/09/2013

the incident happened in Sweden.[16] These incidents involved two women, but that is two too many. A report published in June 2013 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights[17] (FRA), states that violent attacks on Muslims in France, Finland and Sweden have indeed increased. The director of UK's Tell MAMA project[18], Fiyaz Mughal, commented that they 'have been taken aback on the level and complexity of anti-Muslim prejudice'[19] Mughal's reference to the 'complexity' of prejudice calls to mind the two events originally discussed within the context of the 'winged horse' discourse. It suggests that Islamophobia is not confined to acts of violence but is also, perhaps more commonly, exhibited by 'the thinking and meaning that are inherent within the less explicit and everyday relationships of power that we contemporarily encounter: in the classroom, office, factory…'[20] (Allen, 2010:196). Both Tell MAMA and FRA maintain that it is Muslim women who are most likely to be victimised, Mughal asserts: 'visible Muslim females who wear the Hijab (headscarf) are more likely to suffer from generalised abuse. Those who wear the Hijab and the Niqab, (face veil) are more likely to suffer sustained and more aggressive attacks'

A year earlier, in June 2012, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly passed a resolution based on the report 'Multiple discrimination against Muslim women in Europe: for equal opportunities'. In addition to making recommendations, they advised that:

> Muslim women are often victims of stereotyping, since their religious beliefs are
> seen as the only defining element of their identity. The media contribute to this
> phenomenon by reporting on Muslim women mainly as victims of so-called
> "honour crimes" and in relation to their clothing. All too often, political debate
> and legislative action concerning Muslim women is concentrated on the issues of

---

[16] http://www.thelocal.se/49718/20130819/ Accessed on 12/09/2013
[17] http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/annual-report-2012_en.pdf Accessed on 22/09/2013
[18] Tell MAMA is a public service for measuring and monitoring anti-Muslim attacks http://tellmamauk.org/
[19] http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/fiyaz-mughal/baroness-warsi-was-right-anti-muslim-prejudice_b_2541363.html Accessed on 23/09/2013
[20] The use of the term 'Islamophobia' in this study follows this explanation.

the headscarf, and even more the integral veil, instead of focusing on non-discrimination and equal opportunities.[21]

Moreover, Muslim women feel that the 'reality' about them is constructed without any consideration of 'their voices' or their experiences (Muslim Women Network, 2006; Silvestri, 2008).

The Field, Self and Experience

Experience

'Offer your experience as your truth'[22]

Ursula K. Le Guin said those words in 1986 and, in the same speech, she also said:

> How, after all, can one experience deny, negate, disprove, another experience? Even if I've had a lot more of it, your experience is your truth. How can one being prove another being wrong? Even if you're a lot younger and smarter than me, my being is my truth. I can offer it; you don't have to take it. People can't contradict each other, only words can: words separated from experience for use as weapons, words that make the wound, the split between subject and object, exposing and exploiting the object but disguising and defending the subject.

Sahar Al Faifi offered her experiences of *niqab* in a national newspaper, and, with a few exceptions, was met with a barrage of disproving, negative and insulting comments by British (and perhaps also non-British) readers. Mehdi Hasan, in a filmed public debate[23] with Prof. Dawkins, also offered his experience of faith, by declaring, in front of a packed audience that he believed in miracles, only for his words to be used publicly a few months later by Dawkins 'as weapons' against him. Just like Hasan and Al Faifi, I

---

[21] http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=18921&lang=en Accessed on 22/09/2013

[22] Words said by Ursula K. Le Guin, in 1986, in her address at Bryn Mawr College. Taken from http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/sci_cult/leguin/ Accessed on 21/09/2013

[23] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0Xn60Zw03A see 14:37-14:55 Accessed on 23/09/2013

am a Muslim. Unlike Al Faifi, I do not wear the *niqab*, but like her, I am an activist. Unlike Hasan, I am female, but like him, I am a parent. While being female/male, parent and activist are just some of our multiple identities, it is because I am a Muslim and female and European that I wanted to do this research. It is because I felt that the experiences and voices of many women like me are simply not heard or are ignored. If, in the current European climate of increasing Islamophobia, Islam represents a source of positivity and empowerment for me, what do women who are similar to me feel? What are their lived experiences of Islam in Europe? Do they feel oppressed, marginalised and silenced by Islam, by Europe or both?

This research is therefore very personal because the women who took part in it belong to the two communities to which I belong: in Bosnia and in Britain. This means that some of our experiences are shared. It is argued that only by being an 'insider' of a particular group can one produce a 'better' knowledge of that group (Collins, 1986) as there is the commonality of understanding 'shared' experiences. For example, women should research women, researchers should be from the same racial group as research participants and so on. However, this theory has encountered criticism (Sprague, 2005; Valentine 2002; Bridges 2001) which suggests that even with the more 'obvious' identities such as race, religion and class it is sometimes difficult to decide who is an insider and who is an outsider. In Chapter Two I discuss how my position and personal involvement influenced this research process and how the status of insider/indigenous researcher, while providing certain epistemological privilege, can also be problematic as it 'implies a greater potential for value conflict' (Altorki and El-Solh, 1988). In this same chapter I also discuss my use of a feminist perspective where women's experiences, meanings and perceptions are valued and considered as a valid source of knowledge. This is always produced within specific contexts and situated in particular set of circumstances (Haraway, 1988). Muslim women's first-person accounts, such as Sahar Al Faifi's in the *Independent*, are not taken seriously and are not believed because, as Karen and Sonja Foss (1994) argue, 'women's first-person accounts traditionally are not listened to'; furthermore, they argue that the use of personal experience as evidence in feminist scholarship is 'a significant and subversive act in the process of constructing new methods and theories that truly take women's perspectives

into account' where 'feminist scholars and their research participants are actively collaborating to achieve epistemic empowerment' (1994:42-43).

The Field

My interest in this topic therefore is both personal and academic but I am not alone. The past fifteen years have been marked by an increased media, political and academic interest in Islam and Muslims in Europe. Historians argue that this interest has been there for centuries (Hodgson 1974; Matar 1998; Rodinson, 2002) however, with the emergence of social media and other forms of mass communication, the interest is evident in the population at large.

It seems that not a day goes by without Muslims or Islam featuring prominently in print, online or on television. The negative 'hypervisibility' (Archer, 2009) of Muslims in the media has also been discussed by researchers (Poole 2002; Archer, 2009) who have noted a considerable increase in such representations after September 11th 2001. Muslim women, in particular, are being featured regularly, often wearing the face veil (*niqab*) hence, as pointed out by Navarro (2010), the focus is only on symbolic representations. Navarro refers to the study conducted by Martín Muñoz (2005), who found that newspapers in Spain represent Muslim women in one of three ways: 'as passive women, as victims and as veiled women' (2010:100).

According to the December 2012 Global Religious Landscape report[24] from the Pew Research Center's [sic] Forum on Religion & Public Life, there are 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, constituting 23% of all people. From that total, and according to the same report, there are 43 490 000 Muslims living in Europe, constituting about 6% of the total population in Europe (research included 50 countries and territories in Europe).[25] Considering these figures, many feel that the attention given to Muslims and Islam in European media and politics is quite disproportionate. What is so fascinating or interesting about Muslims, or more specifically, Muslim women?

---

[24] http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-muslim/ Accessed on 12/09/2013
[25] http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-methodology/ Accessed on 12/09/2013

Academic research on Muslim women in Europe has also developed significantly during the past 20 years. Recognising the complexities related to identity post mass immigration (in the 60s and 70s), studies of second or third generation of Muslim women, in the context of Europe's immigration past, have become more common since the late 1980s (Afshar, 1989; 1994; Knott & Khokher ,1993; Jacobson, J. 1997; Lutz,1997; Dwyer, 2000; Soysal, 2000; Fadil, 2005; Martin-Munoz & Lopez-Sala, 2005; Brown, 2006; Moors & Salih, 2009). Both Muslim and non-Muslim researchers are increasingly trying to discover Muslim women's own views and consider their experiences. Afshar's research on Pakistani women in West Yorkshire, from 1989, highlighted strong cultural, moral ties and familial control related to the youngest generation of women. Twenty one years later, Haw, in her study of young Muslim women in Britain, argues that, while women are 'in the process of re-constructing and re-integrating both their parents' traditional and cultural notions of being Muslim, and their idealisation of British identity with the re-assertion of their religious values', they are part of an 'in-between' generation (2010:359). Ryan (2012) explores how Muslim women resist stigmatisation by claiming to be 'normal' (and just like anybody else), questioning if that can ever be achieved in multicultural Britain. Silvestri (2011) looks into the intersections of faith, everyday concerns and lived experiences of Muslim women in five European countries, while Tarlo (2010) considers the interaction of faith, politics and fashion among British women who choose to wear the hijab. The hijab, in the British context, is also discussed by Dwyer (1999), Ameli and Merali (2006) and Afshar (2008) while Werbner (2007) considers France too. The past 15 years or so has witnessed another interesting development in the research field of Muslims in Europe, and that is the study of European indigenous Muslim converts (Poston, 1992; Ali, 1996; Allievi, 1999; Roald, 2004), with some researchers focusing specifically on gender and conversion experiences. Myfanwy Franks (2000) explores the experiences of white Muslim women in the UK and, by asking if they are 'crossing the borders of whiteness?', she explores racialisation of religion. In Karin Van Nieuwkerk's 'Veils and wooden clogs don't go together' (2004), she further explores 'cultural racism' in relation to Dutch female converts to Islam and highlights how, as a result of conversion, their Dutch national and cultural identity is called into question. Roald (2004) looks at

converts in Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway and Denmark) and their role in 'defining Islam in the new cultural context' (2004:1), while Bourque (2006)[26] emphasises Van Nieuwkerk's observation of conversion as an ongoing process in her analysis of Scottish female converts. In a study of British white Muslim converts, McDonald (2005) focuses on 'actual lived realities' of women and explores the notion of 'Islamic feminisms'.

The studies I have cited are selected examples to illustrate the phenomenon that Allievi and Nielsen already noted in 'Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities In and Across Europe' (2003): namely that research on Muslims in Europe is broadening beyond the 'Muslims as immigrants' paradigm, where responses are related to shared ideas specific to the European environment. Since the 1990's, research on Muslim women in Europe has endeavoured to include and reflect a diversity of experiences: from the 'in-between generation' of Muslims who are children of immigrants to the experiences of indigenous European converts. The scope of and approach to researching Muslim women in Europe has developed significantly since the late 1980s. The events of September 11th 2001 in particular, significantly altered the approach to this field of research, fuelled by and existing parallel to a great increase in media attention on Islam.

Self: Why Bosnia and UK

Bosnia

I wish to further explore the dramatic occurrences of war in Bosnia and the events of 9/11 and 7/7 (as mentioned above by Davie, Woodhead and Heelas, 2003). Bosnia, a small Balkan country, became the focus of media attention in the UK between 1992 and 1995. Names of Bosnian cities, towns and even remote villages became a part of regular journalistic vocabulary throughout the world. The names of the places echoed in my head as the most horrific images of war unveiled themselves on television screens. Many asked 'why?' and 'how?' could this happen in the middle of modern Europe,

---

[26] In Van Nieuwkerk, K. (ed) (2009) '*Women Embracing Islam*'

wondering if the lessons from the Second World War had been learned. The response of historians, sociologists, anthropologists and others followed; each having their own point of view and each giving different causes of the conflict. At the same time, as a consequence of the war in Bosnia, the 'problem' of Bosnian Muslims (Boshnyaks[27]), developed into a much debated issue, especially within the 'Western' (Western Europe and USA) world. The persistent scenes of destruction of the Muslim presence and culture as well as people, gave birth to yet another set of questions: 'Who are Bosnian Muslims?' and 'Why are they being persecuted?'. These questions were not raised in a vacuum. On the contrary, it was in the wake of the realisation that Bosnia was home to Europe's westernmost indigenous Muslim community.

As Tone Bringa points out, the existence of indigenous, European Muslims seriously contested already set definitions of Europe as 'Christian' and Europeans' perceptions of 'European' (1995:7); she highlights that in 1975, William Lockwood (1975) in his ethnographic survey talks about 'European Muslims' referring specifically to Bosnia (ibid).

Just before the war escalated further, in the summer of 1992, I came to England for a two week holiday with my mother and younger brother. This 'holiday', was in actual fact an attempt by my parents to save their children from the worst of the war, as I had little personal interest in leaving Bosnia at the time. Even with the situation worsening day by day, all of us genuinely believed that things would be calm after a short time, after our holiday, and we would return to our family and comfortable life in Sarajevo. Many residents of Sarajevo felt the same. On receiving what was to be the only phone call for almost two years from my father in Sarajevo, letting us know that we cannot go back, our status changed - almost overnight - from being tourists, taking snaps of Big

---

[27] I think this is the most accurate transliteration to English. *Bošnjaci* pl., *Bošnjak* (singular masculine) or *Bošnjakinja* (singular feminine) in Bosnian language; usually synonym for Bosnian Muslims and, since 1993, it 'has replaced Muslim as an ethnic term in part to avoid confusion with the religious term Muslim - an adherent of Islam' https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bk.html Accessed on 24/09/2013. Although the term is centuries old, it has become more popular during and after the war. However, its understandings and use are complex; involving the issues of ethnic, national and religious identities, nationalism, history and geography. For more see Bougarel (2007) p.96; Bringa (1995) p.30-36; Bieber, F. (2006). Post-War Bosnia: Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector.
I use '*Boshnyak*' (and derivatives) as some of the women in this research self-identified as *Boshyankinye*. I also use Bosnian Muslims.

Ben, to being refugees with only three bags of summer clothes. In London, faced with new challenges of living in a different culture as well as horrific daily news from home, I also found myself asking many questions - 'Why? How? What?". Seeing pictures of the war and people being killed simply because they were Muslim, while most of my family members were still in Bosnia, I could not understand why people were being punished in this way just because they had Muslim names. I questioned my own identity and my connection to the war but I also felt the need for spiritual strength so I started to research different religions: Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. Even though my father is of Muslim heritage, somehow, Islam came last. This was probably because of an internalisation of my childhood aversion to Islam after growing up in an anti-religious and especially anti-Islamic, Communist Yugoslavia. Eventually, I accepted Islam as my faith and way of life; 4 years after arriving in the UK and about 5 years before 9/11. The event and experiences of war were not the only reasons I became Muslim but, rather, they intensified the process of searching for an identity that had already begun.

Aid Smajić, in the *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe,*[28] states that the presence of religion in the public arena, in post-war Bosnia is evident (2012:99). Supporting his statement, the U.S. Department of State's 2006 report on religious freedom also claims that Bosnian 'religious leaders from the Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox communities claimed that all forms of observance were increasing among young people as an expression of increased identification with their ethnic heritage, in large part due to the national religious revival that occurred as a result of the 1992-1995 Bosnian war' as '[Y]ounger believers who grew up in the post-communist period also had more freedom to practice their religions and more access to religious education'[29].

Since the war ended in 1995, and even during the war, there has been noticeable change in the way Bosnian Muslims express their identity and this is particularly noticeable if the female population is considered. During my regular visits to Bosnia, since 1996, I have noticed a steady increase in the number of women who wear the *hijab* in Sarajevo.

---

[28] In Nielsen, J. et.al (Eds.) (2012). *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* (Vol. 4). Brill.

[29] http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2006/71372.htm Accessed on 25/09/2013

Symbolic expressions of Muslim identity such as wearing the *hijab* (Karčić, 2010),[30] regular visits to the mosque, attendance of Islamic circles and talks, became much more common after the war. Karčić notes that this is mostly evident in Bosnian Muslim-majority towns such as Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, Travnik, and Bihać and highlights the activity of Islamic educational institutions (in these cities) as one of the main reasons for this occurrence. The *Reuter*'s article titled, 'War brought Bosnian Muslim women back to Islam',[31] also suggests that war had a key role in 'returning' women to Islam while Prof. Aida Hozic comments, in the same article, that '[D]espite centuries of tradition, many are still learning how to be Muslims, since it is others who violently taught them to feel that way'.

The UK

On September 11th 2001, I clearly remember driving along the London's Southbank, listening to the radio and hearing the terrible news from the USA. Four years later, another violent and tragic event happened in London on 7th of July 2005. I was shocked and saddened by the news and could never envisage what implications those events would have on life of Muslims in the UK. As I wore hijab, the days that followed were accompanied with strange looks, but, for me, that was not too disturbing. However, experiences of some of my Muslim friends (both female and male) were not limited to just strange looks. One of my friends was shouted at on the street while another was spat upon. Most severe, was the case of a family I know who had to move to another area because of the verbal abuse from their close neighbours directed at their hijab wearing daughter. Sadly, these were not isolated occurrences and women in hijab were more likely to be targeted (reference). Sheridan (2006:319) refers to a study by Allen and Nielsen (2002) in which they found that 'the single most predominant factor in determining who was to be a victim of an attack [after 9/11] or infringement was their visual identity as a Muslim. At the same time, some women decided to start wearing the hijab despite the security issues and existing stereotypes (Afshar, 2008), hence 'publicly

---

[30] http://www.cns.ba/docs/islamic_revival_in_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina_1992-1995.pdf Accessed on 10/09/2013
[31] http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/05/05/us-muslimwomen-europe-bosnia-idUSL0465833220070505 Accessed on 23/09/2013

branding themselves as Muslims' when such a label carried a very real 'potential fear of making them vulnerable to open hostility' (Afshar, Aitken and Franks, 2005:262). A recent study by Sahar Aziz reports that during 'the past few years, an increasing number of Muslim women of diverse political and ethnic backgrounds are publishing op-eds, books, and other literature that offers a window into their post-9/11 experiences. Such work is rarely highlighted in mainstream print and television media, leaving in place specious stereotypes of Muslim women as meek, uneducated, and lacking agency (2012).

Alongside a growing community of women who started to include or think about Islam not only as a signifier of ethnic belonging but as a religion in its own right, another outcome of the war in Bosnia was the emergence of Muslim women's organisations (there were no Muslim women's organisations before the war in Bosnia). Two most prominent organisations of this kind are Nahla and Kewser, both based in Sarajevo. Similarly, in the climate following the July 2005 attack on London, and in view of elevated security concerns, Muslim women were recruited into various government anti-terrorism and anti-radicalisation strategies. One such initiative brought about the existence of the Muslim Women's Network (initiated by the Women's National Commission[32]). In this study, I consider the work of Bosnian grassroots organisations Nahla and Kewser, and UK government initiated Muslim Women's Network (as a part of the Women's National Commission).

My Research

Changing circumstances can lead to changes in individual, or indeed collective, identification. This research examines how particular violent events – the war in Bosnia and the events of 9/11 and 7/7 – influence the reformulation and reshaping of Muslim women's religious identities. This research seeks to explore why religion has a strong

---

[32] The research was a collaboration with Women's National Commission as a part of The Religion and Society Research Programme (collaboration between Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)).
 'Women's National Commission is the official and independent advisory body giving the views of women to the government of the United Kingdom.' Taken from http://wnc.equalities.gov.uk/about-wnc/about-us-who-we-are.html Accessed on 27/09/2013 WNC does not exist since December 2010.

influence on Muslim women in both Bosnia and the UK, and more importantly, how women arrive at their pronounced identification with Islam after such violent events.

The purpose of this research is to flesh-out the strategies that can be used to enhance the positive sense of Muslim women's identity in Europe. My intention is to compare strategies (in terms of women's identity) developed by Muslim women in Bosnia and the UK to deal with the external challenges of the aftermath of war and Islamophobia respectively. In order to gain perspective on these strategies, I consider the work of women's organisations in the UK and Bosnia. By looking at the ways in which the Muslim Women's Network (MWN), Nahla and Kewser (in Bosnia) operate and engage with Muslim women, I investigate the connection between organisations and women members/users. This research is based on in-depth interviews with 20 individual women (equal number in both countries). Bosnian Muslim women who took part in the in-depth interviews were aged 20-38 and live in the capital city of Bosnia, Sarajevo; they were all members/users of the two organisations that I observed and they all experienced the 1992-1995 war. The Muslim women in the UK are all British citizens who were in the UK when both 9/11 and 7/7 occurred. All women are university educated or attending a higher education course. I also conducted interviews with the directors/founders of organisations, women involved in running them or women who were involved in setting them up, as is the case with MWN. I explore these organisations' role in fostering individual and collective religious identity after the events of violence, and organisational practices that are in line with both religious demands of Muslim women as well as with the demands of the social environment they live in. Hence, the primary research question asks how did the tragic events of 9/11 and 7/7 and war in Bosnia impact on the women's sense of self as Muslims, and how has this in turn influenced their participation in the Muslim women's organisations.

This research focuses on religious, Muslim women in two European countries – Bosnia[33] and the UK – and their identities as told by them, as experienced by them considering what Islam means to them in their respective contexts. In view of commonly

---

[33] The full name of the country is Bosnia and Herzegovina (correct spelling is Hercegovina). I use a shorter version 'Bosnia' to mean Bosnia and Herzegovina.

perceived and still prevalent stereotypes about Muslim women today, Collins's remark about the importance of Black women's self-definition and self-valuation resonates quite loudly. According to her, it involves 'challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in externally-defined, stereotypical images' (1986:S16). The identities that others (community, society, media, politics) assign to Muslim women and how those interact with the identities chosen by the women themselves are also considered.

My use of 'Muslim women' is not to place all Muslim women into a singular, homogeneous category as that would go against one of the main objectives of this study. As Mohanty points out, 'assumption of women as an already constituted and coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally' (1988:65), which is not the case. Moreover, as highlighted by Jeldtoft (2009: 9-14), the term 'Muslim', should not be taken as a given and without its complexities, assuming that, for example, anyone with a Muslim name has a practical relationship with Islam[34]. The term 'Muslim women', as used in this thesis, is simply of a descriptive nature and relates to some women, like those who took part in this research (and like myself), who self-identify with Islam as a religion and the Qur'an as 'the quintessential source and language' (Fawzi El-Solh and Mabro, 1994:2) of Islam. Islam as a religion is a belief established by the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad (Murata and Chittick, 1994:3) and, reflecting its meaning in Arabic, 'it means submission or surrender to God, or God's will' (ibid); hence a person who submits to the will of God and follows Islam is a Muslim. It is important to note that, both theologically and practically (as lived /practiced by those who follow it), there are various meanings of Islam since it 'is and has always been a religion of diversity' (Aslan, 2006:263). The diversity is supported by Islamic ethos, rooted in Qur'anic verses[35] which emphasise that each individual is responsible only for her or his actions and beliefs while every Muslim has an equal accessibility to God's truth and, as Abou El

---

[34] The terminology 'cultural Muslims' and 'practising Muslims' is employed to differentiate between those who do not have any practical relationship to Islamic rituals while 'practising Muslims' engage in some form of Islamic practice (Nielsen et al. 2011; 2012).
[35] For example see Quran 17:15; 53:38; 3:161.

Fadl suggests, 'it is this notion of individual and egalitarian accessibility of the truth that results in a rich doctrinal diversity in Islam' (2001:9). To further qualify the term 'Muslim women' (as used in this thesis) – it relates to women who consider themselves to be practising Muslims – following Sunni Islam. [36]

According to Pew Research Center [sic], Eastern Europe has the largest number of Muslims in Europe (Russia has the largest Muslim population in the whole of Europe), while Southern Europe (which includes Bosnia and Herzegovina) as a whole has a higher proportion of Muslims than Eastern Europe – 6.9% – compared with 6.2% of the population in Eastern Europe.[37] Using the data from the same source, the Muslim populations in these two European regions combined constitute about 66% of all Muslims in Europe. Since Russia (and other parts of Eastern Europe) as well as the eastern parts of Southern Europe are home to centuries old Muslim communities, it can be inferred that the majority of Muslims in Europe are actually indigenous European Muslims. Although there has been a development in the past 15 years, much of the research on Muslims in Europe is still focused on 'Muslims as immigrants' and Muslim presence in Western Europe. As far as the study of Bosnian Muslim women is concerned, there is only a very small number of works that deal with experiences of women (both in Bosnian and English language) prior to the 1992-1995 war (Sorabji, 1988; 1989; 1994; Bringa). During and after the war, and as I discuss in Chapter One, most work focused on Muslim women as the victims of war, with only a few recent exceptions (Helms 2003 a&b; 2010; Hadzis   , 2003; Šeta, 2011; Spahić-Šiljak, Z. (Ed.)., 2012). Therefore, this research, seeks to make a contribution to the wider field by exploring the views and experiences of women who are part of the indigenous European Muslim community. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, there is no study which compares the experiences of indigenous European Muslim women belonging to centuries old Muslim communities to those of the 'in-between generation', namely

---

[36] Both Sunni and Shia Muslims share the fundamental beliefs but there are differences too. For an extensive discussion please see Esposito (1998), *Islam and politics*. According to Pew Research Center, the majority (87-90%) of Muslims in the world are Sunnis. http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-muslim/#ftn8 Accessed on 23/09/2013

[37] http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-regional-europe/ Accessed on 24/09/2013

European born and educated, daughters of immigrants. My intention is to contribute to the body of literature which, by listening to Muslim women's own voices, paints a picture of heterogeneity of Muslim women's experiences; far from the image of a singular, unchanging and oppressed European 'other'.

Structure of the Thesis

There are five chapters of this thesis and, although they are categorised according to the main 'themes', it is possible that a particular theme might run through other chapters too. This is because of the way participants responded and the way this research was conducted – as a 'story' – of religious identity. As women narrated the story, topics often overlapped and moved within that narration. The first chapter of this thesis seeks to situate Bosnian and British Muslim women within their respective socio-cultural and historical contexts. I consider early histories of Islam and Muslim presence in both countries and how they interact and influence women's present. By providing a critical overview, I also consider the variety of literature that influenced and helped me throughout the course of this research. Discussion of relevant contextual literature is also provided in all other chapters relevant to the respective topics. In Chapter Two, I discuss the way this research was conducted. I consider the ontological and epistemological perspectives which led me to adopt a feminist approach. I discuss my trajectory and justification for selecting my particular methodology and the perspective that I bring to it. I deliberate on my own position in relation to the research topic, the research participants and their respective social contexts. I also critically reflect (Pillow and Mayo, 2007:163) on my role as a researcher and the way it influenced different stages of the research. I then focus on the actual methods used - considering both research design and research process. This is followed by Chapter Three which explores the influence of family life and background on the religious identity of the women who took part in this research. Chapter Four deals with the visual signifier of women's faith – hijab – and what it means to my research participants. Hijab is examined as part of a narrative of women's religious identity rather than a topic in itself. In this chapter, I also explore the religious dimensions and understandings of hijab and how they relate to

women's respective localities. The chapter considers the 'process' of hijab and different stages during that process: How do women arrive at the decision to wear it and what happens after they make that decision? How does hijab influence their interaction with their social environments? In Chapter Five I consider the work of three Muslim women's organisations, or more correctly, two organisations and a network. In Bosnia, the work of two grassroots organisations is considered and in the UK, it is the work of a government initiated women's network. The chapter explores the significance of these organisations on women's religious identity by considering the views of women who started the organisations/network, those who are involved in running them, and in the Bosnian case, those who are regular members or users of their services. I investigate the organisational practices that meet both the religious demands on Muslim women as well as with the demands of the social environment they live in by exploring how grassroots organisations differ to those which are government funded and/or initiated.

Chapter One

Contexts: Situating British and Bosnian Muslim Women

In this chapter, I seek to contextualise the discourses concerning Muslim women in Bosnia and the UK by considering the literature which deals with historical as well as socio-cultural specificities in both locations. As identified by Wagner (et al), while cultural and historical specificities of gender inequalities have been highlighted in the past, the issues around religious differences have been mostly unexplored; especially in the case of the differences 'within and across Muslim communities' (2012:523). My research seeks to address this gap by considering Muslim women who belong to two different communities in Europe, and similarly to Wagner (et al)'s study, it deals with complexities of meanings around women's religious identity. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is twofold: to situate Bosnian and UK Muslim women in context and to situate my research within the existing literature.

This chapter also discusses the literature which helped me to understand, frame and analyse my research participants' words and experiences during the course of this research. As suggested by Allievi and Nielsen, it is only during the past 25 years that 'a serious academic study of Islam in Western Europe' started to develop (2003:vii), and as a result, a considerable amount of literature dealing with the subject of Muslim Women has been published. Numerous studies have attempted to move away from the stereotyped and monolithic view of Muslim women in general, and specifically, in Europe, not only by taking into account the diversity of communities and their experiences, but also offering diversity of approaches towards the subject area (Ahmed, 2001; Bullock , 2007; Werbner, 2007; Afshar, 2008; Moors and Salih, 2009; Silvestri, 2011). Considering the variety of research on Muslim women, it can certainly be said that 'religion is a "site" on which some of the most hotly contested debates about gender in theory and practice are located' (Beckford and Demerath, 2007:7).

The research on Muslim women in Europe has often been burdened by assumptions about what it means to be the 'other' in Europe and, as Katherine Brown states, these

implicit assumptions 'operate as a subset of broader discourses that define the framework of the agendas in question' (2005). Beckford and Demerath argue that the understanding of 'Muslim women in the West who adopt forms of self-presentation and dress in public' that visually mark them as different from the majority creates a 'formidable challenge' for feminist scholars (2007:7). Rosi Braidotti also recognises the challenges to European feminism of, what she terms, 'the post-secular turn in feminism':

> because it makes manifest the notion that agency, or political subjectivity, can be conveyed through and supported by religious piety, and may even involve significant amounts of spirituality (2008:1).

My research draws upon a growing body of literature (Contractor, 2012; Piela, 2013; McDonald, 2005; Afshar, Aitken and Franks, 2005) which uses various feminist methodologies in attempt to provide an assumption-free analysis of Muslim women, privileging women's own voices. Some feminists have pointed towards the oppression, exclusion and marginalisation of women by monotheistic religions in general and Islam in particular (Jeffery, 1979; Minces & Pallis, 1982; Hoodfar, 1993; Onken, 2009[38]). However, recent research not only exposes the inaccuracy of a stereotypical view of Muslim women as oppressed, passive and voiceless but also represents Muslim women as active agents in choosing and negotiating their identities (El-Solh and Mabro, 1994; Esposito & Yazbeck- Haddad, 1998; Khan, 2000; Afshar, Aitken and Franks, 2005). I use the term 'identities' rather than an 'identity' to point towards fluid and multiple religious identities which are not categories or structures, but instead, are part of what Ammerman calls a 'dynamic process' (2003:224). This study aims to explore the dynamic nature of this process and how Muslim women, in two different socio-cultural European settings, use Islam as a reference point.

---

[38] Julia Onken is a Swiss feminist, psychologist and psychotherapist, who played a prominent part in the Swiss right-wing campaign to outlaw minarets on mosques. In the article written by Henckel in German *Die Welt*, she stated that the minaret represents oppressed [Muslim] women: http://www.welt.de/kultur/article5404429/Das-Minarett-symbolisiert-unterdrueckte-Frauen.html Accessed on 22/08/2013, similar statements also found in English, published by the *Guardian*.

Identity

Dealing with basic questions such as 'who are we?' and 'how do others see us?' is a characteristic of humans as social beings (Jenkins, 1996:2). Furthermore, Jenkins considers all human identities as social identities because 'identity' ultimately deals with possible relations of comparison between persons – their similarity or difference (1996:4). At the centre of the debates regarding identity is its construction. Traditional views that identity is fixed or given have been challenged and instead, it is argued that the construction of identity is a fluid and dynamic process influenced by history, geographical environment, political systems, economy, education and religion (Lawler, 2008:3; Jones and McEwen, 2000: 408-411). An individual's identity is seen as a result of different social encounters; hence identity 'feeds' on and is dependent on interaction with others. As Jenkins puts it: 'Not only do we identify ourselves, of course, but we also identify others and are identified by them in turn, in the internal-external dialectic between self-image and public image' (1996:22). Hence the construction of identity is essentially a result of social process between the individual and society.

It is a mistake to consider identity as one-dimensional because under different circumstances, various aspects of identity can come into play. Individuals negotiate their identities, presenting an image of themselves in order to be accepted by others. Therefore, identity is constructed as a result of the relationship between self-image and public image (Jenkins, 1996:71). An important aspect of identity is the interplay of individual identity and collective (group) identity. Individual identity only has meaning when considered in the social world and in turn, collective (group) identity is important in validating individual identity. Anne Sofie Roald points out that if a person is part of the mainstream culture or majority in society, the urgent quest for identity is less than if the same person finds herself/himself in 'minority situations' or, where there is contrast between their own and other opinions (2001:14). The same can also be applied if the person feels that there is some threat to the existence or maintenance of their identity; in those situations, even those previously not so 'identity conscious', become concerned, defensive and cognisant about the threatened identity. This has been the case, in different contexts, with both British and Bosnian Muslims. Identity not only links the

individual to the society and vice versa, it also establishes the political nature of the relationship between the individual and the society (Khan, 2000:87).

Central to membership of a group are the criteria of inclusion and exclusion. It is important to establish who belongs to the group and who does not, as similarity cannot be appreciated without also marking out differences. Jenkins expresses this eloquently by proposing 'a definition of the self as an individual's reflexive sense of her or his own particular identity, constituted vis-à-vis others in terms of similarity and difference, without which she or he wouldn't know who they are and hence wouldn't be able to act' (2008:49). Therefore, group identity construction involves recognition and understanding of common boundaries and symbols. Boundaries are drawn to differentiate who belongs to a group and who does not. If community is considered to be the most important source of collective identity then, as Anthony Cohen points out, community membership depends on the 'symbolic construction and signification of a mask of similarity' (1985).

In modern societies, identity is the way in which one sees oneself as a member of a socially recognised group; be it religious, political, national or cultural (Tajfel and Turner, 1985). It can be said that Islam, as a practised religion, creates a community of believers – Muslims. If considered as a 'system of meaning', Islam communicates the distinctiveness of what it is to be a Muslim through practices, life-style, and belief. Islam also assumes symbolic similarities such as performing prayers on Fridays (*Salat-al-Jum'ah*) or celebrating festivals. Muslim identity can be observed from two, equally important perspectives; one is self-perception (answering 'who am I?') and the other is the perception of community (answering 'how do others see us?').

a) Self-perception

Islam means 'submission'. To accept Islam and become a Muslim, one needs to submit to the will of God. The definition of Islam includes the definition of what it is to be a Muslim. By testifying and pronouncing the *shahadah* (testimony): 'There is no God but God and Muhammad is His messenger' an individual becomes a Muslim. However, to be a Muslim, one cannot just stop at the verbal pronunciation of *shahadah* - there has to

be an unequivocal belief in only One God. The idea of monotheism (*tawhid* – unity of God) is the essence of Islamic belief. The omnipotent concept of God is one of absolute power over the whole universe; God is transcendant, the ultimate creator. The Muslim also accepts that he/she is a subject of God with a purpose 'to do good and prohibit evil'. Constant awareness of God should be prerequisite   to all the actions and decisions of a Muslim. The idea of dualism between sacred and profane is a point of controversy between Islam and secularity; therefore, analysing Islam and Muslim identity from that perspective can prove to be difficult. For Muslims, everything has meaning in this world, and consequently, in all worldly activities there is a transcendent element that can be considered part of worship (*ibadah*). Whether sacred or profane, in Islam, everything is governed by the religion. Islam is a way of life and as such, it governs moral, intellectual, political, economic, educational and other aspects of person's life.[39]

According to Roald the best way to find out about Muslims' own self-definition of identity is to analyse it in terms of internal structural or functional elements (2001:18). She identifies three 'stages' in being a *Muslim* (using the evidence from *hadith*). The first stage is that a person commits him/herself to the five pillars of Islam – pronouncing *shahadah*, prayer (*salah*), fasting the month of Ramadan, giving charity (*zakah*) and pilgrimage (*hajj*). The second and third stages, involve different levels of awareness and a sense of accountability in relation to God. This is a formal definition of Muslim identity and it might be quite different to an everyday, lived identity. And, as Roald concludes, in the end, it is the individual's responsibility for his/her own Islamic performance (2001). In this study, I focus on the everyday experiences of Muslim women and the way they perceive and understand their religious identity. Lawler argues that the 'self is understood as unfolding through episodes which both express and constitute that self' and that the 'constitution of an identity is configured over time and through narrative' (2008:17). By considering identity in terms of narrative, I wanted to examine Muslim women's identities as produced through 'women's talk' (Spender,

---

[39] The Qur'an in verse 2:246-47 talks about designation of king in the addition (and presence) of prophet in facilitating the war; this illustrates that the division can be between temporal and spiritual aspects, however in Islam both politics and the king remain as much subject to the Divine law as the society and the prophet.

1998). Furthermore, Hall says that '[I]dentity is formed at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture' (1996:114). In this research, I wanted to explore these 'stories of subjectivity' and the way in which women construct their own identities as Muslims within the complex socio-cultural environments they are situated in.

b) Perception of community

Cohen's emphasis on the community as a source of collective identity seemed to be fully appreciated and acted upon in the early years of Islam. The main purpose of the Prophet's migration from Makkah to Madina (*hijrah*) was the creation of the community of Muslims (*ummah*) where, for the first time, they would be able to freely identify themselves morally, religiously, politically and socially as Muslims (Seddon in Seddon, Hussain and Malik, 2004:3). According to *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *ummah* refers to the communities sharing the same religion and, later, it almost always stands for the Muslim community as a whole. As a vital part of Muslim identity, the concept of *ummah* transcends the boundaries of the nation-state, race and ethnicity, and unites Muslims on the basis of Islam.

However, Muslims belong to another, even larger community and that is the community of all the people one lives amongst (regardless of their religion) – *qawm*. The Qur'an celebrates this in the following verse (*inter alia*) by emphasising: 'O mankind! Behold, We have created you from a male and female, and have made you nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another.' (49:13).[40] Being part of a wider community (regardless of religion) and belonging to the *ummah* does not exclude responsibilities towards the people of *qawm*. The plurality of religions, cultures and ethnic groups, as well as different opinions, is recognized as a positive factor and something that should be respected. The Qur'an states: 'And if God had willed, he could have made you one people…' (5:48); and regardless of the different moral and political conditions in different countries, the whole world belongs to the Creator (God): 'to God belongs the East and West' (2:115).

---

[40] See Qur'an 7:73, 7:85, 11:61, 11:84.

Muslim identity is dynamic as it has been subject to adaptation and change. As Islam spread over the different parts of world, it came in close contact with varied native heritages or, more accurately, 'social realities'. The very reason why Islam became the main religion in so many countries was the Qur'anic idea of *al-tsaamuh* (tolerance) and flexibility which has a widespread appeal. Social reality and belief accommodated one another in the case of Muslim societies. As Dilwar Hussain points out: 'Islam encapsulates values and ideas that lead to a cultural manifestation in the context of the particular area of the world where those values are implemented' (in Seddon, Hussain and Malik, 2004:99). Thus, when compared, no two Muslim countries are the same. Even if a single country is observed over the period of time there would be variation in what is considered to be 'Muslim identity'. To illustrate, when discussing the Muslim identity in Malaysia, one of the determining factors would be its *distinctiveness* from the other religions present in Malaysia. While, in Pakistan, as observed by Roald, Muslim identity is not so much a means of differentiation as is ethnicity. Consequently it is ethnic identity rather than the religious one that is more pronounced (2001:17). In times of conflict/violence, boundaries become more important and only one 'cognitive schema' is brought to the fore, which might have consequences for Muslim women's identity. Group stereotypes (eg. 'Muslims are fundamentalist', 'Muslim women are oppressed'), hostilities and the mobilisation of collective action (eg. 'ethnic cleansing') are the result of singling out and emphasising specific boundary-making identities. In the Bosnian case, pre-war dominant identities based on 'schemas' of 'neighbourliness' and friendship (Bringa, 1995) were, as a result of pre-war mobilisation of ethnic stereotypes as well as subsequent violence, replaced by the boundary-based identity of ethnicity/religion.

Islam, Europe and Muslim Women: Boundaries of Them and Us

Muslim women in the UK and Bosnia – both situated in Europe, where Islamophobic attitudes have increased since the events of 9/11 and 7/7 – share some similar experiences in terms of their religious identity and the way it is perceived within the societies they live in. [cannot start a sentence with Both where no prior ref to who]In

post-war Bosnia as well as post 9/11 UK, there has been a noticeable change in Muslim women's attitudes towards religion. Recent articles, titled *Women of Birminghamabad [Birmingham, UK] find identity* and *War brought Bosnian Muslim women back to Islam* from the Financial Times (September, 2007) and Reuters (May, 2007) respectively, are imbued with meanings and questions. This research seeks to address some of those questions and discuss the possible meanings.

When considering the British Muslim women I interviewed, Anne Sofie Roald's view of identity transformation can be applied: if a person is part of the mainstream culture or majority in society, the need for the urgent quest for identity is less than if the same person finds herself/himself in 'minority situations' or where there is contrast between their own and other opinions (2001:14). However, the same can also be applied if the person(s) feels that there is some threat to the existence or maintenance of their identity and, in those situations, even those previously not so 'identity conscious', become concerned, defensive and cognisant about the threatened identity, as was the case with the Bosnian Muslim women and their identity.

Both 9/11 and the Bosnian war have been interpreted by some commentators as a result of 'the clash of civilisations' (Huntington, 1993). According to this perspective, the world is divided, very neatly, into conflicting entities or 'civilisations'; the main ones being Western and non-Western. These civilisations have been portrayed as binary opposites and, more often than not, this argument is supported by examples of perceived perpetual conflict between West and Islam where, somehow, the whole of 'non-West' is equated with Islam while West has 'two major variants, European and North American' (Huntington, 1993:24). How does this theory relate to Muslim women in Bosnia and the UK? In the case of Bosnia, Huntington's view of post-communist Europe is that: 'the central dividing line . . . is now the line separating the people of Western Christianity, on the one hand, from Muslim and Orthodox peoples on the other'. He also defines Europe by posing the rhetorical question 'Where does Europe end?' and answering – 'Where Western Christianity ends and Islam and Orthodoxy begin' (p.28 & p.158 respectively). Jusová's (2011) argues that the 'clash of civilisations' in Europe is 'fought over with symbols that are gendered' and Braidotti is correct in her view that 'the clash of

civilizations' is Islamophobic in character and has triggered a wave of anti-Muslim intolerance across Europe' (2008:4). Therefore, it is Muslim women in Europe who are at the centre of gender politics and (often enough) 'standing in' for the backward and uncivilised 'East' and 'feminist achievements are temporarily embraced by an otherwise less than feminism-friendly mainstream discourse for the purpose of constructing the East' (Jusová 2011: 61).

Planned and purposeful destruction of mosques, Bosnian Muslim birth records, libraries, graveyards and people was interpreted by some political leaders in the 'West' as an 'ancient animosity' between 'Balkan tribal killers who have hated one another for centuries and who are incapable of living in peace' (Sells, 1998:3). Just before the war started (1987-1990), Slobodan Milosevic and later Radovan Karadzic[41] , used statements which indeed related to six centuries old historical event that portrayed all Muslims (in what was then Yugoslavia) as responsible for the death of Serb prince Lazar during the battle with the Ottoman army in 1389, in Kosovo. Milosevic gave a speech (which has since received much attention) at the commemoration of the battle of Kosovo in 1989 and ended it alluding to the Crusades:

> Six centuries ago, Serbia heroically defended itself in the field of Kosovo, but it also defended Europe. Serbia was at that time the bastion that defended the European culture, religion, and European society in general.

Although Milosevic has never publicly or directly insulted Yugoslav Muslims, he used religious mythology to evoke strong nationalistic sentiments or, as some termed it, 'nationalist frenzy' among the Serbs in the region (Scharf and Schabas, 2002:11).This was helped by Milosevic controlled RTV Belgrade which 'was regularly broadcasting fear-mongering reports and warnings of dark conspiracies in Bosnia directed against Serbs' (Toal and Dahlman, 2011:84)[42]. This narrative was augmented by demographic

---

[41] And other leaders of Serb Democratic Party in Bosnia as well as other Serbian political leaders in Serbia. For further information please look at http://www.icty.org/x/cases/karadzic/cis/en/cis_karadzic_en.pdf page 3 gives list of names. Accessed on 12/08/2013

[42] Of course, there are different points of view with regards to the Bosnian war, both historical and political, from within the region and from outside. It is also important to note that all three nationalist parties (Serb, Croat and Muslim) contributed to the escalation of conflict. However, the number of victims

details of the perceived huge growth of the Bosnian Muslim population and their higher birth rate compared to the ethnic Serb population, in the period between 1971 and 1991 (Slack and Doyon 2001). Bosnian Serb General, Ratko Mladic, described this population growth as 'a demographic bomb' (Hlliday, 1996:168) and called Muslim women 'production machines, each with ten or twelve children' (Slack and Doyon, 2001:145)[43]. The violence that followed during the four years of war in Bosnia sought to eliminate this demographic threat and according to official UN evidence, '*it had been decided that one third of Muslims would be killed, one third would be converted to the Orthodox religion and a third will leave on their own*' and thus all Muslims would disappear from Bosnia[44].

Although the negative image of Islam and Muslims existed prior to 9/11 (Runnymede Trust, 1997) researchers (Allen & Nielsen, 2002; Sheridan, 2006) have pointed out a considerable increase in cases of religious discrimination after September 11th, 2001. Sheridan's research of 222 Muslim in the UK, showed how the 'levels of implicit or indirect discrimination rose by 82.6% and experiences of overt discrimination by 76.3%' (2006:330). Will Cummins's (pseudonym used by former Sunday Telegraph's comments contributor[45]) statements that Muslims are a 'threat to Christian civilisation' or 'our way of life' (2004[46]) do resemble statements made by Serb nationalists just before the war in Bosnia and illustrate how '*otherising*' a particular community is used to mobilise a community or society so that the positive sense 'us' is constructed and enhanced because of the construction of a correspondingly negative sense of 'them'

---

and the type of war-crimes committed is not equal for the three sides. During the war in Bosnia and Croatia, Nationalist Serbian media (In Bosnia and Serbia) mainly portrayed their version of events where the only victims were Serbs. For the alternative view of Bosnian war, from the Serb nationalists perspective, please see http://www.srpska-mreza.com/Bosnia/index.html Accessed on 13/08/2013

[43] Croat nationalist leader, Franjo Tuđman, who later became a president of Croatia, was also part of 'demographic paranoia'; he also made comments on how the increased birth rate of Muslims threatened the existence of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Uzelac 1998:466).

[44] http://www.icty.org/sid/11345 Accessed on 12/08/2013

[45] Mark Law, the comment editor of the Telegraph, as 'a former teacher whose opinion pieces have not been published before [and] wishes to remain anonymous'.
http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2004/jul/21/1 Accessed on 12/08/2013 A subsequent investigation found him to be Harry Cummins, a press officer for British Council
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3620982.stm Accessed on 12/08/2013

[46] In July 2004 Cummins published four articles in which he the Telegraph, expressing his views on Islam and Muslims. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3608849/Muslims-are-a-threat-to-our-way-of-life.html Accessed on 12/08/2013

(Bauman, 1990). Cummins was very specific in his choice of words, as were Serb nationalists, when he commented, as did Serb nationalists on Muslim demographics in the UK:

> There were 23,000 Muslims in Britain in 1954. Today there is 100 times that many. In the next 50 years those 2.3 million Muslims will increase at an even swifter rate. The political implications of such an expansion are vast. The Muslim's kingdom is very much of this world. Our kingdom will therefore be very much of the Muslim's world.[47]

and

> All Muslims, like all dogs, share certain characteristics. A dog is not the same animal as a cat just because both species are comprised of different breeds. An extreme Christian believes that the Garden of Eden really existed; an extreme Muslim flies planes into buildings - there's a big difference.

Cummins's statements are deeply offensive to Muslims and probably sound ridiculous to the majority of people who do not follow Islam. However, statements like these, when said in an already tense political or economic climate, as was the case in Bosnia, can have grave consequences. The emphasis on the '*us vs. them*' discourse in everyday life deepens the gap between communities and groups and, as a result, the symbolic boundaries become more prominent and limiting to social interactions between the groups involved (Barth, 1969; 2000). The concept of boundaries goes beyond physical state borders or only spatial divides: boundaries are maintained through social interaction and are dependent on an individual or group's lived experience. While Migdal (2004) calls boundaries 'virtual checkpoints' and 'mental maps', Barth (2000) refers to them as 'mentally derived schemas'. Both agree that they are product of a cognitive thinking process about the surrounding world. As such boundaries are contingent on culture, space, time and gender. They function as multidimensional perceptions and are not fixed. Most of the time people deal with a number of boundaries

---

[47] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3608563/The-Tories-must-confront-Islam-instead-of-kowtowing-to-it.html Accessed on 12/08/2013

responding to their own or group's real or imaginary experiences. The decision on whether somebody is included or excluded takes into account actual or indeed 'imagined' people, while the distinguishing factor for 'imagined community' (from other forms of social relationships) is the influence it might have on members' way of living and relation to others (Poole, 1999).

At times of conflict/violence only one 'cognitive schema' is brought to the fore, with consequences for Muslim women's identity. Group stereotypes (e.g. 'Muslims are fundamentalist', 'Muslim women are oppressed'), hostilities and mobilisation of collective action (e.g. 'ethnic cleansing') are the result of singling out and emphasising specific boundary-making identities. In the Bosnian case, pre-war dominant identities based on 'schemas' of 'neighbourliness and friendship' (Bringa, 1995) were, as a result of the pre-war mobilisation of ethnic stereotypes as well as subsequent violence, replaced by the boundary-based identity of ethnicity/religion. Kolind points out how, prior to war, 'ethnic identity in Bosnia Herzegovina was only one identity among others, and ethnic differences were embedded in everyday practices. Today, ethnic difference is all there is' (2008).

The 'boundary schema' assumes homogeneity within a group, as well as cultural difference from other groups, and this also has major implications affecting the social relations between the groups/communities (Barth, 2000). In post 9/11 Britain (as well as in the rest of Western Europe) Muslim women are faced with narrow-minded stereotypes placing them in an 'imaginary' homogenous group of oppressed victims of Islam. Women are used as markers of difference between what is/or not considered to be 'British', they are epitomes of what is 'backward' about Muslims or Islam. In a report, conducted by the Muslim Women's Network, safety 'was the biggest issue', where the majority of women experienced either verbal or physical harassment just because they were Muslim (2006:26-29).

Islamophobia and racism particularly towards women identifies them as 'bearers of corporate identities and boundary markers of their communities' and has a negative effect on their involvement (economical, political, cultural) with the host society (Kandiyoti, 1991:441). Cohen stresses the qualitative nature of social and cultural

boundaries and associates them with 'the formation, articulation, management and valorisation of collective identities' (2002:2). According to him, the identity becomes contingent on 'cross-boundary' interchange and, because boundaries are of a cognitive nature, what might seem as act of violence to one group of people the opposing group could justify as an act of self-preservation, all depending upon what each group perceives to be at stake.

Group stereotypes (e.g. 'Muslims are fundamentalist and terrorists'), hostilities and mobilisation of collective action (e.g. 'ethnic cleansing') are result of singling out and emphasising specific boundary-making identities. Therefore, the concept of social boundaries and, already mentioned Kandiyoti's understanding of women as 'bearers of corporate identities and boundary markers of their communities' (1991:441) provides a means of analysing multiple and shifting identities of Muslim women in UK and Bosnia.

Muslims and non-Muslims worldwide have been affected by the outcomes and reactions to 9/11, the Madrid bombings and the 7/7 London bombings. Many felt that the atrocities committed by few men who call(ed) themselves 'Muslims' have been attributed, chiefly by media, to the *whole* community. The events that great majority of ordinary Muslims abhor and consider contradictory to the core Islamic teachings of peace and tolerance, have become the fuel for intensifying already present Islamophobic sentiments (Allen and Nielsen, 2002), especially towards Muslims who live in the West. Many Muslims feel the unfairness of the way they are represented by the media (Gohir, 2006) and politicians when it comes to treatment of any topic concerning Islam or Muslims. However, as Allen and Nielsen (2002) argue the perceived raise in xenophobia and fear of Muslims was not a completely new EU phenomenon but, instead, it represented something that was already present sentiment only now amplified sense of fear and threat of the 'enemy within'. In some cases, Islamophobic expressions after 9/11 were 'covers' for general racism and xenophobia but many expressions were specifically targeted toward Muslims; the examples of such activity is the formation of the alliance of the ultra right-wing British National Party with anti-Muslim alliance and Sikh and Hindu extremists (ibid).

As far as the attitudes towards Muslim women in Europe are concerned, the situation is not much better. For example, Amnesty International in France produced a report in 2012 which states:

> employers are still excluding Muslims from employment on the basis of stereotypes and prejudices, and that this impacts disproportionately on Muslim women….57% of the complaints on religious discrimination were filed by women…Muslim women are being denied jobs and girls prevented from attending regular classes just because they wear traditional forms of dress[48]

While in the UK, The Equality and Human Rights Commission states:

> Muslims appear to experience religious discrimination with a frequency and seriousness that is proportionately greater than that experienced by those of other religions… the visible aspects of religious difference continue to be 'a particularly salient part of 'religious discrimination', especially in relation to Muslim women and clothing and following 9/11 in relation to physical attacks on Muslims and others perceived to be Muslims by virtue of aspects of their clothing (*Religious Discrimination in Britain*, 2011).

However, despite these negative developments, women are choosing to wear hijab, actively seeking religious knowledge and reinterpreting of the primary texts in relation to women's issues; therefore religion can act as a tool of empowerment (Silvestri, 2008). Relationship between gender, religion and state depends on local contexts of each European country.

Bosnian Context

I begin by discussing the Bosnian case. In order to understand Bosnian Muslim women's identity in post-war Bosnia, it is necessary to consider the historical background of Muslims in Bosnia. While conducting my interviews in Bosnia, I was overwhelmed by sense of willingness to participate of Muslim women and I will never

---

[48] http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR01/001/2012/en/85bd6054-5273-4765-9385-59e58078678e/eur010012012en.pdf Accessed on 12/02/2013

forget a statement that one of them made, just before the interview started which sums up the general attitude of women I talked to:

> Write something about us…so that we are known for who we are…so that there
> is something [written] about us other than just victims of war-time rape…or
> those poor peasant women refugees with fear in their eyes…

It is difficult to fully translate a true sentiment behind this statement into an English equivalent; the fine nuances of Bosnian language with its pauses, body language, facial expressions and sighs are much more than just words. While it left me with a heavy burden of responsibility and self-doubt in ability to do the justice to the time and trust that they selflessly offered, it also confirmed a general lack of literature on Bosnian Muslim women. Bosnian Muslim women I spoke to were all highly educated, they were, for the most part, self-educated in Islam and aware of availability of different sources of literature on Islam and women. They were not aware of any major scholarly works that deals with *them* and their identities. Prior to 1992 war, Cornelia Sorabji's (1988; 1989) and Tone Bringa's (1991; 1995[49]) were two key researchers, publishing in English language, which dealt with various expressions of Bosnian Muslim identity; their research included an anthropological study of Bosnian Muslim women. Sorabji's work highlights the role of women as nurturers of Islamic customs and rituals in socialist Yugoslavia; investigating particularities of these rites and pointing out that women are not just passive participants. Bringa's work is well recognised and respected in Bosnia. In her ethnographic study of Bosnian Muslim village in the 1980s she managed to provide a much needed perspective on lives of Muslims in socialist Yugoslavia.

Bosnian history is at the centre of its identity discourse, be it national or religious. For the purpose of this research I will focus on the parts of the Bosnian history that I believe are relevant for the discussions of Bosnian Muslim women's identity and therefore review the history of development of Muslim identity in Bosnia. As the ethnic, cultural and religious identities are closely related in Bosnia, special emphasis is on the ethnoreligious (*nacija*) identity issues. By looking at the *culturo-historical* legacies I

---

[49] Based on Bringa's research which commenced in 1986 with fieldwork in Bosnia ending in 1988 (Bringa 1995:xv)

then seek to shed some light on the relationship between women and Islam in Bosnia. The period of socialist Yugoslavia has left a great impact on pre and post -war Muslim identity in Bosnia. For that reason, I also discuss the experiences and representations of Bosnian Muslim women in socialism.

> *We live at the crossroads of the worlds, on a border of nations;*
>
> *We bear the brunt for everybody, and we have always been guilty in the eyes of someone.*
>
> *The waves of history break themselves over our backs, as on a reef.*
>
> (part of the poem written by Bosnian writer Mehmed Meša Selimović)

It is Bosnian geographical position ('at the crossroads of the worlds') that accounts for the richness of the history. Often called 'microcosm of Balkans' it is a land where great civilisations met and overlapped. Religions of Western and Eastern Christianity, Islam and Judaism as well as powerful empires of Rome, Byzantium, the Ottomans and Austro-Hungarians all left their marks on Bosnian history and heritage. For centuries, in one way or another, Bosnia was at the crossroads of major political and ideological forces which resulted in contrasting legacies and left a lasting imprint on the culture of the Bosnian people (Bringa, 1995:13).

The ancestors of Bosnian Muslims were South Slavs who came to Balkans in the sixth and seventh centuries. During ninth century most of the South Slavs converted to Christianity. They were later divided into Catholics in the northern areas and Orthodox in the eastern and southern areas by the Great Schism in Christianity (between the western Catholic and eastern orthodox churches). In 1159 the Serbian dynasty was established and about two centuries later the Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarchate was founded with the centre in Kosovo. Bosnia was the neighbouring country of Serbia and emerged as powerful as it was on the trade crossroads between city-state of Ragusa (present Dubrovnik) and Constantinople. Moreover, Bosnia also had mineral wealth in gold and silver, which added to its prosperity. In medieval times, people of Bosnia belonged to one of the three Churches: Catholic, Orthodox and Christian Church, the last of which was also known as the Bosnian Church. As the Bosnian Church was an independent from both Catholic and Orthodox Churches, it was considered heretical and

associated with the Bulgarian Manichean or Gnostic dualist sect – *Bogumils* (believed in two equal principles of good and evil). However, there are historians who claim that Bogumils came from Paulians (those from Paul), founded by Paul of Samostat on his exclusion from the Church in 265 CE. It is said that his followers moved to Plovdiv, where they adopted new Slavic name – Bogomils or Bogumils[50]. They were considered heretics because their views about Prophet Jesus (peace be on him[51]) were contrary to the view commonly held by both Orthodox and Catholic Christians. They believed that Jesus was not the son of God but his messenger. Ancient historians, both Muslim and non-Muslim wrote about this sect. One of them was Ibn Hazm who died in 1064, in his work 'Faiths and Sects' (*al-Milal wan-Nihal*) he says: 'From among Christian sects there are also the followers of Paul from Samostat (*ash-Shishaati*). He was patriarch in Antioch before Christianity spread. His faith was: pure and real monotheism and that Jesus is God's slave and messenger as one of the prophets' (Handžić, 1940).

Another Christian Arab historian Said ibn Bitrik (died 940 CE), mentions Paulians in his writings saying that they believed that Jesus was created as a man by God, and they also believed in God as Single and One (ibid). And, as Bogumils were very similar to Paulians, one cannot deny similarities of their faith with Islam. What is more, the contemporary historians are of opinion that Bosnian Church was the 'forerunner to the Protestants' with some religious practices not unlike Islamic ones. They attached great importance to prayer, condemned the worship of images and saints and objected to use of cross (probably because they did not think that Jesus was crucified) (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 28:918; 15th edition; also Eliot 1908:241)[52].

The battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389 was a crucial event for whole of the Balkans. It is almost ironical that at the birthplace of their Church (in 1346), about 40 years later Serbia experienced large losses. For the other party in the battle, the Ottomans (even

---

[50]   The word 'Bogumil' meaning 'love of God'; composed of two words *bog* – meaning god, and *mil* – meaning dear.

[51]   As Muslim believe that Jesus was prophet of God, it is a practice to say 'peace be on him' every time when his name is mentioned (same as for other prophets of Islam like Noah, Moses etc)

[52]   Detailed discussion on Bosnian Church can be found in John Fine's work, *The Bosnian Church: The New Interpretation* (1975).

though the battle was a draw), the doors to Balkan Peninsula became open. In 1451 Vrhbosna (present Sarajevo) came under the Ottomans and, in 1483 the rest of Bosnia.

The arrival of the Ottomans saw the transformation of towns and villages in Bosnia. There was extensive building of roads, bridges, marketplaces, libraries, *medresas* (theological schools) and so on. Towns like Sarajevo, Mostar and Travnik grew into the cities, while villages grew into towns. The growth and prosperity was accompanied by a large number of conversions of Bosnians to Islam. As Waardenburg puts it, this was 'the glorious time of Muslim Bosnia… which saw important economic activity and a high culture; most Bosnian towns date from this period' (382: 2003). The Ottomans stayed in Bosnia until 1878 when their rule was taken over by the dual Austro-Hungarian kingdom.

However, for Bosnians, the arrival of the Ottomans was not their first contact with Islam. It has been known that, as result of Arab expansion to Sicily, Crete and Spain, Muslims merchants were regularly visiting Dalmatia (of which large part belonged to Kingdom of Bosnia). According to some historians, Saracen rulers of Andalusia are known to have had 13750 men strong Slav army (Hukić, 1977:20). Medieval Hungary, including Srem (area adjoining north-east Bosnia) was a home to some Arab merchants; it is highly possible (because of Bosnia's position) that they would have visited Bosnia. Hence, it can be said that there was an ancient presence of Islam in Bosnia even before Ottomans (Balić, 1992). Western historians as well as others (mainly nationalists Serb and Croat) are of the opinion that this early contact with Islam is of no significance to Bosnia in terms of conversion to Islam. One can presume that supporting this theory works well with the general idea that Islam spread with 'the sword'. However, the significance of the role of merchants (and people of trade) in spreading of Islam is well established. For example, Arnold attributes the missionary spirit of Islam not to 'the fury of the fanatic' but to 'the quiet unobtrusive labours of the preacher and the trader who have carried their faith into every quarter of the globe' (Arnold, 1913). The conversion of such a large number of Bosnian people to Islam is at the heart of the debate regarding Bosnian Muslim national (and religious) identity (Sells, 1998; Bringa, 1995).

Very little has been written about the status and life of women in Bosnia in general and, hence Muslim Bosnian women. Only in 19th and 20th centuries one can find some works concerning women and even they are very scanty. One of the reasons for the lack of the scholarly material might be because, for the centuries, women were considered as 'historically invisible'. It would be understatement to say that there is a great need for historical analysis of women in Bosnia, particularly Muslim women. In the virtual non-existence of any literature regarding this topic, I tried to extract the information from different sources that dealt with variety of subjects: poetry, architecture, traditional clothes etc. I therefore attempt to put together, if only just a preliminary account of the status of Muslim women through the history of Bosnia.

Bosnian Muslim Women in the Ottoman Period

There are no academic works about the status of Bosnian Muslim women during the Ottoman Empire (1483-1878). The main source of information about women in Bosnian language is the lyrics of *sevdalinke* (pl. traditional Bosnian love songs). Bosnian historians predict that *sevdalinka* (singular) started about 40 years after arrival of Ottomans and considered it to be the best representation of Bosnian oral literature and art during this period. They are understood to reflect the new way of life of the Bosnians who accepted Islam. Therefore, *sevdalinke*, in their stories, always mention specifics of Muslim towns, streets, houses and society. For example, the arrangement of the typical house, according to the means of the owner, most of the times, involved separate living areas for men and women of the house, the house was surrounded by the wall or fencing, so that *avlija* (garden) and living areas remained private (Maglajlić, 1978). Most of the *sevdalinke* are told from female perspective; hence, it is of no surprise, that some call them 'lyric monologues of the woman echoing the society in the subjective manner' (Rizvić, 1994).

As in the rest of the Ottoman Empire, and also as portrayed in *sevdalinke*, Muslim women in Bosnia maintained a high degree of privacy, rather than the complete seclusion. It would appear that whole system was in place to protect and respect the women. This can be clearly seen even from the architecture: women were given private

rooms for leisure, socialising (with other women) and education; gardens were secluded away from the roads and planted with flowers; the windows were designed so that the rooms received maximum amount of light etc. Urban women, mainly from upper classes, were always veiled in public, while women in rural areas had a lax approach to the veil, because of their lifestyle. An interesting point here is that even Christian women in urban places adopted the veil. The idea of public and private in Islamic societies is different from western notions of space and hence often misunderstood by westerners. The level of 'seclusion' reflected both the social and political status of women in Bosnia. There is quite big discrepancy in the status of the upper classes of Bosnian Muslim women and peasants or lower classes. Within the upper classes, women had a comfortable lifestyle. Their main concern was running of the household, while the free time was spent socialising or reading religious texts. Women of the lower classes and women in villages had to go out of their houses to work.

Polygamy was very rare and usually associated with the upper classes. Women of the upper and middle classes often possessed property and were known to engage in trade activities engaged in various business activities. As Leila Ahmed points out, women in sixteenth and seventeenth century urban Turkey (Bosnian cities such as Travnik, Sarajevo and Mostar were flourishing and can be considered within this realm) inherited 'in practice, not merely in theory, and they were able and willing to go to court if they thought themselves unjustly excluded from inheriting estates' (Ahmed, 1992:110).

Sevdalinke, being mostly love songs, illustrate that the women had some freedom in choosing their marriage partners. The direct socialising with opposite sex was not allowed, but talking to the possible marriage partners was 'facilitated' by indirect ways and with permission of the parents. For example, a young man would come at the set time and the girl would talk to him from the window (behind the curtain), the window was known to be *ašik-pendžer* (dating window).

According to Dengler, the organisation of 'world of women' in Ottoman society 'appears to have been set very much in the pattern' from the end of 15th until the reforms at the end of the 19th century, in the Bosnian case in 1878 on the arrival of Austro-Hungarians (Dengler 1978:229-30). As much as Dengler's statement sounds like over

generalisation and simplification of the history, there are no contesting opinions concerning Bosnian Muslim women of that period.

The arrival of Austro-Hungarians and demise of Ottomans, brought about the changes in every respect of life. This directly affected the Muslims in Bosnia, and for the first time the question of 'emancipation' of Muslim women was put forward. The Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia in 1878 resulted in dramatic change of circumstances as far as Bosnian Muslims were concerned. It marked the start of political awakening. Rather than identifying themselves by religion only, Bosnians will now be challenged as nationality as well. Therefore, Austro-Hungarian arrival started the 'modernisation' process which continued into the communist era where the Muslim community in Bosnia was 'policed' in the name of gender equality (Razack, 2007:20). In the socialist time ethno-national identity marked by religious identity became the main categories of identity in Bosnia (this is discussed more in Chapters Three and Four).

Women and Muslim Identity in Independent and Post-War Bosnia

This section gives only a brief introduction to some of the contextual issues that concern Bosnian Muslim women's identity in post-war Bosnia. It also considers how different forms of violence impact gendered Islamic/Muslim identity in Bosnia (with some references to UK as well). However, subsequent chapter gives more detailed analysis of this topic.

In spring of 1992 Bosnia was recognised as independent state by European Community and United States. The war started almost immediately after announcing the independence and lasted until 1995. Just after announcing the independence, Bosnia was surrounded by the army of Serb nationalists (*chetniks*). What followed during the next four years was inconceivable to many in the modern world. The war campaign in Bosnia was an organised effort to completely destroy Bosnian Muslims as a people. The UN imposed an arms embargo giving a huge advantage to already powerful and heavily armed chetniks. The genocide, as defined by Rafael Lemkin, in an effort to learn from the experience of the Holocaust, means to 'destroy, in whole or in part, national, ethnic,

50

racial or religious group as such' (cited in Sells, 1996:24). Many consider that what happened in Bosnia, during those four horrific years, was nothing less than savagery genocide.

It was a religious war against unarmed helpless civilians and overwhelming number of them were Bosnian Muslim women. Cetniks employed policy of systematic and organised rape as a means to destroy the Muslims in the most humiliating way. About 20000 of Bosnian Muslim women were raped (Karčić, 2010).[53] Sells calls the rape of Bosnian women 'gynocidal' as it was the deliberate attack on the women as child bearers (1996:22). The birth rate statistics among the national groups in Yugoslavia show that, for Bosnia in 1981, Muslims had the highest birth rate, difference being quite substantial. This became the heated issue with the Serb nationalists who charged Muslims of plotting to overwhelm and 'erase' the Serbs (ibid). Meznaric relates about 'specialised' camps in which young girls and women were raped (in Moghadam, 1994:93). The main aim was that the victim would bear 'Serb seed' and hence become pregnant and give birth to the Serb child; preventing the births of any more Muslims. And, as pointed out by Meznaric, rapes occurred in the areas where Serbs were minority. This is an example of the women being at the centre of the battles of politics of identity. The rape was a 'very real weapon' in the hands of Serb tormentors to carry the 'ethnic cleansing' (1994:18).

Women's appearance and sexuality was seen as representing a nation where women are responsible for communicating nation's identity/values (Yuval-Davies, 1998). Hence they were raped because they were Muslim and because they were women. In this way, 'women become the subjected territory across which the boundaries of nationhood are marked' (*Gender and History*, 1993:159[54]). The rape was not the only form of violence that Bosnian women experienced during the war. The majority have been affected by daily shelling, bombing, witnessing massacres and forced migration. Women's experiences of violence not only re-shaped inter-ethnic boundaries in Bosnia but also lead to reassessment and reorientation of their identity (Bringa, 2002; Korac, 1999).

---

[53] http://www.cns.ba/docs/islamic_revival_in_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina_1992-1995.pdf Accessed on 23/09/2013
[54] Editorial, *Gender and History*, (1993), p. 159.

This brought the question of identity, or more correctly Muslim identity, to the fore of the Bosnian women conscience; emerging as a response to the severe political circumstances where their very survival as Muslims was at stake.

According to the study by Attanassoff, Islamic activism in Bosnia has been on the increase since the war ended (2005). His main concern vis-à-vis the rise of Islamic activism is its potential to become a social movement and have influence on the spread of terrorism (Attanassoff, 2005). He continues by stating that 'the 1992 to 1995 war was the watershed event that led to the affirmation and mobilization of Muslim identity' (2005). Moreover, Attanassoff argues that Bosnia is undergoing Islamic Revivalism manifested in following: the spread of the institutions of Islam as general, such as mosques, ulama, Islamic relief foundations, charities and NGOs, religious schools; also the Islamic proselytisation, in the form of Islamic literature, audio and video tapes, radio and TV, printed media; and the growth of religiosity in society as a whole (2005). Since end of the war in 1995 to date, most research on Bosnian women in general and, Bosnian Muslim women in particular, has tended to focus around their direct experiences of war. Number of studies have discussed Bosnian women as refugees and complexities of displacement within Europe and further away, in Australia and USA (Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2005; Ai, C Peterson and Huang, 2003; Franz, 2003; Al-Ali, Black and Koser, 2001); while others investigated a difficult topic of widespread gender violence (Kesić, 2002; Olujić, 1998; Kozaric-Kovacic et al., 1995; Hansen, 2000). However, as Karčić (2010) correctly highlights there is a scarcity of serious research of post-war Islamic revival in Bosnia and, as he claims, 'although here has been much talk about the revival of Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the last decade, only a handful of serious academic studies have been done on this topic. Apart from this, there have also been a number of rather misleading analyses and reports written by foreign journalists'[55]. Although research on gender violence and displacement is very important, only few studies have dealt with opinions and attitudes of Bosnian Muslim women beyond 'victim of war' paradigm. Among those in English language is Elissa Helms's ethnographic study of women's organizations (not just Muslim or religious),

---

[55] http://www.iseef.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=122&Itemid=42 Accessed on 12/08/2013

post-war activism and reconciliation in Bosnia's Muslim majority cities of Sarajevo and Zenica (2003a; 2003b; 2008; 2010). There is also Swanee Hunt's (United States Ambassador to Austria in 1993-1997[56]) study of Muslim women where she attempted 'to address Islam in Bosnia as women experience and describe it' (2004:302). Hunt explains the lack of research on Bosnian Muslim women with her observation that 'there is no dramatic Islamic tale to tell; few women in Bosnia look, act or speak in some particularly Muslim way'. There are few problems with this explanation. The key problem is of paradoxical nature, if there is nothing 'dramatic' and if, as it was the case with her conclusion, the majority of Bosnian Muslim women blend seamlessly into Bosnia's religo-ethnic milieu, why then a title 'Muslim Women in Bosnian Crucible'? Helms's work displays in-depth familiarity with Bosnian (and regional) cultural, political and historical contexts while providing analysis on post-war activism and exploring women's attempt to forge new identities. Although Helms discusses Islam in Bosnia and ethno-religious identities to an extent, her focus is not on women's religious identity. Both Helms's and Hunt's research offer valuable contribution to post-war study of Bosnian women beyond the victimhood image however, questions need to be asked as to whether their approach and analysis were (in certain aspects) limited because of their respective positionalities as foreign researchers and, in case of Hunt, as a senior representative of USA government. This is not to say that non-indigenous researchers/outsiders should not conduct research but, as Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) highlight, the importance of positionality of researcher vis á vis their research participants and a possible 'lack of objectivity in getting, analyzing, and reporting data' should be kept in mind (this is further discussed in Chapter Two).

Benedict Anderson in '*Imagined Communities*' discuses the notions of national identity, he argues that nationalism should be considered as analogous to kinship and religion (1991). In this context, where nation is representing a sort of 'big family' or, indeed religious entity, it is believed that women's role assumes one of the carriers of the traditions and symbols of group where 'appropriate models of womanhood are to be found in scripture'. Valentine Moghadam argues that when the group identity becomes

---

[56] http://www.swaneehunt.com/bio.htm Accessed on 12/08/2013

'intensified', importance of women is raised as they become the 'symbol' of community. Moreover, in those circumstances, according to Moghadam, women become duty-bound in their role of the reproduction of the group, whereby the positions of motherhood and wifehood become 'exalted' and 'fetishized'. It is in this context when the issues of women's dress and behaviour become important as expressions of the divine ordination and with the aim of putting the women 'in their place' (Moghadam 1994:18).

In Islam, women and family are considered as the foundation of community, they are at the heart of Muslim society. However, it should be noted, that, in Islam, the status of women does not suddenly 'become exalted' according to the need(s) of the community; their roles as human beings, mothers, wives, daughters and sisters, as stated in the Qur'an and Sunnah (narrations of Prophet Muhammad), are praised and valued regardless of the time and external factors (economy, politics etc). In other words, their rights are permanently granted. Islam, therefore understands the significance of women's agency in the development of religion and religious identity, however it never reduces her to be a mere tool; her role is fully appreciated and will be rewarded in the Hereafter.

British Context

It is important to acknowledge that the history of Muslim presence on British Isles goes beyond the commonly perceived association with mass immigration that occurred in the 60s and 70s and, as Gilliat-Ray points out, although the scale of migration post-Second World War is significant, 'wider British engagement with Muslim majority countries, goes back much further' (2010:1). Some scholars, like Joly (1987) wrote about how arrival of Islam in the UK was a 'recent' phenomenon and that it 'took place after dismantling of the empire in the post second world war [sic] era'. Joly further explains:

> Nothing had prepared the British Society to give a home to a strong nucleus of Muslims forming communities in some of its major cities…Britain is primarily a Christian Protestant society; this is enshrined in the composition of its institutions whereby state and church are not separated…Moreover, as in most

countries which possessed an empire, Britain does not have a tradition of religious or cultural tolerance of non-Christian outsiders. The past persecution of the Jews and today's prevalent racism bear witness to this (1987:1).

Reading Joly's argument made me feel slightly uneasy as it reminded me of my own tourist-turned-refugee experiences: her choice of terminology in, what is a relatively short statement, encapsulates the harsh reality that was and, to some extent, still is facing 'outsiders' on arrival to Britain. Not 'being prepared' for Muslim 'outsiders' in 'Christian' society, 'empires[sic]', non-tolerance and racism, in a way, summarised many points that have been historically and politically used when discussing 'arrival' of Muslims to Britain or indeed, any other 'outsiders'. Even some Muslim researchers, like Anwar and Bakhsh (2003), when discussing British Muslims, often take post WWII period as their starting point. In spring 2013, a campaign group called 'Curriculum for Cohesion[57]' called for the British government to be more inclusive of 'Muslim history in the national curriculum, as a way of engaging young Muslim pupils, and educating non-Muslims about the contributions of the Islamic world to science and philosophy' as, at present, it 'excludes all reference to Muslims and Islam' (Elgot, 2013[58]). The remarkable success of, now international, '1001 Inventions' exhibition[59] at 'its record-breaking residency at London's Science Museum with 400,000 visitors in the first half of 2010' demonstrates the level of interest by British public in scientific and cultural achievements of Muslims from the 7th century to present. Another exhibition, in 2011, organised by The Royal Society fittingly used the 17th century spelling – 'Arabick Roots'[60] – to draw attention to the scientific and scholarly achievements of Arab and Muslim world. By using term 'roots' organisers probably also intended to establish that the science produced in the Muslim world centuries ago, is not something alien but, instead, interwoven into the very fabric of British culture.

I shall provide a brief historical overview of Muslim presence on British Isles, referring only to a number of selected events and encounters to illustrate that roots of Islam in

---

[57] http://curriculumforcohesion.org/ Accessed on 20/08/2013
[58] http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/04/12/muslim-history_n_3070107.html Accessed on 20/08/2013
[59] http://www.1001inventions.com/ Accessed on 20/08/2013
[60] http://royalsociety.org/exhibitions/arabick-roots/ Accessed on 20/08/2013

Britain go as far back as eight century[61] and that first, albeit, small communities of Muslims were established in 17th century. Additionally, the historical and literary analysis of Islam and Muslims prior to the post WWII mass migration is important as it informed much of the British attitudes towards Muslim 'outsiders' and their arrival to the UK. A prominent scholar on History of Britain and the Islamic Mediterranean, Nabil Matar, notes that while many 17th century English and Scottish theologians and writers 'vilified and misrepresented Islam and Muslims in their work', 20th century historians and literary analysts 'adopted the post-colonialist discourse in "constructing" the Muslims and have applied it on early English drama and travelogue' (1998:12).

Both Lewis (1994) and Clarke (1985) mention Bede, an Anglo-Saxon monk, who makes a first reference to Muslims in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in eight century (735) while describing 'Saracens' in the battle. Tolan (2002:xx) argues that 'chroniclers such as Bede made little effort to distinguish these Saracens from the other "barbarian" invaders ravaging Europe'. It is claimed that around the same time, Anglo-Saxon King named Offa of Mercia who died in 796, had coins minted with the inscription of the declaration of Islamic faith (*La ilaha illallah* or 'there is no god but Allah') in Arabic. The coin is described by the British Museum as 'one of the most remarkable English coins of the Middle Ages. It is remarkable because it imitates a gold *dinar* of the caliph al-Mansur, ruler of the Islamic ᶜAbbasid dynasty. Although the Arabic inscription is not copied perfectly, it is close enough that it is clear that the original from which it was copied was struck in the Islamic year AH 157 (AD 773-74)'[62].

Bade's references to Saracens were 'in passing' and with a little knowledge of Islam (Lewis, 1994:10) however, Clarke notes that '[U]ntil relatively recent times those following Bede who wrote about Islam, with a few notable exceptions, regarded it as a

---

[61] For more on history of Islam in the UK please see http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/bmh/bmh.htm ; http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/uk_1.shtml Both accessed on 20/08/2013; also Habib, I. (2008). *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677*, Aldershot: Ashgate. ,"Chronological Index of Records of Black People, 1500-1677," pp. 274-368. ; Matar, N. (1999) *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* and other works by Nabil Matar.
[62] http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/cm/g/gold_imitation_dinar_of_offa.aspx Accessed on 12/09/2013

major threat to their culture, institutions and way of life' (1985:3). As Islam was spreading across Christian territories, Bede represented Saracens (Muslims) as the spiritually deviant opponents of Christianity not just Christian states. He therefore created what Gilliat-Ray calls 'polemical "othering" of Muslims' (2010:10) which provided religious grounds that fuelled the Crusades (ibid). The Crusades involved a series of 'holy' battles or military 'expeditions' by Catholic Europe, to regain the control of 'holy' places, Jerusalem being the main focus, from the 'savagery and tyranny of the Muslims' (Riley-Smith, 1987:xxix), they started in 1096 and the last crusade league, named Holy League, took place, significantly, in Balkans the period between 1684 and 1699 with the aim shifting to limiting the spread of Islam in Europe. Many believed that crusading was 'authorised by Christ himself' and communicated by the pope and, as such, were considered as a form of pilgrimage (Gilliat-Ray, 2010:11). What followed was about two hundred years of 'crusading' activity for Europeans 'with some families sending one or two sons off to the wars in every generation' (Ansary, 2009:148). English king Richard I, known as the Lionheart, also took his army in attempt to recapture Jerusalem in the famous Third Crusade. Riley-Smith[63] highlights how Crusades, which lasted for hundreds of years, 'touched the lives of the ancestors of everyone today of Western European decent and of many of Eastern European, Jewish and Muslim decent as well' (2008:1).

Crusaders also left some positive interactions and encounters and trade between Europe and 'Middle World' increased. People in Britain and other places in Europe were able to obtain exotic spices, silk, cotton as the result of intensified trade but there was also a trade of scholastic ideas mainly from the Muslim world to the West.

In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* written in 1386 there are references to Muslims and Muslim philosophers in General Prologue, lines 430-435 describe 'Doctour of Phisyk' who was familiar with '... Razis, and Avicen, Averrois'[64]. The first book ever to have been printed in England by Caxton in 1477 called *'The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers'*, was a translation from French to English that, in turn, came from Latin

---

[63] For more on the history of the Crusades please see Jonathan Riley-Smith's (1987) *The Crusades: A History*; Thomas Asbridge (2012) *The Crusades: The War for the Holy Land*
[64] http://www.librarius.com/cantales.htm Accessed on 12/09/2013

text based on popular 11th century Arabic manuscript, *Mukhtar al-Hikam wa Mahasin al-Kalim* or 'Choice Maxims and Finest Sayings'. In the aftermath of the Crusades and by 1558 when Queen Elizabeth I came to rule, one of the major powers in the world was the Ottoman Empire. By 1588, Elisabeth I proposed an alliance to Ottoman Sultan Murad III for naval assistance against the Spanish Armada; the commercial alliance between two empires continued for further two centuries. In her correspondence with Sultan, Queen stressed that as a Protestant Christian, in her Christianity, she was 'closer to Islam than was Catholicism' (Matar, 1998:123). Also, according to The Royal Society, 'Arabic studies in England had been promoted by Archbishop Laud, who founded an Arabic professorship at Oxford in 1636. English people studied eastern languages for a variety of reasons: to enable merchants to communicate with traders from the Arab world; to read early Biblical texts; and to learn about Arabic literature and culture'[65]. The first recorded Englishman to become a Muslim was John Nelson, who converted to Islam at some point in the 16th century and his name appears in a written source. Matar challenges Bernard Lewis's view that there were only 'few' conversions to Islam during that period and dedicates a whole chapter to conversions or, as he calls it 'Turning Turke' where he talks about reported 'high number of Christians and Britons' who converted to Islam. Furthermore, Spanish word 'renegado' entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 1583, with a meaning 'a convert from Christianity to Islam' (Matar, 1998:22). Matar, with his work titled 'Islam in Britain, 1558-1685' provides invaluable contribution to study of Muslim presence in Britain and his research highlights how, compared to all other countries in Europe, 'Britain enjoyed the most extensive trade with the Muslim Empire in the seventeenth century' (1998:10). Referring to the relationship between Turkish and British Empire, Matar argues that Turkish Empire 'played a significant role in formation of British (and European) history and identity' (1998:14). Moreover, throughout Renaissance and 17th century, 'Islam left its mark on Britain in a way that was unparallel by any other non-Christian civilisation which Britons encountered (p184); from 18th century onwards this relationship transformed into one 'of power and empire' (ibid).

---

[65] http://royalsociety.org/exhibitions/arabick-roots/language-philosophy/ Accessed on 12/09/2013

Indeed, from 18th century onwards, it was British Empire's colonial activity that brought significant number of Muslims to British Isles as seamen, soldiers or students as the first large groups of Muslims arrived in the UK. The start of Muslim communities was mostly around the main British ports and connected with the East India Company[66]. Sailors from the Indian sub-continent, known as *lascars*[67], started to form a community in London but, as noted by Gilliat-Ray, the diversity of Muslim seafarers was considerable, 'Pathans, Punjabis and Mirpuris were recruited in Bombay, while Bengalis, especially from the Syleth region, were recruited in Calcutta (2010:30). Lascars' work was extremely hard and their wages were significantly smaller than those of their British co-workers (ibid). Further immigrants came from the Yemen and Somalia and settled in the port cities of Cardiff, Liverpool, South Shields, Hull, and London. At present, it is estimated that there are 70-80000 Yemenis living in Britain form the longest-established Muslim community in Britain. How did the wider British society respond to the arrival of Muslim (and non-Muslim) seafarers? Sophie Gilliat-Ray explains how it was class tensions as well as religious difference that played part in their public perception:

> They were outsiders, not only because of their origins and visible racial difference, but also because they were regarded as being part of a migratory labouring underclass (2010:31).

Referencing Robinson-Dunn's (2003:2) work, she further states:

---

[66] According to the findings of still ongoing research on lives of lascars, at the University of Southampton: 'By the 18th century, the English East India Company (EIC) had factories and forts across South Asia and held a monopoly on the lucrative maritime trade between Britain and the East. During this period, over 220 EIC ships voyaged from Britain to the East, returning manned by predominantly Asian and African crews.'http://www.southampton.ac.uk/archaeology/research/projects/lascar_lives_and_the_east_india_company.page?#overview Accessed on 10/09/2013

[67] According to J. P. Jones, who wrote in 1931: 'A "*lascar"* has been officially defined as *"an Asiatic seaman, native of the British Empire,'* but the term is also applied to the many seafaring inhabitants of East Africa. Most of these are the Christian inhabitants of Goa, in Portuguese East Africa, who excel as ship's cooks. The word derives from the Persian *"lashkar,"* meaning an army or a camp. In time it came to mean a soldier and in the seventeenth century it was first applied to sailors.' http://www.lascars.co.uk/plafeb1931.html Accessed on 10/09/2013. Also, according to National Maritime Museum: 'The first European use of the word dates back to the Portuguese employment of Asian seamen in the early 1500s.' http://www.rmg.co.uk/explore/sea-and-ships/facts/faqs/people/why-were-indian-sailors-called-lascars Accessed on 10/09/2013

They were "beyond the pale of the true English nation" because their "circumstances and lifestyles resembled those of other English people who seemed to threaten the social order", such as pedlars, criminals and vagrants (ibid).

Most of the lascar sailors married or had relationships with British white women from the poor, dockland areas. Diane Robinson-Dunne's (2003; 2006) uses postcolonial analysis to explore the relationship between Islam and Britain in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, according to her research, lascars were considered to be from the same 'lower' social class and, as that was the time when the status of a woman in the UK was determined by the status of her father or husband, these women were considered to be 'Orientalised' by their sailor husbands (2003:2)[68]. Commenting on complex processes by which identities developed, Robinson-Dunn argues that:

> A definition of Englishness created in relation to Islam that emerged in any given time necessarily developed and was understood in the context of the multiple and even contradictory perspectives…(2006:4)

Wealthy elites, especially from India, also came to Britain in 19th and beginning of 20th centuries, mainly in pursuit of higher education. One such example is Muhammad Ali Jinnah, known as the founder of Pakistan, who came to London and studied law at Lincoln's Inn and became barrister in 1895 at the age of 19; he was the youngest Indian to be 'called to the bar'[69] in England (Ahmed, 1997). According to Ansari (2004), at the end of 19th century there were about 10000 Muslims in Britain. However, as Gilliat-Ray writes, both educational and socio-economic differences 'had a determining influence where Muslims were located on the precarious and porous boundary of inclusion and exclusion in British society' (2010:32).

This was the period when the first Muslim places of worship and organisations were established to meet the needs of the emergent community. For example, in 1860, the existence of a mosque at 2 Glyn Rhondda Street in Cardiff was recorded in the Register

---

[68] Also referenced in Gilliat-Ray (2010).
[69] A legal term meaning 'to be qualified to practice law and argue in court'.

of Religious Sites and in 1886 Anjuman-I-Islam was set up in London which was later renamed the Pan-Islamic Society. This period is also known for the number of converts to Islam amongst the English upper classes, including Edward Montagu, son of the ambassador to Turkey. According to a recent study by Jamie Gilham, titled '*Britain's First Muslim Peer of the Realm: Henry, Lord Stanley of Alderley and Islam in Victorian Britain*', Lord Henry Stanley converted to Islam in 1859 (in other sources 1862) after working and travelling in the East, '[D]espite hardening racial and religious prejudices in mid-to-late-Victorian Britain, voiced forcibly by his own father, Stanley's individuality encouraged and enabled his conversion to Islam' (2013:107). Lord Stanley was the first Muslim member of the House of Lords.

In 1887, William Henry Quilliam, a solicitor, later known as Shaikh Abdullah Quilliam, also converted to Islam and led a small community in Liverpool which in 1889 rented a house, 8 Brougham Terrace, to serve as a prayer hall. The locality later became home of the Liverpool Muslim Institute[70]:

> In 1893 the Institute published a weekly magazine, named 'The Crescent', and later added the monthly 'Islamic World', which was printed on the Institute's own press and distributed to over 20 countries. The Crescent was published every week and was effectively a dairy and record of Islam in Britain and the around the world[71]

Liverpool Muslim Institute, later included a mosque, library, printing press, lecture hall and Medina Home for Children (for orphaned and 'illegitimate' children) (Gilliat-Ray, 2010:40). Part of Quilliam's legacy and the reason why he is described by some as 'the founder of Anglo-Muslim movement' (Murad, 1997[72]), is that he made Islam relevant to a sizeable, indigenous British group of people who subsequently converted to Islam. However, as Gilham points out, this 'community, which totalled some 300 converts over a twenty-year period… experienced hostility to their religious conversion within their own families'; he further says that 'discrimination extended beyond the home',

---

[70] For a detailed study please see Ron Geaves (2010) *Islam in Victorian Britain, The Life and Times of Abdullah Quilliam*, Kube Publishing
[71] http://abdullahquilliam.com/wp/about-abdullah-quilliam Accessed on 12/09/2013
[72] http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/british.htm Accessed on 12/09/2013

describing the following event: 'As they left the Institute, the Muslims were pelted with missiles of bricks, cabbages and offal'(2013[73]).

In 1889, a first purpose built mosque, the Shah Jehan Mosque, was established in Woking and it also had an adjoining student hostel[74]. According to Ansari (2002), 'it became the symbol and centre of Muslim activity in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century' and:

> The mosque acquired symbolic and organisational centrality in the inter-war period for British Islam. Muslim dignitaries from abroad, including Amir Feisal of Saudi Arabia, invariably made a point of attending prayers at the mosque on their visits to Britain. One of the Mission's objectives was to build a viable Muslim community in Britain, in part at least through conversion. It was apparent that in order for Islam to prosper in Britain, it would have to be 'indigenised' as it had been elsewhere; and this would not happen if it continued to be perceived as an 'alien' and 'exotic' religion practised by people who were attributed by the majority population with traits that made them inferior in their eyes. The Muslims connected with the mosque trod delicately. Contentious polemics were carefully avoided. Nothing was said that could possibly offend anybody's religious sensibilities. Common ground was consciously sought. Audiences were encouraged to do their own thinking[75]. (2002:8)

Muslims who were involved with Woking mosque and their objective 'to build a viable Muslim community in Britain' did, in many respects, succeed in achieving this objective given the prejudice and discrimination against Muslims and Islam present in British society at the time. For example, Gilham, mentions how Liberal leader and four-times Prime Minister, William Ewart Gladstone (1809–1898), in his writings 'urged for the expulsion from Europe of the Ottomans, 'the one great anti-human specimen of humanity' (2013:100). Philip Almond's (1989) study of portrayal of Prophet

---

[73] http://www.hurstpublishers.com/islamophobia-in-victorian-britain/ Accessed on 14/09/2013
[74]For a brief history and photos see http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-surrey-13340461 Accessed on 13/09/2013
[75] http://www.plainislam.com/in-depth/muslim-engagement-with-british-society-in-the-20th-century-the-woking-mosque.aspx Accessed on 12/09/2013

Muhammad (p.b.u.h) in nineteenth century England, titled 'Heretic and Hero: Muhammad and Victorians', traces the development of Western knowledge and understanding of Islam and its prophet. Almond mentions that for almost 200 years (from 1697 publication of Prideaux's '*A Life of Mahomet, Directions to Churchwardens*') popular accounts were mainly anti-Muslim where Muhammad was considered to be an Anti-Christ, imposter and heretic. Furthermore, Almond considers Victorian period to be 'a particularly crucial one' because the abundant literature (both scholarly as well as popular) at the time, about Prophet Muhammad and Islam, 'played a significant role in the subtle interplay of "fact" and interpretation which created for the West the various meanings of Islam' (1989:1). However, Almond also emphasises that the perspectives of Islam and Prophet Muhammad changed as the 19th century progressed (hence the title of the book) and, while he draws on work of Edward Said, he points toward plurality of discourses that existed in that period and claims that the discourse 'about Islam is much richer, more diverse and more complex' than demonstrated by Said (Almond, 1989:2).

Ansari states that, 'the climate of opinion in early twentieth-century Britain was, thus, simultaneously sympathetic towards and highly suspicions of Muslims' (2011:86) and this attitude is well illustrated by some of the events during that time. In 1913, Lord Headley (known as Al-Haj El-Farooq) converted to Islam and later became a President of the British Muslim Society (which was connected to Woking mosque). In March 1923, published by *The Times* he wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Duke of Devonshire, to protest against 'abusive language against Islam by a Church of England clergyman in East Africa':

> The indiscretions in question, though at present confined to East Africa, are far reaching and are now known all over the world…You will, I feel sure, agree with me that insulting language and vilification of a sister religion – Muhammadanism and Christianity being identical in the great essentials of duty to God and one's neighbour – are in the last degree undesirable[76]

---

[76] http://www.wokingmuslim.org/thetimes-archive/1923-mar10p12.pdf Accessed on 14/09/2013

In 1917, Marmaduke Pickthall, the son of an Anglican clergyman and distinguished poet and novelist, converted to Islam; he translated the Qur'an and later became imam of the Woking mosque. Abdullah Yusuf Ali also translated the Qur'an and subsequently became best known in the English-speaking Muslim world for this significant translation and commentary.

After years of lobbying by Muslim individuals, including already mentioned Lord Headley (Nielsen, 2004:5), British Government was persuaded to enable building of the mosque in London; this decision was also intended 'as a tribute to the thousands of Indian Muslim soldiers who died defending the British Empire'. According to Tibawi (1981), Prime Minister Winston Churchill at a War Cabinet meeting on 24th October 1940, 'swiftly' authorised allocation of funds for the acquisition of a site for the London mosque. Tibawi further highlights 'quick change of attitude by the British Government from aloof neutrality to enthusiastic endorsement and material support. There is no question that the change was dictated by political considerations connected with British propaganda during the war' (1981:201). It took 38 years for the London Central Mosque, adjacent to London's Regent Park, to be opened to Muslim worshipers in 1978.

As stated previously, this is just a selective and a brief summary of Muslim presence in Britain from 8th to 20th century and, as such, its purpose was to provide context to the main study of Muslim women in the UK. There are many events and scholarly works that have not been mentioned or discussed here as a thorough historical analysis is beyond the scope of my research. However, there are number of important points to take from this summary. First, the interaction between Muslims, Islam and Britain started many centuries ago and it intensified with the spread of Islam and, later, spread of British Empire. The history of interaction prior to WWII, is largely unknown beyond narrow academic circles and scholars who specialize in the field. This gives, generally accepted but factually untrue, impression that Muslims and Islam are something new and completely alien to the British 'Christian Protestant society' and this, in turn, has serious consequences on Muslims and non-Muslims in the UK. As work of the scholars mentioned here demonstrated, Islam's presence in both British discourses and in British cities prior to WWII was very significant as it informed and shaped the way Islam and

Muslims were perceived post WWII and even presently. Secondly, this summary is only a small reflection of diversity of Muslim presence and experience in the UK. Muslims came to Britain for various purposes, from diverse cultures, belonging to different social classes. The experiences of seafarers in poor areas of Cardiff and South Shields would have been quite different to experiences of converts such as Lord Headley or wealthy Muslim students from India such as Jinnah. A development of indigenous British Muslim community in Victorian Liverpool (founded by Quilliam), and to a lesser extent, Surrey (associated with Woking mosque) and London is also noteworthy since roots of Islam in Britain are often only associated with 'outsiders'. This development was also important because, perhaps for the first time, the issues of 'belonging' and 'loyalty' entered a public debate and anti-Muslim/Islamophobic attacks were recorded. As Jahangir Mohammed, director of the Abdullah Quilliam Heritage Centre (quoted in the *Weekly Zaman*) explains (referring to Quilliam):

> [H]e talk[ed] about the stereotypes and misreporting in the media he had to face and the physical attacks on the mosque. His identity and loyalty to Britain was questioned as is today for British Muslims. He was also the first Muslim arrested for suspected terrorism when he was walking down the street with his Irish clients for his legal practice, and then released. So there are many issues which are the same[77].

Furthermore, it seems that the legacy of the Crusades is here to stay and even its use in English language has gained a positive quality: 'to campaign vigorously for something or a vigorous and dedicated action or movement in favour of a cause'[78]. Ansary argues that modern-day Islamist radicals 'trace the roots of modern Muslim rage to that era and those events' (2009:148) and his view is supported by Gilliat-Ray who also maintains that 're-imagining' of the Crusades provided 'fuel and inspiration to the anti-Western jihadists' (2010:67). President of United States of America, George Bush, on September 11th 2001, in response to the tragic event that happened on the same day, stated:

---

[77] http://weeklyzaman.com/en/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=6150&columnistId=0 Accessed on 15/09/2013

[78] http://www.thefreedictionary.com/crusade Accessed on 13/09/2013

This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while…We will rid the world of the evil-doers. We will call together freedom loving people to fight terrorism. And on [sic] this day of - on the Lord's Day, I say to my fellow Americans, thank you for your prayers, thank you for your compassion, thank you for your love for one another.[79]

After this speech a columnist, Alexander Cockburn, coined the term 'The Tenth Crusade' whereby the 'War on Terrorism' is to follow Crusades of the medieval time; he concludes his article with this statement:

War on Terror? It's back to the late thirteenth century, picking up where Prince Edward left off with his ninth crusade after St Louis had died in Tunis with the word Jerusalem on his lips (2002[80]).

Anders Behring Breivik, the man who confessed his attacks in Norway in July 2011 and killed 77 people, mentions both Crusades and Radovan Karadzic in his 'manifesto'. According to an article in *The Economist*, Breivik's manifesto draws on 'the crudest of warmongering Serbian propaganda from the 1990s, the document describes Muslim Albanians and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) as an evil jihad-waging enemy'; referring to Karadzic, Breivik states:

His [Karadzic's] efforts to rid Serbia of Islam he will always be considered and remembered as an honourable Crusader and a European war hero[81].

The presence of the 'Crusade' in everyday language as well as in discourses, demonstrates how historical events can be revived and, if necessary, opportunistically manipulated (into myths) to be used as political mobilising tools. Whether used by leaders of the countries (George Bush), political parties (Slobodan Milosevic, British National Party), groups (Al -Qaida) or individuals (Anders Breivik) certain historical events gain mythical additions and come to assume a central role in historic and

---

[79] http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html Accessed on 13/09/2013
[80] http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/09/07/the-tenth-crusade/ Accessed on 13/09/2013
[81] http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2011/07/norway-killings Accessed on 13/09/2013

psychological consciousness of people. As such, they can have serious, lasting and often tragic consequences.

Immigration from 1950 until 1970s was affected by specific push and pull factors which were of historical, political and economic nature (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). What can be said but is often overlooked is that there was a diversity of experiences, backgrounds and circumstances. The Muslims in Britain are very diverse. The largest number originates from South Asian countries, namely – Pakistan (43%), Bangladesh (16%) and India (10%) – with sizable communities originating in Cyprus, North Africa, Middle East, Malaysia and others. Using data derived from the 2001 Census, *The Guardian* deduced that 'London's Muslim population of 607,083 people is probably the most diverse anywhere in the world, besides Mecca.'[82] Moreover, the BBC report from 2011 states the following:

> Using a number of sources, including a survey of more than 250 British mosques, census data from 2001 and conversion figures in Europe, the researchers estimate that there could be as many as 100,000 converts - of all ethnic backgrounds - in the UK. This represents an increase on an estimated 60,000 converts in 2001 (Nye, 2011).

A report conducted by the University of Essex and published summer 2012 signifies a strong sense of British identity among Muslims. The researchers who worked on the this report, Nandi and Platt, state how it is 'striking that all the Muslim groups, of whatever ethnicity, are particularly likely to identify more strongly as British, with over a point stronger identification on the 11 point scale' (2013). More recently, in the 2011 Census, in England and Wales, Muslims made up the second largest religious group with 2.7 million people, an increase of 1.2 million (from 3% to 5% of the population) and nearly half of Muslims (48%) were aged under 25 (1.3 million), an increase of 505,000 since 2001.[83]

---

[82] http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/jan/21/britishidentity12 Accessed on 30/11/2013
[83] http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/detailed-characteristics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/sty-religion.html Accessed on 30/11/2013

Therefore considering the history and settlement as well as the current trends, it can be said that neither Islam nor Muslims are foreign to Britain. Even during the Victorian times, Muslim communities, although much smaller in size, existed and were active on British soil. As pointed out by Gilliat-Ray, there are research projects in the UK cities which seek to 'document and celebrate the history of their Muslim communities' (2010:52). These projects are just one of the ways of providing the opportunity for Muslims to connect to their historical roots and achievements and, in the same time, nurture the strong sense of belonging to the UK beyond media stereotypes.

Chapter Two

Methodology

'what is at issue is the need to attend to what people say, and to heed the intent they are trying to convey, rather than groping for some `larger´ answers in the particulars of their spoken words' (Wikan, 1992:466)

In this chapter, by following the chronological story of the research, I reflect on some of the complexities that emerged during the different phases of my fieldwork. This study is cross-cultural and it took place in two different countries and two different languages – English and Bosnian – and, sometimes, mixture of both. I elucidate the research process in both settings and consider the interplay of different factors that influenced the research process. I also discuss the ethical issues that were relevant throughout this research.

Ontological and Epistemological Positions

When I first started to think about researching for this thesis I considered both my relationship to the research topic as well as my relationship to the research participants. The questions I was asking in relation to these 'relationships' were: Why does this research matter to me? Why am I the right person for this research? How can I contribute and will this contribution add any value to the wider research field? Motivated by feminist research which portrays Muslim women as active agents in choosing and negotiating their identity (Khan, 2000; Afshar, Aitken and Franks, 2005 *et allia,* Cesari and McLoughlin, 2005; Begum, 2008), my study focuses on Muslim women's identity transformations by taking into account *their* lived experiences. Since 9/11 there has been a noticeable shift in the way Muslim women are represented in the media. While the presence of the negative stereotypes of Muslim women as generally oppressed and passive is still prevalent in the daily tabloid press, some British newspapers such as the *Times*, the *Guardian* and the *Independent* have published

articles in which Muslim women expressed their own views of what it means to be a Muslim in the UK. Through these women's words and views negative stereotypes are debunked. For example, in an article titled 'Young. British. Female. Muslim' published in *The Sunday Times*, one woman who converted to Islam says (talking about her experience of meeting Muslim women):

> But when I walked in, none of them fitted the stereotype of the oppressed Muslim housewife; they were all doctors, teachers and psychiatrists. I was struck by how content and secure they seemed. It was meeting these women, more than any of the books I read, that convinced me that I wanted to become a Muslim.[84] (Harris, 2010)

I wanted to investigate the role of faith not only as a personal identification but also as a means by which Muslim women construct an alternative gender identity as suggested by Dwyer (2000) and McDonald (2005). Having familiarised myself with recent research on Muslim women in Bosnia (Helms 2003a; Helms 2003b; Ibrahimpasic 2008) and the UK (Dwyer, 2000; Afshar, Aitken and Franks, 2005; McDonald, 2005; Ameli and Merali, 2006; Begum, 2008) I wanted to focus on women's lived experiences in a comparative way, which has not been done before by exploring two communities of Muslim women based in different parts of Europe: an indigenous Muslim community in Bosnia and a 2nd generation diasporic Muslim community[85] in the UK.

Since the concepts of *identity* and *experience* are at the core of this research, the starting point in choosing the appropriate methodology were ontological questions such as 'what is *self* and how is it constructed?', 'how does identity figure in the experience of social reality?' This research uses Muslim women's reported experiences as valid source of knowledge (evidence) about their social reality. Therefore, I subscribe to the feminist epistemology which sees *self* as 'the seat of experience' (Stanley and Wise, 1993). The basis for this research is feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1994)

---

[84] http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article2522634.ece Accessed 06/06/2010.
[85] Avtar Brah's definitions of diaspora in *Cartographies of diaspora* (1996).

arguing for the situatedness of knowledge production. In this context, knowing is partial, relative and depends on locality, history, race, nationality, religion and class. Sprague refers to Harding when commenting on partiality of knowledge:

> Researchers should seek to understand how each interpretation of experience is shaped and constrained by the interplay of the specific location, material interests, access to interpretative frameworks, and ways of organising the work of producing knowledge (2005:77-78).

If I take Haraway's view that knowledge is always produced within specific contexts and therefore it is situated in particular set of circumstances, then the situadness of knowledge means that knowledge is also based on the position of the researcher whereby this position needs to be accounted for through the research process (1991). The main reason for choosing a feminist methodology for this research was its concern over knowledge production where knowledge is connected to the social position of the researcher (Ramazanoglu and Holland , 2002).

The way I am positioned – my gender, religion, class, colour, locality, nationality - all influence my 'knowing' and, therefore, they also influence all aspects of methodology (Mullings 1999). My positionality affects my choice of research topic (e.g. as I am a Muslim female, I have an interest in researching Muslim females), my motivation for choosing the topic, the methods of conducting the research and the 'knowledge' that I intend to produce (Hartstock,1997; Haraway,1991; Harding,1991).

The concept of the researcher's positionality is central to the feminist methodology used in this research as it affects the 'whats', 'whys' and 'hows' of the research process and hence deals both with power relations and with basic methodological issues. In order to discuss my positionality in this research, I address my own identity and 'reflex' on *self* in the next section. My aim is not to 'navel gaze' but to identify and locate myself for the purpose of producing ethically sensitive research (Abu-Lughod, 1988; Falconer Al-Hindi and Kawabata, 2002).

My Positionality as Researcher and Being an Insider/Outsider

When I first started to think about suitable research participants, I considered my relationship to the research topic as well as how the myriad facets of my identity (Bosnian born, Muslim, female, British, feminist researcher, white, middle-class, single mother) would influence the participants and the research process. As already indicated, the positionality and reflexivity of the researcher affects the research process as well as the relationship between the researcher and the participants in the research (Mullings, 1999; Sultana, 2007). This section is structured so that it first gives a section of my biography, followed by discussion on why/how that particular part of my biography influenced the research participants and the research process. It follows from my experience of talking to Bosnian Muslim women who took part in the pilot fieldwork: I arrived at the meetings ready to listen to them and, while I anticipated that I would need to give a brief introduction to myself and my research, I did not expect that I would need to tell 'my life story'. The conversation turned towards me soon after our introduction. At the start, I felt slightly uneasy but after some consideration I decided that it was only fair to expose my life and feel vulnerable if I expected them to do the same in their future interviews. In this way, we built a rapport based on mutual trust and sharing of experiences from our lives.

Another reason for choosing this approach originates from my own dilemmas regarding the insider/outsider debate and a mock interview that a Muslim friend conducted with me. Although she did not transcribe the interview my responses were very similar both to the ones mentioned here and the ones I gave to the women in Bosnia. By using this strategy, I not only exposed my perceptions to the research participants but also to everybody else reading this thesis. In doing so, I seek to 'disrupt the traditional hierarchy' between the researcher and the researched by 'levelling the field' and considering my own life parallel to those I wish to research (Falconer Al-Hindi and Kawabata, 2002).

I was born in Bosnia and lived there until 1992. In August 1992, I came to the UK as a teenager with my mother and younger brother. Our intention was to stay in the UK for two weeks to improve our spoken English. Although the war in Bosnia had started and

we came from the war zone, we were quite naïve and unaware of that fact. At the time, we did not understand the seriousness and reality of the situation, sincerely believing that all would be over very soon and we would return to our normal lives in Bosnia. However, the situation in Bosnia escalated and we were not able to return. We became refugees, later asylum seekers and after 10 years British citizens.

One of the most prominent issues, from the beginning of the war in Bosnia (April 1992) until the end (1995), was 'who left [Bosnia] and who remained there'. The men who left Bosnia were considered traitors while the ones who stayed were heroes. Numerous patriotic songs were composed during the war addressing this topic. The lyrics of these songs echo the general public stance towards all of those who left by using generic term and addressing *all* those who left regardless of their age or gender. 'We rather stay here and die than abandon our country when it needs us most'[86] – was sung by one of the most popular Bosnian female singer, Hanka Paldum. While in the UK, aware of the situation in Bosnia, I felt, that in some way, I was also a traitor and this 'stigma' never really left me. I found that during my visits to Bosnia (after the war), in initial conversations with friends who stayed there, I always needed to justify my/my mother's decision to leave my country. Thus, the issue of 'leaving Bosnia' was a source of tension between me and my research participants. At times I could not help but feel as 'the one who got away', gained her education in West and now wants to research ones who were loyal/not privileged enough to leave their country at the time of need. However, I managed to 'explain' myself by emphasising the elements that provided common positional spaces. For example, if asked, I emphasized that I was a minor and that I had to follow my parent's decisions. I would mention that my father stayed in Bosnia throughout the war, difficulties of living apart from home, adjusting to the foreign environment. I hoped that this can inform them that leaving Bosnia and living in the UK was not as easy as they might have initially thought.

Another reason why we could not return to Bosnia was my ethnically 'mixed' background. My mother is Bosnian Serb while my father is of Bosnian Muslim heritage.

---

[86] My translation from Bosnian.

'Mixed marriages' (*mjesani brakovi*) were common[87] in the bigger cities of socialist Bosnia especially among Communist Party members (my parents were members) who had to uphold atheist/anti religious views. At the start of the war, when the question of ethnicity became core to the nationalist projects, mixed marriages became highly 'problematic' (Perišić, 2012). As the conflict between the three ethnic groups deepened so did the negative perception of such marriages. Individuals who were in mixed marriages were blamed for choosing inappropriate marriage partner and also for 'letting down their nation/ethnic[88] group' by 'contaminating their blood-line'. As with all nationalist projects, soon this argument turned exclusively towards the women of such marriages since they were considered to be 'mothers of the nation'. The children of mixed marriages where seen as 'lost' in ethnically charged war as they did not 'belong' to either side of the ethnic conflict. As a result, they were more susceptible to the abuse, discrimination and violence. Therefore, while residing in the UK, I became aware of my certain 'other' in Bosnia where my 'mixed' background became a contested issue affecting my (and my mother's) security and, consequently, possibility of return to Bosnia. Even though my name – Sanja – is a very popular Bosnian female name, it is not a typical Muslim name. It is more common that Bosnians of Serb, Croat or 'mixed' ethnical background use this name. My (then) married surname – Kurd – sounded completely foreign. This proved problematic when I tried to establish my initial links with Muslim Bosnian women via email, from UK. I found that, even though I would receive a polite response, they were not interested in my research. In my emails, I used Muslim greetings (Asalaamu Alaykum) and, by doing so, I was identifying myself as a Muslim. However, it did not seem to have any effect and I was quite puzzled as to why. Living in the UK, as a Muslim, for a number of years made me 'de-sensitised' to the fact that for Bosnians who cannot see me in person I was still a 'mixed-marriage child' as my name was their only indicator of my identity. I made second attempt to reach

---

[87]According to statistics found in national papers (*Oslobodjenje*, www.oslobodjenje.ba), in Sarajevo before the war there were about 120000 such marriages. The original newspaper article is not available online any longer. This is the only source where I was able to find an approximate figure http://mams.rmit.edu.au/pjocwu3685ds.pdf Accessed on 18/08/2013

[88] Terms nationality/ethnicity are often used interchangeably in Bosnia.

them, this time through my cousin and my father in Bosnia. After being briefly introduced, I was told that women's response was positive and I was given their phone numbers. Only few minutes into our conversation they would enquire about my background and I felt like I was the one being interviewed. One of the first questions was in regards to my name and ethnic background. They all initially thought that I am a Serb or Croat in UK and that I want to 'research [Muslims]' and they did not feel comfortable with that. Only after being reassured about my Muslim identity by the persons living in Bosnia who are Muslims themselves (my father and my cousin) they felt they could trust me. I believe that the trust between us has deepened as I had opportunity to meet some of the key informants prior to the start of the fieldwork. This gave us an opportunity to talk about our lives and also about the purpose of my research.

To most of the participants based in Bosnia, fact that I had the means (financial and other) of leaving Bosnia and travelling to London, signifies the 'privileged' background. Great majority of women and children who left Bosnia during the same period or soon after could do so only as a part of organised convoy. Later on, there were many families who wanted their children to escape to safety but they could not afford it. It is very possible that my research participants/their families could have had same aspirations and disappointments.

Change of locality and status had bearing on my sense of identity. I found myself in the constant process of negotiation between what I was and what I have become. Women (and men) who were in Bosnia also experienced the change – from peace to war. They lives were shattered by fear, death, destruction, lack of food and water. Their experiences and suffering were much worse than mine. Their identities were affected in different way and with different outcomes. Women who participated in this research did at times feel distant to me as a researcher because I did not experience the war as they did. On my visits to Bosnia, even my own family members often say to me: 'Oh you would not know, you were not here – it was really hard' (when describing an event from the war). One of the women said: 'You cannot imagine what it was like having an exam in the underground cellar…or running across the road [to avoid sniper fire] to get to the mosque'.

The locality – central London, provided me with experience of living and meeting people who were from different background and cultures. This surrounding also provided a 'neutral space' where I felt free to explore different ways of living/believing as I did not feel inhibited by family or community views and judgments. The participants of this research have never lived outside Bosnia. Their experience of 'otherising' is related to their ethnicity and their responses to this experience will be different to my. Their knowledge of other cultures is limited by what they learn or see in the media. Moreover, their ability to explore and challenge their inherited identity (whatever that might be) is limited by social constraints of family and community. Two of the research participants found it very strange how I 'choose' my identity. By choosing to be a Muslim, I felt sense of belonging regardless of my parent's 'mixed marriage' heritage and regardless of how people from Bosnia perceive me. All of the participants in this research were from the Muslim background with their immediate family members being Muslim. They have been exposed to at least some 'Islamic' practices (even in socialist Yugoslavia) from the early childhood unlike me, who they considered see as a novice. On one occasion, when I used some Arabic words, the Bosnian woman I was speaking to was shocked asking: 'You know what that [word] means?' Similarly, in the UK, 'choices' are not as easily available and usually need to be negotiated (Brown, 2006) against cultural, family and community norms.

Living in the UK for 15 years (almost half of my life), means that I have consciously or unconsciously adopted some of the cultural and behavioural practices specific to this country. The most obvious is my knowledge of English language. After realisation that the return to Bosnia was not possible because of the war (a month after our arrival to the UK), I made a determined decision to learn English well this knowledge proved very useful in establishing my education, employment and social links in the UK. My Britishness is evident in certain traits of my behaviour that made me different from the Bosnian research participants. My choice of method for the initial contact is a good example. Used to the life and practices of social interaction in the UK, I believed that by sending an email would be enough for the women to respond. What I learned or, rather, what I was reminded about was that the best way to establish an initial contact in Bosnia

was through recommendation or introduction rather than via email as it is commonly done in the UK.

Other examples come from my visits to Bosnia. Over-use of 'please' and 'thank you', my concept of time-keeping, my inability to drink numerous cups of strong Bosnian coffee (which customarily accompanies long conversations/meetings) are just a few among many other different aspects of my behaviour that were perceived as 'British'. Even though they might seem insignificant to an 'outsider', in Bosnian culture, people are very sensitive to the details or gestures that a person displays/or not; therefore I was careful not to alienate myself to a degree where they would consider me a stranger or another 'western researcher'. The Bosnian participants sometimes also questioned why I did not return to Bosnia after the war and about my loyalties to my 'native' country/motherland. I was often asked whether I intended to return. This question carried a multitude of meanings and, my negative reply would have been perceived as a rejection of Bosnian culture and people. As a consequence, I carefully negotiated the answer and usually turned it into a joke.

It is argued that only by being an 'insider' in a particular group one can produce a 'better' knowledge of that group (Collins, 1986) as there is commonality of understanding of certain 'shared' experiences. So, for example, women should research women, researchers should be from the same racial group as the research participants and so on. However, this theory has become subject to criticism (Sprague, 2005; Valentine, 2002; Bridges, 2001) which points out that even with the more 'obvious' identity markers such as race, religion and class it is sometimes difficult to decide who is an insider and who is outsider. For example, Razavi (1992) states that just by being a researcher (as in the incident mentioned above) one might be considered an outsider by one's own community. This is where the whole concept of the insider/outsider debate and researcher's position (in relation to the research participants) becomes very interesting. To illustrate, I paraphrase part of my conversation with a director of a NGO in Bosnia: I was asked about my research, and when I said that it concerned Muslim women and their identity she expressed some concern. I asked about her concern and she commented that she had lost trust in researches from the West who come to talk to

Muslim women and then misinterpret their views (words). She questioned their (Western researchers') ability to understand 'life in Bosnia'. She then positively encouraged me to continue with my research since, as she said, 'you are the only Bosnian who came to talk to us'.

For the greater part I agree with the view expressed by the director of the NGO in Bosnia that, for some reason or other, Western scholarship has missed on the opportunity to analyse Bosnian Muslim women as a producers of their of their own narratives beyond the victim of war image. Director's reaction and her final encouraging remarks to me as a native female researcher indicated sense of trust that just by the token of being a Bosnian Muslim I would not betray her/community trust. Muslim women in Bosnia as well as in the UK need to grapple with negative stereotypes in their daily lives and it is likely that some information that might contribute to the reinforcement of these stereotypes would not be revealed to the outsider. This suggests another advantage as a Muslim woman researcher and as an insider.

I found that, during my research process, there were times when I felt like an insider - I was able to recognise certain patterns of behaviour without needing an explanation from my research participants. For example, I knew that it is good manners and sign of respect to be silent during a call to prayer, which often happened while the interviews/focus groups were still running. The conversation would cease for the duration of the prayer. Sometimes we even went to the nearby mosque to join the congregational prayer. However, there were times when I felt like a complete outsider and needed to strategically negotiate my 'differences' in order to preserve both a good relationship and the 'flow' of the interviews/focus groups. One instance of this happening was during the pilot fieldwork. I was at Kewser offices and at towards the end of the meeting the lunch arrived and I was invited to attend. I felt like I just had to accept even though I really did not feel hungry and I was running late for my other appointments. I think my somewhat negative facial expression prompted Sadika's (Kewser's director) to comment: 'come on, have lunch with us and you can ask us more questions while we are eating'. If I refused (even politely), it would have seemed that I did not want to ask them anything more and they willingness to participate was taken for

78

granted. It would have also alienated me further as somebody who has forgotten/rejected their 'native' cultural traditions. The situations such as these made me aware of the importance of being flexible and able to adapt to different situations and unexpected situations (Mohanraj, 2010:90). Therefore, rather than having a fixed binary position of being either insider or outsider, the researcher's position shifts from one to another and back throughout the process of research. In this context, the research process is considered to be a 'performance' relationship where both researcher and the research participants negotiate and produce their 'difference' or 'seamness' (Valentine, 2002).

It also made me aware of my own multiple subjectivities and re-examine my own identity both within the research process and generally. I experienced shifts and transformations of my identity, sense of national belonging and spirituality. On one occasion, during our informal chat with her mother, my friend's (who was also one of the research participant) daughter commented: 'No she [referring to me] is not a Bosnian, she is an English lady who knows how to speak Bosnian very well.' This comment made a big impact on me. Although said by an 8- year old child, it resonated with , in a most frank manner, some of the more subtle comments made by few research participants and others while I was in Bosnia. Even though *I* thought I dressed and behaved in a similar manner to other Bosnian Muslim women of a similar age there was something about me that made people think, even before I spoke, that I was not from *there,* to them, my *outsiderness* was obvious from the first moments of seeing me. The 'boundary blurring' between insider and outsider position is indicative of the notion discussed by Bev Mullings who says that connections and differences we have with our research participants are about 'wider biographical moments' (Valentine, 2002) rather than social categories such as ethnicity, gender, race and, in my case, religion. Moreover, this also supports the view that attributing particular connections based only on physical appearance is a form of essentialism (Kobayashi, 1994) where the diversities of experiences within the particular community are unnoticed (Valentine, 2002). By doing fieldwork and thinking about women's responses to their identity, I started to think about my own identity like never before. Consequently, from the start of the research process the dilemmas I faced as a 'native'/insider researcher were both personal and intellectual and not at all unproblematic as it may seem at first glance

(Narayan, 1993; Buckle, Dwyer & Jackson, 2010; Mohanraj, 2010). I found that in practice it is not always easy to hand over the power to the research participants or, indeed, maintain equilibrium of power between the researcher and the participants. This is especially prominent if there are limiting factors of time and locality and at certain points of fieldwork I felt that I needed to have more power in order to achieve the goals of my research in the limited time that I had. This problematises the notion that the researcher always has power over the research participants. Rather, the power shifts towards and away from the researcher depending on the circumstances and the stages of the research process. Complexities and influences of belonging to two different cultures were most apparent in the use of language. Next section discusses some concerns related to the language in my research.

Language and Politics

Speaking/or not the same language as the participants in the research can influence whole of the research process. I am a bilingual researcher and this certainly had its benefits in cross-cultural (Bosnia and UK) research but that did not mean that problems were non-existent. I speak and write in both Bosnian and English. My first language is Bosnian, connected to the first half of my life, my childhood in Bosnia. My second language is English, although I do not consider it to be 'second', I connect it to my adulthood – it is a 'first' language of my adulthood. When I arrived in the UK my first language was still officially called Serbo-Croatian. It was a language that included two distinct scripts – Latin and Cyrillic and numerous dialects of which only two (or sometimes three) were commonly thought. Growing up in Bosnia meant that I had to learn Serbo-Croatian with both scripts and also have knowledge of all the dialects. It also meant that, as a child of educated urban parents, from mixed ethnic background, I did not use words like '*babo*' but instead more official words like '*tata*' (for farther). At an early age, when I once 'accidentally' used '*amizda*' [amija] for my uncle (as I normally called him in family surrounding) I was laughed at by my peers. Since that incident, I never used that word or other words that indicated my connection with the Muslim ethnic background in Bosnia.

Living in the UK, for the past 15 years, means that my understanding of Bosnian language and its uses is still burdened with the experiences from former Yugoslavia and remains of 'old' Serbo-Croatian which I now call Bosnian. My language has not 'evolved' to eliminate or include certain words in order to make it more authentic. For example, I still use '*tata*' for father and '*ka[f]a*' for coffee instead of '*ka[hv]a*'. Although aware of the changes, my locality and use of English language in everyday life means that I did not need to 'evolve' or adapt my use of Bosnian language. In Bosnia, the knowledge of language, in terms of correct grammar, structure and the words used, is connected to the level of individual's education. In the UK, on the other hand, language is mostly related to the class such as 'posh'/'common' or geographical region 'northerner'/'Londoner'. In both countries, however, language is one of the initial factors that people use to identify each other or to ascribe a particular identity. Moreover, the meanings of a language can change with time, place, politics and outside influences (like globalisation).

Bosnian Language

Any discussion of Bosnian language involves reflecting on historical and political context. Here I highlight only some issues that are relevant to myself as the researcher in relation to my research participants in Bosnia. Just before break-down of former Yugoslavia, respective republics, including Bosnia, used the language as one of the main tools to 'wake-up' the nationalist sentiments of the people. As the republics gained their independence, language became very important building-block of their newly formed nations. Language was used as a unifying factor *for* people of the same nationality and, more importantly, as differentiating factor *from* the people of other nationalities. Language discourse became a real nationalist project as the republics (now new nations) argued whose language is the most authentic. At times, the efforts to make three distinctive languages have reached humorous levels.

Even after relentless efforts Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian are still considered to be examples of *ausbauspraches* or 'languages by development' (Kloss, 1967) – they have

minimal variations and this 'variety' is taken to be an independent language rather than a dialect.

For the newly independent Bosnia the issue of language was more complicated than for Croatia and Serbia as the previous official language (Serbo-Croatian) already included two versions i.e. Serbian and Croat. Serbo-Croatian 'hybrid' was only used in Bosnia and even the name did not sound inclusive of Bosnia and most of Bosnian Muslims felt that it negated their input towards language and culture. Yet after the break-up of Yugoslavia Bosnians became only inheritors of Serbo-Croatian.

I found myself in Bosnia at the start of the public discussions over what makes a Bosnian language and what differentiates it from the Serbo-Croat, Serbian or Croat.

I received the first book on Bosnian grammar and a dictionary while in the UK in 1994. The script was only in Latin and I noticed the words previously excluded or considered as sign of 'backwardness' in the official Serbo-Croat language. These words were considered specific to the Muslim population of Bosnia although they were sometimes used by other two nationalities (Serbs and Croats) in Bosnia. For example, while I was living in Bosnia words like '*mashallah*' were used by all three nationalities especially when talking about babies, younger children or generally something/somebody that was regarded as 'beautiful' in order to ward off evil eye or jealousy. At that time *mashallah* (for most part) was not associated with its proper meaning in Arabic indicating appreciation of God (Mash Allah - what God (Allah) wishes) and, I would argue, that great majority of people did not even know its religious roots or indeed connection with Arabic. Words like '*babo*' (father) or '*amidza*' (uncle - father's brother), used only by Muslims before independence, were also included in new, official Bosnian dictionary. Therefore, Bosnian language (post war) included and recognised the words of Arabic/Turkish roots frequently used in Bosnia by all three ethnic groups as well as words specific to Muslims in Bosnia. As a result of that, Bosnian Muslims (*Boshnyaks*) who previously felt inhibited to use words like *babo* in public, started to use them openly and more frequently. Some people abandoned the words they used before almost overnight and changed them for new 'more authentic', Bosnian words. This sudden change was important public display of their ethnicity and religion, something that they felt was suppressed for many years.

While being aware of the issues and complexities surrounding present day Bosnian language I observed this development and all the subsequent developments from the UK. I remained 'outside' socially situated motivations that contributed to the new meanings of language for the Bosnians living *in* Bosnia.

This was problematic for my research as my research participants were situated in Bosnia and for them, as for other Muslims in Bosnia, language is important part of their identity as *Boshnyaks*. To illustrate, at the end of my meeting with a director of well-known Bosnian Muslim women's organisation, I needed to call my father, and I called him '*tata*' – the reaction of the director was tacit but obvious, it seemed like she really did not expect me to use, what they (Muslims in Bosnia) consider, Serbian or Croatian words. My inability to use and incorporate typically Bosnian Muslim words in natural conversation, challenged me to 'strategise' as a native/indigenous researcher, leaving me with following questions: Should I discuss why I do not use those words? Should I use other words to 'buff out' the gap? How do I find a way of explaining and communicating that my lack of utilisation of these words is simply due to living away not because my somehow 'divided' ethnic loyalties (because of my mixed background)?

English – my 'Second Language'

Living and studying in Britain for the past 15 years has meant that my knowledge of academic/official Bosnian has been relatively static while the knowledge of English has developed and been influenced mainly by the process of education in the UK.

I fully identify with experiences of Nicole Ward Jouve (1991) when she describes her efforts to learn English: 'I felt for a long time very much like a parrot. I was so aware of my efforts to adapt to the world of academic learning by imitation of mannerisms and formulas.'

It is exactly this use of academic mannerisms which resulted in my English (although fluent) having a strong 'middle class' overtone. For most of the UK participants of this research English is either their first language or used from early childhood parallel to the mother-tongue spoken at home with family. Most of the UK research participants had

the regional accents of English depending of their location. Although I am familiar with different accents of English I was always careful not to miss some of the cultural references having not spent childhood in this country.

But on the whole, considering politics of language in Bosnia, challenges with English language were not as problematic.

Research Participants and Methods

Throughout this research, committed to the feminist principles, I wanted to minimise the power differences between myself as a researcher and the women who took part in this research (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992; Harding, 1991; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Oakley 1981). I wanted to treat the research participants as the active agents in this research. I considered them to be the experts and authorities of their experiences (Oakley, 1981; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1994; Moss, 2002). Hence my choice of terminology - research participants - is very intentional.

In this section I discuss my two different research settings – the UK and Bosnia – and the way I conducted my research in both countries and the choices I made.

In Bosnia

Since my MA dissertation on Bosnian Muslim women's identity involved interviewing a group of Bosnian Muslim women I already had a good base for establishing further contacts. I had remained in touch with these women and built a good rapport with the directors of both Nahla and Kewser as well as with some women who were using their respective services or were directly involved in running the organisations. Both organizations are based in Bosnian capital Sarajevo where the research took place. Bosnia (full name of the country is Bosnia and Herzegovina, but since research was based in Sarajevo which is in Bosnia, I use shortened name -'Bosnia') is divided into two political entities - Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska - according to Dayton peace agreement of 1995[89]. Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

---

[89] http://www.state.gov/www/regions/eur/bosnia/bosagree.html Accessed on July 4th 2011.

is mostly inhabited by Bosnjaks[90] and Croats, while Republika Srpska is almost exclusively inhabited by Serbs. Two entities are further divided into cantons and municipalities and Sarajevo is one of the cantons (canton IX), as shown on Figure 1.

Figure 1. Cantonal Map of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Darker shaded areas belong to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's population is approximately 4.6 million and the capital Sarajevo has a population of 0.4 million being the highest populated city in Bosnia and Herzegovina[91].

From early on, I was aware that the best method of setting up the initial communication was via the phone. I started by contacting them from the UK. From previous experience I knew that contact via the phone was much more productive than writing emails and ensured a positive response. Since the women I contacted via the phone were already familiar with my background it was not difficult to explain what I was planning to do. Being a Muslim woman who spoke the same language helped in gaining their trust. They had mentioned to me previous researchers who visited them and commented that people were generally interested in their work and origins since they are both quite popular[92] Muslim women organisations in post-war Bosnia. Although they did not say

---

[90] 'Bosniak has replaced Muslim as an ethnic term in part to avoid confusion with the religious term Muslim - an adherent of Islam' https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bk.html Accessed on July 4th 2011.

[91] https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bk.html Accessed on July 4th 2011.

[92] Please see Chapter Five for the details.

anything overly negative, I had the sense of unease of being 'a popular research subject', as one of the directors put it during our conversation. They mentioned a couple of 'foreign' lady researchers and left me with the impression that they did not feel that the research was 'useful' as far as they were concerned. Both directors expressed a deep interest in my research and a willingness to participate, stating the need for more Muslim women writing about and talking to Muslim women. While their positive response was very encouraging it also left me with a sense of responsibility. It was almost as if I was told: 'Yes, we love the idea and we are happy to participate, but you better make it relevant and useful for us and for other Muslim women'. Although, this for me as a feminist researcher was already a goal, it made me think very carefully about which methods to employ to achieve my goal.

While still in the UK I reflected on my knowledge of Bosnian culture and my experiences of dealing with Bosnian Muslim women (professional and personal). My background and regular, yearly visits to Bosnia gave me some indication what to expect but I decided to undertake pilot fieldwork in order to ground my research and also to experience directly how Muslim women relate to each other within the organisations and outside, in their everyday lives. I wanted to make my interaction with research participants during interviews and focus groups to be less formal and more similar to the interaction that takes place during the regular conversations between friends - talking and sharing ideas that happen between university-educated Muslim women who live in Sarajevo. I wanted to build on the existing successful relationships and tried my best to do all that I could not to jeopardise them and that was one of the main reason why I decided not to have consent forms. By using forms the nature of interviews would be more official and that would have influenced the rapport I had with research participants. I also talked to number of friends and family in Bosnia about this and they all pointed out that in Bosnia signing/filling in forms is connected to very 'serious', official spheres of life and that by mentioning any sort of 'signing of form' would lead to a certain distance and even suspicion on behalf of research participants. Another reason for not using forms was a method of finding research participants. My research focuses on very specific group of Muslim women in Sarajevo, Bosnia and I made contact with them was by method of snowballing - through the key informants (directors

and staff of Nahla and Kewser) and personal contacts. Therefore, although everyone involved knew I was conducting a research, I felt that our relationship often went beyond the 'professional' - researcher - research participant. From the first meeting we seemed to get on really well and shared some personal information about our respective family lives and life experiences.

However, informed consent was obtained orally from all research participants. This was done at two separate intervals: prior to meeting for an interview, while arranging the interview setting and details as well as just before the start of the actual interview. In first instance, usually during the phone conversation, I would described the nature and purpose of the research, the way interview would be conducted and how the information would be used once it was digitally recorded. I pointed out to each research participant that they can refuse to take part or withdraw from an interview at any time should they wish to do so also anonymity and confidentiality was to be maintained and, except when specifically agreed, pseudonyms would be used instead of real names. The same information was repeated on both occasions because I wanted to make sure that research participants felt comfortable and at ease with the whole process.

While I have had a general idea of my research question(s) conducting a pilot fieldwork in May 2008 helped me to frame and qualify these (Jorgensen, 1989: 29). I conducted 4 focus group discussions. Because of my concern for obtaining the contextualised information (Gluck and Patai, 1991) from the research participants and also reducing the power of the researcher in the research process, I decided that the focus group method would provide the spaces for individuals and the group to construct their own meanings out of individual and shared experiences through their own narratives. Focus groups method is efficient: 'in the sense that they generate large quantities of material from relatively large numbers of people in relatively short time' (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005:903). Another benefit of using the focus groups is that the information obtained is representative or microcosm of the real social interactions, where the complex relations between the individuals occur. Positioning, invocations of memories (that could possibly be beyond individual memory), certain practices, questions, opinions etc all take place in the dynamic of the group.

Some of the research participants did not understand the method of focus group. They did not see it as credible and 'accurate' way of collecting information. One of them asked about my sample size and if I will conduct any standardised surveys (she understood this to be the only way to obtain primary data), her final comment was: 'oh, I really do not understand your Western research methodology'.

Two focus groups were organisational - one in Nahla and one in Kewser, while the other two were with the 'users' or 'members' of the organisations, outside the organisational setting. I decided to take this approach in order to see how is the identity negotiated within the organizations themselves, how do women who are directly involved in running of the organizations understand Muslim identity and what methods they use to transfer information (related to identity) to their members, public and media. By organizing focus groups consisting of just members/users of NGOs, I wanted to explore to what extent information or activities produced by the NGOs effect and shape their sense of Muslim identity.

The 18 women who took part in my pilot fieldwork were aged 23-35 (except for the 3 - who were between 35-40 years old), living in the capital city of Bosnia, Sarajevo. They are all university educated and members/regular users of the two Muslim women's educational centres. By looking at the ways in which Nahla and Kewser operate, I investigated the connection between organisations and women members/users and the role they have on individual and collective sense of Muslim/Islamic identity. I also held three individual interviews. One was with a prominent male scholar (who worked on the Bosnian Muslim women identity) and another with the two Muslim female academics working at the same institution (Faculty of Islamic Sciences). The third interview was with very popular imam Sulejman (Suleyman) Bugari. After considering and analysing the information that emerged from the pilot, I further sharpened the focus of my research. I wanted to find out what is the meaning of Islam for women and the processes through which they construct and narrate their identities and how did the specific incidents of violence - war in Bosnia and 7/7 (and 9/11) in UK - influenced the reformulation and reshaping of the Muslim women's identity.

The key research questions that emerged were:

1. How do Muslim women in the UK and Bosnia think about their identity?
2. How has their identity changed since the war ended?
3. What were the main or 'breaking' moments that influenced the change?
4. How did the organisations influence the women's Islamic identity?

The aim of the pilot fieldwork was to gain insight into the most prominent issues that women themselves find important in their identity formation/transformation by using the methods that are culturally insightful and acceptable. The focus was on the experiences and the world as seen by the Muslim women, from their standpoint, including their experiences that were not considered before or were left out by the previous researches (Kirby and McKenna, 1989).

'The selection of the method is a critical aspect of researching and is usually based on what kind of information is sought, from whom and under what circumstances' (Kirby and McKenna, 1989: 63). Therefore, the information and experiences of conducting a pilot fieldwork helped me in deciding on the following: method – in-depth interviews, who to interview (and how to reach/contact them), and where to conduct the interviews.

My aim was to hear from women themselves about their experiences of being a Muslim both in the UK and in Bosnia. As pointed out in the introduction, the research on Bosnian Muslim women prior to 1992-1995 war is almost non-existent while, after the war, the researchers tend to focus on Muslim women as the victims of war. The topics of genocidal rape (Meznaric, 1994; Kozaric-Kovacic, Folnegovic-Smalc, Skrinjaric et al., 1995; Sells, 1996) and Bosnian women's experiences of being refugees in different parts of the world (Eastmond, 1998; Colic-Peisker, 2002; Franc, 2003) have been widely discussed. However, as it stands, very few researchers choose to deliberate on the Bosnian Muslim women's post-war identities beyond their victimhood experiences. Helms (2003b), in her PhD thesis, examines some aspects of Muslim women identities by considering women's activism within NGOs, while Ibrahimpasic (2008) considers Muslim women identities in post-war Bosnia. Both Helms and Ibrahimpasic point towards Bosnian Muslim women's identity as heavily burdened with a passive and powerless victimhood stereotype that is reinforced by media both within and outside Bosnia (Helms, 2003a). The statement made by one of the women during our informal

conversation really made an impact on my choice of topic and methods for this research: 'I am sick and tired of the sad village woman's face being all around papers and news representing me, my face – a Muslim woman in Bosnia. Yes, we suffered a lot during the war. People were killed, women were raped. Many of us were made to be refugees – forever. But there is more to us then the war.' I wanted to find out what that 'more' is both in terms of their religious identity how it relates to their experiences of war but also and more importantly, how does this aspect of their identity influence their present lives.

The recent research on Muslim women in the UK that produced insight on their identity was mostly qualitative in nature. For example, Muslim Women's Network used focus groups in their exploration of Muslim women's views (2006). Researchers have used one or combined qualitative methods such as interviews, participant observation and focus groups to point towards complex ways in which Muslim women in the UK express their identities (Dwyer, 2000; Afshar, Aitken and Franks, 2005; McDonald, 2005; Farooq, 2010). Others such as Ameli and Merali used combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the meaning of hijab for British Muslim women (2006). Hence, since the main motive of this research was exploration qualitative method was most suitable to understand women's identity and the social and cultural contexts within which they live.

To accomplish this, I decided to conduct series of in-depth interviews since interviewing is considered to be the most effective research tool in exploring people's experiences (Denscombe, 2010:174). By in-depth interviews I mean 'research approach whereby the researcher plans to ask the questions about a given topic but allows the data-gathering conversation itself to determine how the information is obtained' (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992:281). Other methods such as questionnaires or surveys wound not provide in depth answers that I was looking for. Also, in order to gain a better understanding of women's identities, I wanted to have an opportunity to probe their responses and to use their words to convey and construct the main arguments of this research.

Drawing from DeVaults's (1999) feminist argument of using the language to the advantage of feminist theory, this research uses 'women's talk' as a primary source of

information in any interview (Mishler, 1986). This is based on the premise that social world and notion of shared reality is constructed through social interactions where use of language (talk) is the vital (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984). The interview method of obtaining the information works towards the feminist aims of this research. It allows face-to-face interaction between the researched and the researcher and a chance to develop the more reciprocal relationship based on mutual trust which should, in turn, provide greater breadth and depth of the information produced (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). I wanted to minimise my own agendas and assumptions but, being familiar with the social contexts, culture(s) and language(s) of research participants and being an 'apparent insider', I was aware that my research would be conducted through closer *relationships* between the researcher and the research participants (Sprague, 2005). I wanted to have a conversation with the research participants where I would explore few topics and in that way uncover the participant's views.

One limiting factor was time. I only had three weeks in Bosnia to complete my fieldwork. Keeping that limitation in mind and my experiences of conducting a pilot fieldwork (and regular visits) in Bosnia and UK the method of in-depth interview seemed to be the most culturally applicable for the research of Muslim women's views. Social interaction via face-to-face meetings is the main form of interaction in everyday life in Bosnia. People often meet with their friends and family to discuss the events in their daily lives or in the community. This is especially true for the women, they use both public and private spaces to meet and converse with each other on the daily basis. Drawing from Spender's work on language, where 'women's talk' is valued, this research focuses on 'women's talk' with the intention to provide an opportunity to express their otherwise 'muted' voices; in this respect it also offers an empowering potential (1998). Women who took part in the fieldwork expressed their surprise that somebody would be interested in what *they* have to say about issues such as identity. They were frequently asking me to verify if what they were saying had any relevance to my research.

In the UK

The actual fieldwork included interviewing individuals within and outside of organisations both in the UK and in Bosnia. In Bosnia I interviewed women working in Nahla and Kewser, as well as women who use their services. In the UK I interviewed women working for WNC and women who were/are involved with MWN and also individual Muslim women who are not working or associated with either WNC or MWN.

My research participants in the UK were found by snowballing method and here Women's National Commission[93] played a key role. Since WNC was an official collaborative body for this research, my relationship with it was a close one. After writing the initial email explaining my research I was invited to stay in WNC offices on two separate occasions - 28.07.2008 - 01.08.2008 and 7-10th July, 2009. During my week long stay in WNC office, located in London, I was familiarised with its work and how it related to Muslim women in the UK. I interviewed the director, staff members and the commissioners. Since they were all extremely busy, the meeting schedule was prearranged by one of the WNC staff. WNC was responsible for setting up Muslim Women's Network[94] and they provided the contact details/meeting arrangements for the women who were either involved with MWN at its formation or were still involved with its functioning. Some of the interviews took place at WNC's offices while others took place in the offices/cafes which were most suitable for the women who worked outside WNC.

All, except one, of the interviewed participants in the UK who were associated with WNC or MWN were women aged between 30 and 60. In total I interviewed 10 women - 6 were located in London, 2 in Newcastle, 1 in Leicester and 1 in Blackburn. All of the women were university educated and held senior positions in WNC, MWN or other

---

[93] See the Chapter Five for more information on Women's National Commission.

[94] For more see Chapter Five.

affiliated organisations. 4 of the women were not Muslim, however they were involved in either setting up of MWN or knew about its formation and purposes.

I also interviewed 10 Muslim women located in London, aged between 20-38, university or higher degree graduates, born and raised in UK - British nationals – the majority belonging to second generation of South East Asian diasporic community[95].

Organisations: Experiences with Nahla

Nahla was established in 2001 by the group of young Muslim women 'to provide the space for Bosnian woman in which she could feel safe and accepted and get a chance to learn, socialize, broaden and enrich her knowledge and acquire different skills needed to efficiently perform job and actively participate in social life.'[96]

Nahla is a very popular NGO (or Women's Educational Centre), particularly with the women aged 18-30, with about 3000 regular members and many more users. There is hardly anybody in the city (and wider) that has not used or at least heard of Nahla. So, as a research setting, Nahla offers many advantages. Sehija is a director of Nahla. She is very influential, respected and admired by the Muslim women (and men) in Bosnia. This was not our first meeting, I visited Nahla's offices (2 rooms on the top floor of old town's building), during my previous travel to Bosnia, so she was familiar with my work and the purpose of visit.

It is an organisation whose membership has risen progressively since its establishment, pointing towards increased interest in the services that it offers but also increase in the number of women who want to socialise and engage both with other women (of similar background) and the society they live in. In this way, Nahla provided a research setting which was optimal for the richness of information and a sense of interconnectedness and 'boundedness' of different factors - individual, group's, organisational and societal (Holliday, 2007).

---

[95] Please see Appendix I for participants' brief biographies.
[96] For more on Nahla see their website at http://www.nahla.ba/default.aspx

For example, when I interviewed some members of Nahla they stressed how crucial was its role in the development of their personal identity and feeling of empowerment. They mentioned how their positive sense of Islamic identity was particularly assisted by Nahla's activities, educational classes and welcoming atmosphere. Women's response was connected with my own observation of Nahla's work during my time there. Women would be warmly greeted by the receptionist at the entrance by the Muslim greeting 'Asalammu Alaykum[97]', everybody had a happy disposition and most of the women new each other by their first names. They would interact in the café before or after their classes, discussing different topics. General sense of the place was the one of family house/ setting where anybody (regardless of their status, education, age or religion) who enters the building becomes the part of the family, part of the community.

For example, while waiting for my meeting with Nahla's director I overheard the discussion of three women regarding the colour of the walls they should choose for one of the rooms in the building. The discussion's dynamics were not unlike between close family members - they were all giving their opinions and the justifications for their choice and, after 10 minutes, they arrived at unanimous decision, all in a very informal manner. When the director, Sehija (pr. *Sehiyya*), appeared to welcome me, she was informed of their decision (wall colour) before she invited me into her office. There was no obvious hierarchical relationship between the director and the other women in the organisation.

From the first meeting, we have established a good rapport because Sehija considered the topic of my PhD as very important for the Muslim women in Bosnia and there was a sense of beginning of collaborative relationship. She expressed her appreciation and agreed on helping in any way that she can. Her understanding and willingness to support my research have been crucial in arranging access to further research participants and providing advice on the 'most effective methods' of gathering the information.

This time, we met in Nahla's new, modern, 5-storey building. I could not but comment on their obvious progress. Sehija replied that their success is because all of the women

---

[97] Muslim greeting, meaning 'Peace be upon you'.

involved in Nahla and their support. She said: 'We are here because and for them [women who use their services]'.

She seemed pleased to see me and, from the start, my positions were very rapidly shifting from the one of researcher to one of friend and vice-versa. For the greater part of conversation we discussed our family lives and realised that we are going through the similar circumstances. We were both exchanging the experiences of being working, single mothers. Because of the nature of our conversation and my readiness to share 'my story' she felt very comfortable talking about her private life and how it fits in current social context of Bosnia. As this was not our first meeting and because of Sehija's genuine interest in my research, the sharing of our personal stories and experiences felt like a natural progression of our relationship to a friendship. It would have been considered very strange, if not insulting to avoid the exchange of personal information when you are received well and offered support. This would have alienated me as a researcher and would have positioned me as an outsider who only wants to gain information for her own benefit (for PhD). By allowing the relationship to develop in most natural, organic way I have gained Sehija's trust and sense of shared value in my research and our collaboration.

She tried really hard to think of the best way of organising focus group on site. She was suggesting the possible times and available rooms in Nahla's building. She informed me of the most attended classes and the profile (age, education) of the majority women who attend them. Although I felt really grateful for her involvement I could not help but feel redundant in the whole process of organising - it seemed like she knew what was best: time, place and people. On her suggestion, I visited one of the classes before the lesson time to invite them to attend a focus group meeting. After being introduced to the class by Nahla's administrator, Azra, I gave a brief description of my research and informed the class attendees of the time and location of the meeting.

Sehija suggested that the best time would be after the classes in the café area and she also agreed to inform as many women as possible. I preferred the café area to the classroom/meeting room because I wanted the setting to be as close as possible to the 'natural environment' where the women interact in their everyday lives. I really did not

know what to expect as this was to be my first focus group and I did not have any idea how many people will attend. However, when the day arrived, I came prepared with the box of chocolates (as suggested by Sehija), waited for an hour and nobody appeared. It was a very disappointing experience and it made me re-consider my methods of finding/attracting research participants.

After talking to family and friends, I was reminded about the way 'things happen in Bosnia' and that the people are different to what I am accustomed to (in the UK). They all prompted me to start 'thinking with my Bosnian head' and accept that people are generally not interested in attending the meetings/focus groups unless they can see a clear benefit from the experience. I was also remained about the notion of being 'connected with the right people' and importance of having a reliable, respected and trusted person in the community who can invite women to attend. It was all about gaining the trust.

I went back to Nahla and talked to Sehija, we both agreed that I (she actually said 'we') should take different approach where she, personally, would contact members of the 'Nahla club' and invite them for the meeting. The timing and setting was to be the same. First woman to arrive did not know exactly why she was invited, she told me: 'We [the women in Nahla's club] were told that there will be a chat in the café and that there will be cakes and coffee…So I really do not know anything more about it'. Sehija, Azra and another woman working in Nahla arrived and soon after 6 more women. It appeared that nobody, except for the 3 Nahla employees, knew the purpose of the meeting or, indeed, who was I. This made me think about the ethics of the whole arrangement. It was obvious they came because they were personally invited by Sehija (via collective email). However, if they were told about the purpose of the meeting maybe they would not have attended. I could not help but feel that somehow they were 'tricked' into attending. The women are the members of the Nahla's club that works within the Nahla on specific projects. They seemed to know each other very well and they talked about their lives before the meeting 'officially' started. They all wondered who I was and they were keen to find out. It was difficult to gauge what exactly to tell them about myself, what position to take and how would that effect their perception of me and therefore the

process and outcome of the focus group meeting. I decided to join in their conversations, giving just the basic information leaving the rest as a 'surprise'. One of them said: 'Oh, you [myself] might be this 'surprise' and the reason why Sehija wanted us to come today'. So, this 'fun' interaction, of solving the 'mystery' was a crucial point in setting the right and friendly atmosphere from what could have been quite an awkward situation for me as a researcher. At the start of the meeting Sehija introduced me and hence gave the reason for her invitation.

Organisations: Experiences with Kewser

My experiences with Kewser were almost entirely different to Nahla's. Kewser is also a Muslim women's organisation but they activities differ to those of Nahla's. They are focused mainly on cultural productions and media. Kewser is established in 1994, during the war in city of Zenica with the mission 'to help women and children in the field of education and upbringing in the spirit of the Islamic faith and culture'. The head office is now in Sarajevo. They publish bi-monthly Muslim women's (family) magazine called *Zehra* and they also have a choir made up of 17 young, hijab wearing Muslim women. During the past two years Kewser has also expanded its media efforts to include TV Zehra programme every two weeks. The magazine, the choir and TV programme are very popular and have strong following throughout Bosnia.

Every year, Kewser organises the major cultural manifestation in the capital, called 'Prophet's [Prophet Muhammed (p.b.u.h[98])] Musk'. It usually lasts 7 days culminating in the large scale concert at the Olympic hall of Zetra with around 10000 attendees.

My first contact with Sadika, the director of Kewser, was from the UK. Sadika is a very influential Muslim figure and well-known for her efforts in making Kewser the organisation that it is today. I interviewed her via the phone for my MA dissertation. She was very interested and happy to assist in my research, so when I contacted her again in

---

[98] P.b.u.h - stands for 'peace be upon him'. It is customary for Muslims to always say this phrase when mentioning the prophet, as a sign of respect.

regards to my PhD research she expressed her enthusiasm for the topic and agreed to meet.

I arrived at Kewser's offices and was pleasantly greeted by the office staff. Most of the staff recognised me from my previous visit and also from the article that was published about me in previous issue of *Zehra*. One of them commented: 'there is our English lady', in very sweet and friendly way. However, I found myself slightly concerned about this sense of 'familiarity' and my position as a researcher. They were informed (from the article) about my family background, education, my spiritual path and my research. I wondered how their image of me might influence their responses in the focus group setting.

Sadika arrived about 30 minutes later than arranged but remained positive and interested in my research. We agreed on the date and time of the focus group which would be made up of the Kewser's staff. She also asked me to give the talk for one of their members' meetings. I was happy to oblige as it felt like natural and polite gesture providing the sense of reciprocity between myself and the research participant who was also an important gate-keeper (Coffey, 1999). However, few days later Sadika informed me that it would not be possible to organise the focus group as they were very busy with the preparation of the next month's 'Prophet's Musk' and she suggested for me to call her again to arrange another date.

I decided to use the opportunity of my talk arrangement and try to talk to the members of Kewser then. I was reconsidering the ethic behind my purpose of wanting to give the talk, given the time constraints of my visit to Bosnia I really wanted to use every occasion to gain information. When I arrived on the day of the talk, I was addressed as the 'guest' and introduced to few women who were waiting for the talk. I found it very strange that nobody mentioned my name at that point. Finally, at the beginning of the talk I was presented as a 'Master of Islamic Studies who is doing a PhD now' and my name was given; at that point the host asked the audience of some 25 women (aged over 37) – 'you will probably wonder how it can be *Sanja* [referring to 'non-muslimness' of my name] and covered…wearing hijab'. She then went on explaining about the difficulties of raising the children in today's society and maintaining strong Islamic

identity and how, 'God leads whomever he wishes' and 'He lead me to choose the right path' because of my ethnically mixed heritage and lack of religious education in childhood. This need to offer an explanation about my background reconfirmed my initial concern of addressing me as a 'guest' rather than by my first name.

It became clear to me that the issues in regards to my first name have much greater emphasis than I anticipated especially at the point of my introduction. Once the 'reassurance' of gate-keeper was provided, the women were very perceptive and engaging in their responses to me, my 'talk' morphed into a very interesting discussion between women and me and lasted much longer than all of us have initially planned.

The focus group meeting happened a couple of weeks later. Arriving at Kewser's office now for the third time my welcome was more ordinary, I was lead to the lounge area, offered a drink and then left to myself. It seemed like nobody knew why I was there as they went about their usual work. This time, I waited for over an hour when Sadika arrived. She gathered everybody in the lounge and we all had coffee before the lunch time. I was ushered to ask the questions quickly as there was not enough time. This made me question whether or not anybody really wanted to take part in this discussion or rather, as they perceived it, question and answer session. As a researcher I felt powerless. This was not sort of setting I wanted or believed would produce rich data. I also felt unprepared as my questions were not very detailed; they were aimed to guide rather than provide complete structure of the discussion. Although this focus group meeting was not at all how I envisaged it to be it still provided me with some valuable information and I was grateful for the time I had with the Kewser's staff.

Experiences of Non-organisational Focus Groups

I held two focus group meetings outside the women's NGOs. The initial contact was Sehija, director of Nahla. She mentioned another researcher who was working 'on similar issues' and introduced us to each other. This researcher was also of Bosnian origin but settled in the USA. She (E) took some of the classes at Nahla and also taught

English at their language classes. 'E' spent six months in Sarajevo and Nahla and she had a good network of friends and other women she interviewed for her research. We talked about our research topics and methodologies and she seemed very interested in attending one of my focus group meetings, also suggesting utilising the contacts that she already has. We arranged the time, date and setting.

Most of the young women (22-26) that she wanted to invite were either working or studying at the university. We decided that the best time for meeting is after their work and the best setting is a café in the old part of the town where they normally meet after work. My intention was to re-create the most natural setting and conditions for the discussion to occur.

All of the 6 invited women came. After I introduced myself very briefly our discussion started. It seemed that having 'E' as the 'trusted informant' removed the need for in-depth justification and trust building between myself and the women. The discussion that followed was perceived as very useful for both participants and me. This experience made me concur with Coffey's view of fieldwork relationships as both 'personal and professional in the same time, stating: 'It is not enough to simply go through the motions of politeness and professional courtesy' (1999). I felt that meeting with this group of women provided the source of self - identification and vice-versa. My interest in their views was perceived as empowering and 'identity-enhancing' as they have never been asked about their opinions or views (Harrington, 2003).

Analysis

The importance of starting the analysis from the beginning of data collection has often been emphasised, since qualitative data analysis 'is an iterative process of data collection along with data analysis' they work interactively and should proceed simultaneously (Karp[99] in Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011:123). It is also recommended to keep memos or notes and to write down ideas as they emerge in the process of data

---

[99] The references are not given in the original text, the following remark is made: 'Sociologist David Karp, in another behind-the-scenes interview, provides us with a step-by-step approach…' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011:123).

collection. This, in turn, helps researchers to become more reflexive about their own positionality. Following this approach, I started rudimentary data analysis from the early stages of data collection. After each interview/focus group, I made some written observations and kept a brief diary of the events as soon as it was possible.

Using a digital voice recorder I recorded the focus groups meetings, the twenty individual interviews with Muslim women and the interviews with four women who established and are involved with the running of the Bosnian women's organisations (two from Nahla and two from Kewser). Interviews with women (and one man) involved with the WNC and MWN were not recorded. All of these interviews were pre-selected and pre-arranged for me since the WNC was a named 'collaborative body' for this research. The majority of these interviews were with people in senior governmental positions and asking if they would agree to the interviews being recorded did not seem appropriate at the time. Further interviews with one imam from Bosnia and a Bosnian Muslim academic were also not recorded digitally.

Before the start of each of the twenty individual women's interviews they were asked if they would agree to the recording of the interviews and were told that their confidentiality[100] would be maintained. Since Bosnian is my first language, I planned to do all of the transcribing and translating myself and I was able to reassure them that it would only be me who listened to their responses. All of the participants were happy with this arrangement, and a few of them mentioned that they would not like anyone else to hear their voice and their 'rumbling'. This comment related to a general sense of feeling 'unease' or shyness that somebody other than me would hear their voice.

I also used the voice recorder to record my own experiences just after the interviews/meetings took place, usually on my way back home or to another meeting and while I was waiting for the transport. I wanted to capture my initial findings,

---

[100] Appendix I provides brief biographies of twenty women in the UK and Bosnia who took part in this research. To maintain their confidentiality, pseudonyms were used and only basic information was given. The same appendix also provides short biographies of four women from the Bosnian organisations. Because of these organisations' well-known status in the Bosnian Muslim community, two founding members and directors' real names are used (with consent). Names and biographies of the women from WNC and MWN are not mentioned to maintain confidentiality as the WNC does not exist any longer. Also, the interviewed women from MWN's have not been associated with its functioning for a number of years now.

feelings and thoughts as they appeared at that particular moment in time as I was not able to write them down immediately. These initial findings, from my written and recorded memos, were the start of my analysis stage, in a way, providing the preliminary ideas about women's religious identity. After listening to the recorded memos and considering my written notes, I would write a diary for each interview highlighting the main concepts/topics that women talked about.

This daily 'checking in' (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2007:496) facilitated self-reflexivity and helped in making fine adjustments to the interviews (and focus groups) that followed. It also made me appreciate the importance of being flexible and prepared to readjust and re-examine my own positionality according to the situation and the way a particular woman's story was conveyed to me. By engaging in reflexivity, after each interview, I was more perceptive of the '*situational dynamics*' (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011:114) between myself and my research participants, which made me (re)consider the way I posed the opening question, my general attitude and any ethical issues that were emerging. For example, on one occasion, one of my interviewees in Bosnia became quite overwhelmed and started to cry as she spoke about her experiences as a Muslim woman who wears the hijab. I did not anticipate that talking about one's religious identity would cause such a reaction. I did not deem it 'a sensitive topic'. Although her reply did not contain any confidential information, the fact that this was the first time she was asked about *her* Muslim identity, caused her to be overwhelmed by emotion. As I comforted her, I also felt a strong sense that, perhaps, by conducting this interview, I was somehow responsible for her distress. I asked if she would like to stop the interview; she vehemently declined and said: 'I was never asked about my experiences of being a Muslim woman…this is first time that somebody actually asked…I want to continue'. As we ended the interview, we hugged and she left. I remained sitting in a quiet corner of the café, feeling emotionally drained, worried about my ability to appropriately deal with outpour of emotions, both my research participants' and my own. Reflecting on a recorded memo I made after that interview made me more aware of possible emotional effects that interviewing can have on my research participants and on me but it also provided a clue about the possible lived experiences and meaning of Muslim identity for my research participants. Another

example of how my initial recorded feelings informed my approach is in organisational setting. After the first, informal meeting with Kewser's director, Sadika, in their office, I realised that I needed to be more relaxed and considerate towards Bosnia-specific and silent cultural norms. In my recorded memo I noted the combination of physical setting, the dynamics between the women in Kewser and their reactions to my presence. Keswer's office looks like a family house from the outside and, to some extent, feels like home from inside too. Prior to our second meeting, I re-visited my notes and I tried my best to take into account the observations from my initial visit. I took slightly different approach and this influenced the mood and the way women at Kewser reacted to me: during my stay I became part of the family. Therefore, a careful consideration of notes and memos during the data collection stage helped me not only to be more situationally dynamic but also enabled me to start to identify the main themes pertinent to women's understanding of their Muslim identity. Moreover, notes and memos helped to contextualise the information that I later came to transcribe, translate and analyse – the second stage of my analysis.

I transcribed and translated the recorded interviews at the same time, about two months after completing the fieldwork in both countries. I decided to start with a few interviews in the Bosnian language, to get a 'feel' for translation. Although I have translated and transcribed first person accounts from Bosnian to English before (for a British TV documentary) I was somewhat apprehensive about this task. I was worried if I would be able to convey the accurate meaning of women's words as some of the statements were quite complex and elaborate. While translating, my primary concern was that the core meaning of the responses given by research participants was not lost. As I listened closely to the recorded interviews, my post-interview notes and memos assisted the recollection of the particulars for each occasion, such as body language, silences/pauses, interruptions and emotions. These were very valuable particularly with interviews in the Bosnian language and helped in making the English translation as close as it could be to the original meaning. While being fluent in both Bosnian and English certainly helped, translating certain Bosnian language phrases presented an occasional challenge, as there were no equivalents in the English language. For example one of my research participants stated that her parents considered wearing of the hijab as '*kočnica*' in life.

In Bosnian that word is commonly used for a car or bicycle brake translating it literally would not have the same meaning in English. In such circumstances, I consulted friends and family who are more knowledgeable in both languages and found the closest meaning possible. It was helpful that all of the research participants in Bosnia were residents of Sarajevo, which meant that I was familiar with the local dialect and cultural references. The interviews with my UK participants were all in English language and I also transcribed them myself. They were transcribed without any changes or editing, even the grammatical errors were left unchanged. After each of the interviews, the participants agreed that, if there was a need, they would provide further explanations via email to any of responses that were not clear or that I could not understand. I found that, for the purposes of transcribing, this was not necessary and that listening and re-listening to the recorded interviews was sufficient. However, at a later stage, while writing up a chapter, I found that I needed a further explanation in regards to one mentioned concepts (please see p.107). This was the only occasion where I felt that I needed to consult my research participants in order to gain a more precise understanding of their statements.

My approach to listening and analysis was holistic (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber, 1998), focusing on the interview as a whole 'story' rather than dissected into parts which are analysed separately. The manner in which women talked about their lives as Muslims was not made up of simple descriptions but of complex ways of explaining and understanding of their lives. Therefore, different parts of the interview were analysed in context of the story as whole – as a part of a puzzle – they impacted each other. I started by listening carefully to all of my interviews and, in each case, I noted the main themes and key words. I then examined the post-interview notes and memos with my rudimentary analysis. My initial intention was to transcribe all of the interviews in their entirety. However, I did this with only seven of my interviews. I noticed that women's narration of their Muslim identity focused around three central topics. These topics emerged both from listening to the recorded interviews and from the memos and notes I made right after they took place: family, hijab and, in the Bosnian case, Muslim women's organisations.

I decided that transcribing all of the interviews in their entirety was not necessary. Instead, I re-listened to the remaining 13 interviews to ensure that any other key issues are not left out and, subsequently, transcribing only the parts where research participants talked about the three identified themes. My interviews would start with an opening – 'Could you tell me about your Muslim identity'. Lawler talks about how '*situating of the self*' 'takes place, at least in part, through the development of a self-narrative that starts, not at one's own birth, but with one's forebears' (2008:42) and this was the case with my interviews. On listening, one striking feature, of all of the individual interviews, was that women always started with talking about their families: about their childhood experiences of Islam, their parents' attitudes towards religion and the impact it had on their own, early understanding of Islam. Women talked about families as a means of transmitting their respective cultural and social attitudes towards Islam. They would then move on to talk about how they arrived at their present Muslim identity and the topic of the hijab was the most prominent feature in the narration of that development, even for the four women who did not wear it at the time. A possible reason why women talked about the hijab, without being prompted to, is that the hijab was (and continues to be) a much debated issue in both the UK and Bosnia, causing some controversy in media outlets and in politics. Also, my own sporting of hijab could have been interpreted as a silent invitation to share their experiences about the hijab as a sign of identity and commitment to faith. Another theme that emerged from all of the interviews with Bosnian Muslim women concerned the influence of local Muslim women's organisations on the development of their religious identity. Women talked about two particular organisations – Nahla and Kewser – being a major locus of their lives, safe places where they could express and develop their Muslim identity without being stereotyped and criticised by their families or other members of their society. In the UK, Muslim women I interviewed did not mention any organisations at all. However, as the WNC and, therefore the MWN, were the official collaborative bodies for this study, I felt obliged to ask my research participants (at the end of each interview) if they were influenced by or had heard of the MWN; their response was generally negative.

Therefore, because of careful (and repeated) listening and consulting my memos, even before the process of transcribing was complete, I had a good idea about the main points

of focus. Upon re-examining all of the transcripts and notes I was confident that my theses' chapters should be on family, hijab and organisations.

The third stage of my analysis started with considering how to interpret and use women's transcribed words to build the arguments for the three chapters. My objective was to focus on meanings of Muslim identity for my participants and how they formulated their experiences as Muslim women, both in Bosnian and English. In both cases, I tried my hardest to stay true to the original meaning by building the analysis using the words they used during the interviews (Charmaz, 2006). I draw from DeVault's broad understanding of 'listening' which includes not only listening during the interviews but extends to listening and studying of recordings/transcripts, 'and even more broadly, to the ways we work at interpreting respondents' accounts' (DeVault, 1999:66). Listening, re-listening and transcribing of participants' interviews felt rewarding although, at times, distressing and, as Letherby puts it, 'this was compounded by the fact that what they were describing often resonated with my own feelings and experiences' (2003:111) . For the most part, I empathised with their experiences as I was able to imagine myself in their 'stories' and I felt a strong sense of responsibility not to misinterpret or overlook their words. While attending to this, I also wanted to include the important aspects of co-production of knowledge in my analysis. Hesse-Biber and Leavy point out that 'writing involves ethical, moral, and personal decisions' and that a feminist researcher 'must also think about negotiating her political project, her activist intentions, her epistemological commitments her desire to unearth and make available subjugated knowledge, and her obligation to empower and not oppress.' (2011:343-344). I was mindful of this while selecting the quotes to be used as the evidence in thesis chapters. I wanted to choose quotations would 'provide rich, nuanced, and multidimensional portrayals' (ibid) of women who took time to talk so passionately about their experiences of being Muslim. Their quotes were largely unedited. The parts that were removed contained personal data (real names, addresses, phone numbers/emails) or inconsequential chatter, for example about the weather. However, when this 'chatter' provided further details/context it was accounted for. For example, during one of the interviews in the café close to the mosque, the call to prayer was heard; my research participant asked me if I wanted to stop the interview to attend a

communal prayer. I included this in my analysis as it further contextualises women's relationship with their faith and with me as a fellow Muslim researcher.

The interviews were conversations between my research participants and myself as they would often ask questions about my own identity: how I came to be a Muslim, why and when I decided to wear hijab, how did my family react etc. In their settings and manner, I wanted interviews to resemble everyday 'women's talk' allowing for 'the exploration of incompletely articulated aspects of women's experiences' (DeVault, 1999:65). During the interviews, I tried my best to take the cues from my research participants by listening intently and responding to the points or questions they raised. For example, after talking about own experiences of wearing of the hijab, one of the Bosnian research participants asked me about my experiences of hijab in the UK. I responded and we talked about similarities and differences between the two countries.

Being an active and compassionate listener, with a genuine interest in Muslim women's views, aided the co-production of knowledge where both my research participants and myself were able to widen our perspectives through sharing of experiences (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011:11). During the course of an interview, my respondents often expressed their disappointment about the way Muslim women's identities are discussed in (their respective) wider societies and showed real enthusiasm and interest in my research[101]; this shared interest, the collaboration continued even after the interviews took place. I exchanged contact details with the majority of my research participants as they wanted to read the final thesis. Because of the geographical distances between the two localities and women's busy schedules (the majority of women were either professionals or in full time education) the collaboration was somewhat limited to a few instances, however, the relationship with some of the research participants developed further via popular social network communication. One of those instances arose when I came to write chapter four – 'Hijab and Identity' ; I needed to further corroborate some of the statements and concepts and decided to write a brief message to my research participants and ask their opinions. All of them responded with the lengthy and eloquent

---

[101] These discussions were not directly included in the analysis but helped in contextualising it and underlining the salience of the hijab and Muslim identity for these women.

answers which not only humbled me but confirmed they keen interest in this research. Therefore, one intended audience for this thesis is, the women who took an active part and interest in this research. I hope it will further the 'emancipatory dialogue' (Code, 1991:292) that started during the interviews. Once the thesis is complete, I am planning to inform my research participants and arrange an online discussion. Bosnian women's organisations, who took part in this research, have also expressed interest in this thesis and arrangements will be made to organise the best way of sharing this knowledge with them. Nahla, with its newly opened research department, will be organising a public talk and publishing an article (based on this research) in Bosnian language on their website, while Kewser is interested in publishing an interview in their magazine. The findings of this research will also be published on The Religion and Society Research Programme's website as they founded this research. Policy makers and researchers interested in women's religious identities could benefit from this study as well as general public in both countries. I will be looking into publishing articles in academic journals which focus on contemporary discussions of Muslims or Islam, such as the *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* and *Contemporary Islam: Dynamics of Muslim Life*.

Chapter Three

Family Life and the Sense of Feminine Muslim Identity

Most of the women I interviewed, both in the UK and Bosnia, started their story on Muslim identity with a discussion about their family background. I found this very interesting – as my first, opening question did not mention family at all – yet the majority of the women chose to start their interviews by explaining the specifics of their family life. This is in accordance with Mol's (1977) understanding of family as both 'a crucial focus of identity' and a 'transmission agency' where values and beliefs are transferred from one generation to another. Mol stresses the importance of the parental relationship in identity formation of an individual where parents act on behalf of a larger group or a society to which they belong. Among many questions related to a young person's identity during their upbringing, a question of belief also relates to identity. This was demonstrated by my research participants through the use of a repeated statement at the start of the interviews: '*Well, my parents/family are/are not religious...*' Therefore, in this chapter I examine the influence of family life on my participants' sense of religious identity and ways in which women perceive their religiousness through the family life and history. As families are 'embedded in wider patterns of social and economic relations' (Jackson, 2008:128), in order to contextualise the participants' accounts (and my analysis of the same) and explore Mol's concept of family as a 'transmission agency', I will start by discussing the socio-historical and political background that influenced their family life. How did different circumstances influence research participants' families' (parents, grandparents) view of Islam and how was it conveyed to them in their daily lives?

Based on women's responses, I discuss the influences of parents and grandparents rather than other family members, focusing on the roles that close female members of family play in defining a woman's Muslim identity. However, I will argue that for the majority of women I interviewed, their current understanding of faith in both Bosnia and the UK, comes from their own individual spiritual or educational journey rather than from their

family members. Additionally, I also discuss the importance of women's religious 'work' within the family setting based on Tapper's argument which maintains that '[I]t is wrong to assume *a priori* that women's religious "work" is less important than or peripheral to that of men' (1987:72). Throughout the chapter, I will be dealing with two communities separately: I discuss Bosnian women first and then I discuss the women I interviewed in the UK.

Since I wish to explore the gendered understanding of Muslim identity, I do this by focusing on the status of Muslim women in the UK and Bosnia during different periods. For Bosnia, the chosen period includes the Austro-Hungarian rule (which ended in 1928) and the period between 1940 and 1990 – when Bosnia was part of socialist and communist Yugoslavia. The events and changes that occurred during these two periods are considered to be of major importance to the development of present Bosnian Muslim identity. The arrival of Austro-Hungarians meant the end of the Ottoman rule which, in turn, meant a different approach to religion and Islam in particular; while the arrival of communism and its deeply anti-religious stance had further (and lasting) implications on Muslims in Bosnia: influencing both the way Bosnian Muslims perceived and practiced Islam and the way they were perceived by others (within and outside Bosnia). These two periods of social change would have had a major effect on the ways that Bosnian research participants' families understood religion in general and Islam in particular and the way they communicated it to their daughters/granddaughters.

For the UK, the period of concern is 1960-1990, the time when the participants' families immigrated to the UK (mainly from South Asia) and the key events related to Muslim community after they settled in the UK. It is known that immigration is 'a complex psychosocial process' which has 'significant and lasting effects on an individual's identity' (Akhtar, 1999:5). As far as my research participants in the UK are concerned, all of their families arrived in the UK (before participants were born) – during the late 1960s or 1970s – going through the complexities of the 'immigration experience' (ibid) would also have had an effect on and shaped their children's identities. Muslims in Britain are a very diverse community however the largest numbers originate from South Asian countries, namely – Pakistan, Bangladesh and India – with sizable communities

originating in Cyprus, North Africa, Middle East, Malaysia and others. During 1950s post-war economic development, Britain was in need of labour force and the arrival of 'ex-colonial subjects' was encouraged and as Brah says:

> [M]igration of labour from the ex-colonies to the metropolis during the 1950s was thus largely a direct result of the history of colonialism and imperialism of the previous centuries. If once the colonies had been a source of cheap raw materials, now they became a source of cheap labour (1996:21).

Early immigrants were either young single men or men with wives who still resided in their home countries; mainly from the rural, peasant backgrounds and their aim was to earn and save enough money to go back home to make a better life for themselves and their families. However, for various reasons, which I will not discuss here[102], the majority decided to stay and, to use Lewis's phrase, 'sojourners became settlers' (1994:16); those who had already entered and worked in Britain 'started to make emotional and financial investments in a long-term stay' (Brah, 1996:27).

Therefore, it was the men who arrived first to the UK with their wives or families following suit once the basic conditions of accommodation and employment were in place. To illustrate, the census data for Bradford from 1961, states that there were 3376 Pakistani men and only 81 women. By the 1970s the majority of South Asian men brought their family members to the UK, made financial investments and brought property and as a result the notion of returning home became more of a myth and focus shifted towards building a better future in the UK. One of the research participants, Fatima, talked about this in relation to her family background:

---

[102] Main contributing factor was the change in law which made it harder to return/re-enter or bring the dependents to the UK. For example, 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act made 'all holders of UK passports to immigration controls unless they, their parents or a grandparent had been born, adopted or naturalised in the United Kingdom' and Immigration Act 1971 which brought further restrictions especially concerning dependents of those who can enter the UK: dependents were allowed only for the duration of the work permit of the main claimant. This is well illustrated by Vishnu Sharma's (who was, at the time, the Executive Secretary of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants) criticism of the bill where he stated that it would 'create day-to-day bureaucracy and interference on people living in this country. It will create more hardship for people wanting to enter into this country.' (http://www.runnymedetrust.org/histories/race-equality/47/immigration-act-1971.html Accessed on 12/06/2013)

> Dad came here in 1960s…I think…his two brothers joined him later…He does not talk about it much now…just says that it was a very tough time and that he missed his family and village very much…but it made him happy that he was able to send some money over to his mum and dad…Later, he went back to marry my mum and then she came here in 1970s…

In fact, Fatima was the only research participant who offered a bit more information related to her parents' migration to the UK. It may be that the rest of the women I interviewed in the UK felt that delving into the topic of migration, which happened at least 5-10 years before they were born, would mean a departure from the main topic – *their* Muslim identity. However, Fatima's words – 'he does not talk about it much now' – are indicative of how immigration to the UK was a 'very tough time' for people who have experienced it and this needs to be addressed in order to understand participants' families' perception of their Muslim identity and the way they practiced (or not) Islam within their new setting – the UK.

Bosnia: Austro-Hungarian and Communist /Socialist Legacy

The arrival of Austro-Hungarians and demise of Ottomans brought about changes in every respect of life. This directly affected the Muslims in Bosnia, and for the first time the question of 'emancipation' of Muslim women was put forward. From their arrival in 1878, the Austro-Hungarian administration aimed to reform and adjusts the existing Islamic way of life to meet the needs of their capitalist state. While Christians especially Catholics (who allied with Austro-Hungarians), tried to adapt to the new systems, Muslims did not accept the changes easily. This affected their economic status. As Senija Milišić points out, Muslim women represented unused economic potential, and it is in this context that the Austro-Hungarian rulers wished for the 'emancipation' of Muslim women and their inclusion in public life (1999: 225-241). However, the arrival of Austro-Hungarians also caused Muslim scholars, under their pressure, to review the status of women of that time. As Muslim women at the time were considered to be mostly uneducated and illiterate, some scholars were calling for the re-examination of the Shar'iah laws (which were effective only within Shari'ah courts) concerning women

even though they pointed out that the heavy patriarchal system and cultural traditions and not Islamic teachings were the main cause of 'backwardness' of Muslim women. But as Muslim scholars were trying to emphasise the importance of education, the Austro-Hungarians had different ideas. They invested time and effort to analyse Bosnian Muslims[103] and their 'traditions' in order to be able to maintain efficient administration. At the centre was the issue of women and women's dress – the veil, and removal of it was seen as a 'big step' towards betterment of their status.

Here, one can notice the obvious similarities with the perception of Muslim women in other colonized Muslim societies as described by Ahmed (1992) and Bullock (2007:20-21) where colonisers took it upon themselves to free the oppressed native Muslim women by persuading them to remove the ultimate symbol of backwardness – head/face cover. To this effect, Bullock cites Cromer, the British Agent and Consul-General of Egypt between 1883 and 1907, where he states: 'The position of women in Egypt [is] a fatal obstacle to the attainment of that elevation of thought and character' (2007:21). Acting as a sort of 'gentle, mothering imperialism', the Austro-Hungarian administration, used the woman as a main tool in the establishment of their colonial tendencies. As Diana Reynolds points out, gender was at the centre of the Austro-Hungarian imperialistic rhetoric. Ballet and dance was one of the cultural forms used to both metaphorically (hence 'gentle') and literally invite Bosnians to abandon 'the old ways' and take 'the hand' of the lady (meaning Empire) who would teach them how to 'dance' (Reynolds, 2003, pp135-148). Central to the resistance to colonialism was the resistance around women and family and, as in other colonised countries, the actions were undertaken to modernise and 'emancipate' women especially Muslim women.

According to the work of Ljiljana Beljaskić-Hadžidedić (1987), who investigated the participation of Muslim women in the economy during the 19th and 20th centuries, Bosnian Muslim women were quite active in the economic sphere of life. She also maintains that the view of Muslim women as completely dependent, oppressed and constrained is not correct. Beljaskić-Hadžidedić goes on to describe the variety of roles

---

[103] Work of Atnun Hangi published in Sarajevo 1906 and republished again: *Život i običaji muslimana u BiH (Life and Practices of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina)*, Sarajevo, Dobra knjiga, 2009.

and positions women enjoyed. For example, she mentions how rural women were involved in all work, usually sharing the workload with their husbands. Women in towns differed according to their class, Fig. 2. is an old Austro-Hungarian postcard from Sarajevo showing Muslim urban women.
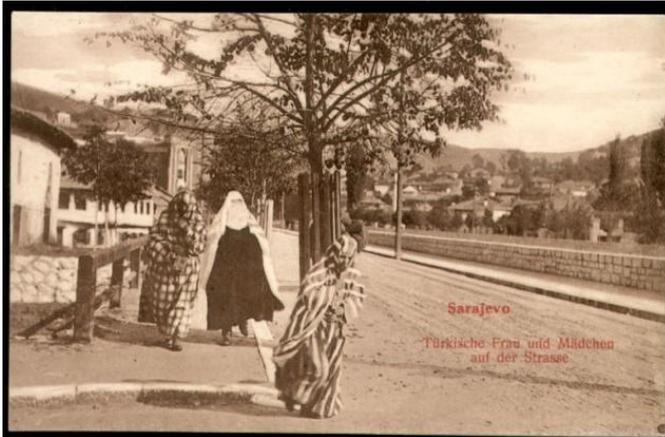
 Figure 2. An old Austro-Hungarian postcard from Sarajevo showing Muslim urban women.

Women belonging to the middle and lower classes usually needed to employ some kind of work in order to support the family. Their jobs varied, including domestic services, trade, teaching, skilled craftwork etc.

With the outbreak of the First World War, due to the severity of economic conditions, women had no choice but to look for work wherever they could. Here is another example where, because of external circumstances, women had to adjust and re-negotiate their identities. However, the question of 'emancipation' (and hence de-veiling) of Muslim women would not go away. It seems that these two issues always went hand in hand with the issue of education. There are records that the Islamic society 'Gajret' worked on promoting the education of girls, also giving education grants, building women only schools and, in 1926, a university (Milišić, 1999). In 1928, the Congress of Muslim Intellectuals made the decision that veiling was not obligatory but a voluntary practice and the choice of every woman. However, they also emphasised that education was a priority and, for the purpose of education, women could take off their

veils[104]. As a community, Bosnian Muslims were, for the very first time, governed by a non-Muslim power and started assuming a more introvert and defensive mode. It is important to note that even though the arrival of Austro-Hungarians brought a lot of changes for the Muslims in Bosnia, their policies and attitudes were not as severe as the ones that would follow in communist/socialist Yugoslavia.

The period between 1928 and 1940 witnessed the appearance of a new political factor in Bosnia – communism. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia, in its party program, asked for political and economic equality for women. World War Two anti-fascist sentiments were used to attracting masses of women. They aimed to politically mobilise women, who were according to them, 'oppressed' and second-class citizens until then. During this time as well as during the Second World War, the Communist Party gave women the right to vote and encouraged their political involvement. There are also records of Muslim women taking part in the war. After the war, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was established with the communism as its main ideology. Bosnia and Herzegovina, as one of the six republics of SFRY, experienced yet another major political change which had an immense impact on Bosnian women in general and their participation in public life.

Figure 3. Photo of veiled Muslim women in Sarajevo marching (circa 1945).

Bosnian Muslim women took part in rebuilding of the country, and some found employment outside the home. The socio-economic change caused the change in the perception of Muslim women. In newly formed Tito's Yugoslavia (1945) Muslim

---

[104] The declaration stated that women could 'when needs require, expose her face, attend all types of public schools, work in stores and occupy all offices which are not contrary to the principles of Islamic morality'.

women took part in the elections and records also show that the political consciousness of Bosnian Muslim women was on the rise as they campaigned for the Communists. Fig. 3. shows heavily veiled Muslim women in Sarajevo marching (circa 1945-47) with pro-Tito banners – 'Long Live Comrade Tito' – their support for communism stemmed from the newly won war against the fascists. What followed was a series of campaigns aimed to involve Muslim women in all aspects of public life. For example, in 1947 in Sarajevo, 2135 women were looking for employment and 1843 were Muslim women (Milišić, 1999). Because there was a great shortage of people, the need for the women to take part in rebuilding of the country was huge. This explains the eagerness of Communists to educate and recruit women in general and therefore, including Muslim women.

Under communist rule, religion was not to be expressed in public life and religious organisations were not allowed to conduct religious education. As much as this was applicable for Catholics and Orthodox Christians (predominantly ethnic Croats and Serbs), for the Muslims of Bosnia this seemed to be a 'double disadvantage'. The 1946 constitution stated that SFRY would allow freedom of belief and separation of 'church' and state (i.e. secularisation). This, of course proved problematic for Muslims as Islam is considered to be a complete way of life and affects both private and public spheres of life. According to Noel Malcolm, the Communists were well aware of the impact this would have on Muslims in their daily lives (1994:195). Religious properties were confiscated, *Mektebs* (elementary religious schools) were closed and teaching children in mosques became a criminal offence. Muslim cultural and educational societies were abolished and the Muslim printing house in Sarajevo was closed down (ibid). The Shari'ah courts that remained active during the Austro-Hungarian rule were also abolished. On a more individual level, to be religious was considered as being intellectually 'backward'. Muslims in military service were forced to eat pork whilst Muslim members of Communist party were not allowed to have their sons circumcised. I am personally aware of the incident where a father was arrested and beaten by the secret police (UDBA) for choosing to circumcise his son and that the surgeon who performed the operation was seriously reprimanded. People who were known to be religious were fired from their jobs and only declared atheists could became the

members of the Communist party. To be a party member was necessary in order to access official government jobs (Waardenburg, 2003). Even having a Muslim name and using typical Muslim terms for family members, like *amidža* for father's brother (uncle), resulted in social stigma. Simply put, anything, be it religious or secular, that was connected with being Muslim was considered as 'backward' and almost criminalised, with the exception of the veil, which was actually criminalised in 1950.

A detailed political and historical analysis of socialist period is beyond the scope of this research, but suffice to say that from 1964 (when Bosnia gained the right of self-determination) until the end of socialism in 1990 there was an improvement in terms of Bosnian Muslims' status and religious freedom. In 1974, SFRY recognised Bosnian Muslims as an ethnic group and this had many implications on their economic and educational development. As a result, 1977 witnessed the opening of the Faculty of Islamic Theology in Sarajevo, as well as the opening of a girls' section of the *Ghazi Huserbeg Medresa* (Islamic secondary school). However, the situation remained quite difficult for anyone who attempted to publicly practice Islam, use symbols such as hijab to visually identify with Islam or propagate/discuss (publically or in private) Islam outside any of the mentioned institutions and mosques (that were still active). One such woman, Melika Salihbegovic (now Melika Salihbeg Bosnawi), decided to wear hijab in 1979/1980 and was subsequently imprisoned in 1983, as one of the two women in infamous 'Sarajevo Process'[105]. Salihbeg was considered 'a prisoner of conscience' by Amnesty International in 1985 and, as per Amnesty's publication from the same year she, with others, was found guilty

> Of association for purposes of hostile activity" and of having performed "hostile and counter-revolutionary acts derived from Muslim nationalism". They received sentences ranging from five to fifteen years imprisonment. Ten of them have been adopted by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience (Amnesty International 1985[106])

---

[105] In April 1983, 13 Bosnian Muslim intellectuals, including Alija Izetbegovic (who will later became president of Bosnia), were charged under the section 133 for their beliefs and political writings.
[106] *Yugoslavia: Prisoners of Conscience*, Amnesty International 1985.
http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR48/020/1985/en Accessed on 12/04/2013

I had an opportunity to talk to Melika about her experiences, adopting the hijab during that time in Sarajevo and how her 'spiritual awakening' and inspired writings had serious impact on all aspects of her life. What she narrated to me can also be found on her biographical web page, she said that she was:

> exposed to extremely serious and continuous political oppression, which resulted in her being fired from her job with the Cultural Educational Association of Bosnia Herzegovina. Her literary-philosophic work was not to be published anymore, and she was shunned away from taking part in public art and intellectual life[107].

Although majority of the women I interviewed were probably too young (or not born) to remember 'Sarajevo Process' in any great detail, their parents and families would have witnessed this highly publicised and controversial ordeal. Many, including Melika herself, would argue that the manner in which this trial was played out on national media and TV channels gave way to both a climate of fear of Islam (by all three nationalities/ethnic groups) as well as the questioning of identity by Bosnian Muslims. Lovrenovic, a Bosnian Croat intellectual called it a 'Stalinist trial of 'Islamic Fundamentalists' imposed by Belgrade, as one in a series of similarly fabricated scandals. The real issue in the background was always the status of the state of Bosnia: the 'Islamic danger' served only as the ideological choreography' (1996). Melika Salihbeg was one of the two women in 'Sarajevo Process' and her images from the courtroom – the only woman with a hijab – stood out as a symbolic reminder to those who identified themselves as Muslims (if only in the ethnic sense) see Fig 4. Also, by adopting the hijab during that time and wearing it during the nationally publicised court case was seen as a provocation to (until then) the relatively unchallenged communist world-view vis-à-vis Islam.

---

[107] http://www.bosnawi.ba/ENG/?ID=25&cat=0&subCat=0 Accessed on 12/04/2013

Figure 4[108]. Melika Salihbeg Bosnawi during the Sarajevo Process in 1983.

Under such an anti-religious system, Muslim women were the ones who worked on maintenance of the religious identity. Closure of most *mektebs* and emphasis on secular education caused the decline of religious education. According to the official account of Bosnian Islamic Community body, *Rijaset*, 'the Islamic Community was completely destabilized in terms of personnel, *waqf's* [religious endowment[109]] property was unscrupulously nationalized and *maktabs* and *madrassahs* were closed down. Only Gazi Husrev-Beg's madrasah continued to work' (*The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina*[110]). As Cornelija Sorabji points out, this meant that the younger the person the less likely it was that she/he had any religious education (El-Solh & Mabro, 1994:108-127; Bringa, 1995:202). This applies to the majority of my participants' parents. Unlike Bosnian men, who had to obtain Communist party membership in order to be employed, women who were not employed in the public sector or women in rural areas did not have such a pressure. This 'pressure' was not just related to issues pertaining to employment, it permeated almost every aspect of Bosnian Muslim life, as already mentioned. It resulted in internalising the negative image of Islam and Islamic practices by Bosnian Muslims themselves, as described by one participant's statement of how her father reacted to her sister learning the Qur'an:

> When my sister was little…and my father does not even like to mention it
> now…he says it is his past…'please do not mention it'…but I think it would be
> useful for you to know this detail…she was two years old...just started to

---

[108] Taken from http://www.bosnjaci.net/foto/Proces_1983_Alija_Izetbegovic_Omer_Behmen.jpg; Accessed on 03/05/2013.
[109] 'n. an endowment made by a Muslim to a religious, educational, or charitable cause' from http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/waqf?q=waqf Accessed on 10/05/2013
[110] http://www.rijaset.ba/english/index.php/modules-menu/history Accessed on 10/05/2013

talk…my mum's mum taught her Surah al-Asr [a short Qur'anic verse]…grandmother then told her to go to her father and recite it for him…when dad heard it, his reaction was: 'Nan, do not teach those stupid things to my children'…that describes the state before the war…

While Nur talked about how her mother's practicing background became abandoned because of her marriage to Nur's father:

Father was not religious. Mother was from a religious family but when she married my father she stopped practicing…

Nur's statement demonstrates the strong patriarchal structures that still existed (in spite of the claims of gender equality) in communist Bosnian family life and that their impact extended onto the religious behaviour of women too and, as Hunt says, 'the socialist values of gender equality did not cross the home threshold, except to provide working mothers with generous maternity leaves at full pay' (2004).

Bosnian Muslim women, in their homes, became the main maintainers of religious practices. During the communist era in Yugoslavia, there was 'a huge gap' between urban and rural women; 'in 1981 Yugoslavia had one of the highest rates of university-educated women in the world' (Hunt, 2004). In urban areas, Muslim women were encouraged to gain a secular education; hence many of them attended universities. However, in rural areas, girls usually stopped their education at the age of 14 to 16 and about 17% of them were illiterate (ibid); however there were some who carried on with education. Bosnian Muslims women appreciated the value of education in general, and they understood it to be a part of Islam, but for simple economic reasons (usually lack of finances or the need for extra help in the case of villages) not everybody (men or women) was able to pursue further education (Sorabji, 1994). Some Muslim women, especially those active in the Communist party developed a completely anti-religious stance. For the majority, however, the pressures of social environment resulted in the re-shifting of identities whereby they almost had 'double' identities: private – which maintained the Muslim identity, and public – which responded to the demands of secular, atheist society. Rather than being mutually exclusive, these identities were

negotiated between each other and made up what it meant to be a Bosnian Muslim during the SFRY.

However, even in this anti-religious time of socialism, when there were continuous efforts to keep Islamic influences out of the sphere of identity of Bosnian Muslims, the expression of religious identity was integrated in the expression of cultural (non-religious) identity of Bosnian Muslims. During the same period, women were the ones who maintained and practised religious rituals, and as Bringa points out they had a 'pivotal role in the construction and maintenance of the collective Muslim identity anchored in Islam' (1995:10). In this way, religious identity in Bosnia became an integral part of Muslim cultural (secular) identity (Bringa, 1995). I will now discuss how these 'private' identities of female family members, in particular, influenced the development of my participants' sense of Muslim identity.

Gendered Influences in Bosnia: Mothers and Grandmothers

The family life experienced by my research participants is quite typical of Bosnia. As explained in previous section, the socialist state encouraged the education and employment of women. Also, during the early 1980s, the country, then part of SFRJ, was under extreme economic strain, which meant that in order to keep up with the general cost of living and survive both parents needed and were generally expected to be employed especially in the cities. Because of the lifestyle and expectations, the life in rural areas was quite different. For the purpose of this research, I focus only on urban lifestyles as all of the research participants grew up in either the capital city or another town/city in Bosnia and later moved to Sarajevo.

The traditional family/traditional (patriarchal) roles did not disappear under the influence of the socialist egalitarian slogans as it was claimed hence the patriarchal family model did not give way to the 'modern family' where all the members of the family have the equal rights and responsibilities. However, it is important to stress that during socialism, women did gain better access to education and that parental support in this respect was greater. Based on the evidence, the deciding factors of the increase of

parental support for female education were strong patriarchal traditions infused with religious understandings; where the importance of motherhood and marriage was emphasised as well as the traditional male and female roles. Hence, women's choice of professions and type of education reflected this.

The way that the majority of my research participants talked about their understandings of gender roles demonstrates that the traditional patriarchal norms still play an important part. What is new and different from their parents' understanding is an additional dimension in this gender role matrix – Islam – or, more accurately, *their* own understanding and knowledge of Islam as Muba said:

> Only in those families where there is an open discussion [emphasis] about Islam...if there is an Islamic understanding...there you can find...that he [meaning a husband/potential partner] has the same [knowledge] as she [wife] does...only in those families...but how many families are like that?...how many families who discuss and self-manage things like that?...

In the majority of cases, if there was a suitable employment, women would go out to work and also be in charge of most (if not all) duties within the household. Bringing up, educating and caring for children was still considered to be the domain of the woman and the majority of my research participants seemed to have adopted this view. This was clearly demonstrated by Muba, who also talked about education, family life and childcare:

> A woman [Muslim] has to be educated...but she does not have to work...she can, if she chooses to, dedicate herself to the family life...there is a say...'If you want to have a well brought up child, you need to do that 20 years before she/he is born'...so...so...the aim should be a strong family...here [in Bosnia] the problem is with family...

Jenna, also a professional, talked about the relationship between woman's education, career and family. For her, the main purpose of gaining education is the ability to transfer and share knowledge with one's child(ren):

yes...the career is connected to the education...but...I think...education is not only important because of the career...we talked about this once [at the study circle]...that education is important so that you can give the answers to your child...so that the child is not brought up by others...he/she does not need to go and ask the school teacher...who is going to give her/him some answers...and when the child asks you...you don't know...that is why the education is important...primarily because of the family...because of your children...then, of course, because of yourself and your own career...

In socialist Bosnia, if children were under school age (below 6 and a half), they would either be at nurseries or, more often, in care of grandparents, specifically, grandmothers. This was due to the very limited number of places available for children at nurseries and related costs but more so to do with the notion of extended family. It was a common practice that a newly married couple would live with bridegroom's family for at least first few months of their married life. This tradition was considered to be a sign of respect for the family that the newly married woman was 'joining'. Although sometimes it was done because the couple did not have an alternative place to stay and staying with groom's/bride's parents provided a temporary base and lesser strain on finances. Therefore, in most cases, the couple would be part of an extended family from the very start of their married life. This relationship between the family members would develop even further with the birth of the children. It is a tradition in Bosnia that the women of the family (primarily mothers) lend a helping hand during the months of the pregnancy and after the baby is born. When the mother returned to work, the grandchildren were left in care of grandparents. Of course, there were instances where grandparents were not present or able to look after grandchildren but those cases were rare. If living apart, the family members gather (usually in parental home) on a weekly basis. The parents and grandparents were expected to be taken care of and visited regularly and leaving them in the care homes was considered a taboo as the community considered that to be the last resort. In this way, the relationship between parents, children, grandparents and grandchildren was a close one where the grandparents look after the grandchildren and, later on this was expected to be reciprocated through children/grandchildren look after parents/grandparents. Although this traditional view of family life in Bosnia has

changed over the time, as far as participants in this research are concerned, it was the norm whilst they were growing up – even if some did not experience it directly – this model of family life would have been presented as typical. Because of the close relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren developing over a long period of time, grandparents had a lot of influence over a child's development and therefore their core identity. Grandmothers were the ones who encouraged the religious education and religious rituals (like praying and fasting). The influences of grandmothers were stressed as important by 6 out of 10 women I interviewed in Bosnia. In addition to their role of trusted and loving carers, women talked about the way Islam and Islamic practices were presented to them by their grandmothers. For example Jenna said:

> As far as I am concerned…my parents did not have any influence on me…but, yes, from my grandmothers ... I knew one is supposed to pray… but only during the Ramadan (month of fasting)…that is how I understood it…that is how we were taught …

In another instance, Nela talks about being encouraged to perform obligatory prayers by her grandmother:

> On mother's side of the family grandmother was a pillar [in terms of religious practice]…grandmother's father was a well-known religious scholar in that part of Herzegovina. And there was always the sense of being a Muslim although it was not said aloud: 'you are a Muslim'…It was just the way we lived…
> That is the way my mother grew up…Grandmother was always reminding her kids to perform the prayers…It was very important to her…when we came along…there was 17 of us…grandchildren…
> And my grandmother did not find it hard to ask each of us individually if we have preformed our prayers…so since I was really little…I knew how to pray, I was going to tarawih [long evening prayers during the month of Ramadan (month of fasting)], I was fasting…

Similarly, one of the Bosnian respondents in Hunt's paper also talks about grandmother's role not only as a form of religious teacher within their own families but

also as ambassadors of faith for the wider community – Bosnian Serbs and Croats – in communist led pre-war Bosnia:

> We loved the differences among us. My friends came to my grandmother's during Ramadan and participated in our religious traditions (2004).

Ever since the Austro-Hungarian arrival in 1878 until just before the 1992 war, the Muslim community in Bosnia had assumed a more defensive mode. There were very few Muslim religious schools in Bosnia which were teaching elementary Islamic knowledge. Because of this, it was usually the grandmothers who became the maintainers of initial (childhood) religious education. Half of the participants reported going to the religious classes (*mekteb*) during the war and just after the war. Hana said:

> Yes…I had a very stable life…It was all normal…childhood, school, secondary school, friends…you knew exactly who was where…I had friends both Muslims and non-Muslims…but I was always aware of my religious identity…my dad always used to say that it is ok to have friends but not a boyfriend…it came naturally…they [parents] did not have to persuade me too much…it felt right…I loved going to *mekteb* [religious primary education]…I always used to get the prizes…I was one of the best pupils…I was dreaming of going to *medresa* [Islamic secondary school]…

Medresa in Bosnian context, and as mentioned here by Hana has a quite different meaning from the meaning of *madresa* for the UK participants, which I discuss later. I purposefully used different spelling to signify the distinction between the two. In both countries they are pronounced similarly as they stem from the Arabic word for an educational institution hence, in many Arabic speaking countries this word is used for any type of educational institution, be it of a secular or religious nature, similar to the word 'school' in English. The word '*madresa*' has a Semitic root '*D-R-S'* which means 'to learn' or 'to study'. In Bosnia, it signifies higher education institutions attended after finishing an eight year elementary school at 14. Over hundreds of years of their existence (some dating back to 15th century) in the major cities of Bosnia, they are well established for very high educational standards and difficult admission policies. They are historical as well as prestigious educational institutions attended by a great number

of Bosnian Muslim scholars in the past and present. An example of such a medresa is, the above mentioned Gazi Husrev-Beg's Medresa, established in 1537, in the heart of old town in Sarajevo. It is a place that I am very familiar with and one of the main tourist attractions of the city. During my field work, I often used its location as a meeting point and interviewed two of my research participants in the comfortable and welcoming courtyard of the mosque attached (which is also one of the main tourist attractions). The open door system of both Gazi Husrev-Beg's Medresa as well as the mosque, with their cooling fresh water fountains and deep shade provided by the courtyard trees and plants, offered a tranquil and women/children friendly space irrespective of the ethnic and religious background. Women would come to offer their prayers, to meet friends or simply to have a rest or drink of water. To illustrate please see Fig. 5, it is a photo I took during the Ramadan, when the number of women attending a night prayer (*tarawih*) exceeded the number of men so greatly that the actual courtyard needed to be used as an extra space.

Figure 5. Women offering the night prayers during Ramadan at the Courtyard of Gazi Husrev-Beg mosque, Sarajevo.

In summary, *Medresas* in Bosnia are generally considered in a positive light by the women who manage to study there, by those who aspire to study there and also by those who just simply wish to visit them as cultural or historic sites. Later in this chapter, I demonstrate how this general perception, as well as level and type of education offered, marks them as almost completely different to *madresas* that my UK research participants are familiar with and hence the two should not be confused. The family involvement and understanding of *madresas* is in the context of preserving cultural and

126

religious identity, whereby they were considered to be an extension of 'home country's' traditions. Parents nostalgically try to hold on to this imaginary extension in an often hostile and challenging UK environment. This further differentiates Bosnian Medresas from those described by women in the UK. Also, while the UK mosques have, over the time become more open and welcoming to women, at the time my participants attended them (if their particular madresa was an integral part of their local mosque) they were understood to be 'masculine spaces' (Hopkins, 2007:194) where women were not particularly wanted.

Two women who mentioned that their families practiced Islamic rituals were very aware that this was an exception in communist and socialist Bosnia and that their families needed to be careful not to show or express their religiosity publicly. One of such women was Hana, who talked about her family: 'Yes, mother and father always prayed…and they taught me to be a good Muslim…' Hana's experience is quite unusual when compared to other research participants' experiences of religious practices within the family environment. All other interviewed women in Bosnia talked about the lack of any religious practices in their daily life with neither parents practicing all five pillars of Islam. The practice, if present at all, was mostly sporadic and there was no explicit spiritual meaning given to it as Muba explained:

> Yes…mother would occasionally…when she was upset about something…take prayer beads…I knew that she was upset when she had prayer beads in her hands but it was just that, I did not really ask or understand why…

Asa also talked about how nobody in her family observed Ramadan or prayed. For her, as for the majority of Bosnians, regardless of ethnic background, the most important and holidays during the year were secular: New Year celebrations and 1st of May – International Workers' Day – which was a national holiday. She said:

> Ramadan? – forget it! I did not have a clue what that is! I was always thinking of Christmas tree that we would put out, five days before the New Year celebrations. We would invite family and friends…people were drinking [alcohol]

Even the Christmas tree practice and decorations did not have any religious meaning at, most of the people were actually unaware of any connection with Christianity and would be decorating it for the New Year, as Christmases (Orthodox or Catholic) were not public holidays or publicly celebrated. During communism, the majority of Boshnyaks (Bosnian Muslims) gradually lost and stopped most of the Muslim religious practices: their daily lives, celebrations, dietary requirements, language, greetings were no different to the other two ethnic groups in Bosnia. Because of the communist legacy, the majority of participants' parents were not practicing Muslims. There are quite few similarities here with Islam in USSR and to some extent Turkey. For example, Tokhtakhodjaeva talks about the lack of spirituality within Uzbek family life during the communism in USSR where both the propaganda of 'primacy of society over the individual' and 'aggressive' state atheism played an important part, she says:

> the fact that all but material interests had been squeezed out of family life meant that the family gradually lost its function as an institution involved in spiritual upbringing…Large numbers of women were drawn into the structures of the shadow economy, impacting on the family in an unexpected way…many of these women, who were traditionally responsible for bringing the first elements of spirituality into their children's upbringing in the patriarchal family, became the source of a destructive lack of spirituality (1995:93-94).

Almasa, who lives in Sarajevo, described this well:

> Ok. First, I come from the family that was Muslim only by name…at least from the father's generation…father's family…parents were religious, but he lost his parents early in the childhood…he was raised by his older sister…and religiousness was gone…they blended in with the local Serbs…they lived on the border with Serbia…and that had a big influence…to the extent that they forgot that they were Muslims…

The phrase 'only by name' is often used by Bosnian Muslims to describe someone who does not practice Islam at all; it signifies ethnic belonging but not a religious one and, similarly to Ridd's observation of South African Malay community, a born Bosnian

Muslim who did not practice the religion did not cease to be a member of the community (1994:95). The lack of any religious knowledge within her family context was described by one of my research participants – Nur – whose initial information about Islam came from religious education lessons in primary school, where all of the major religions are taught:

> Only in primary school, in the last two years, as part of religious studies…you learn about religions…Only then did I figure out that one needs to pray 5 times a day…since then I started to pray… that was just after the war….maybe 1996/1997...around that time…but it was not as easy…I often felt shy to pray in front of my family…but, thank to God…I continued to pray…they just took it like it is just a phase…they never prevented me…but they never encouraged me either…nothing special….on many occasions father told me: 'come on, you don't have to do every prayer' [laughs] ….he still says it…So everything I learned by myself and from the religious studies…my parents never sent me to *mekteb*…they were not like that…

Nur's father's discouragement of her performing five daily prayers stems not only from communist/socialist induced and internalized aversion to Islam but also from cultural expectations of younger women. However, this cultural understanding is also influenced by parents' anti-religious especially anti-Islamic attitudes inherited from communism: it was acceptable for a woman beyond working age (over 60) to be spiritual or religious while a younger woman was supposed to be 'enjoying her life' and not wasting her time on religious rituals. As pointed by Sorabji in her study of women's *mevluds* (ritual celebrations) in Bosnia (just before the war), 'what is appropriate to a *zena* (woman/wife) is not necessarily appropriate to a *cura* (unmarried girl)' (1994:115); unmarried women are not supposed to be overly religious according to the cultural understanding of Islamic rites. They are encouraged and 'expected' to spend time having fun and socialising while married women, because of their 'unavailability', can spend more time performing religious rituals. This cultural understanding is not specific to Bosnian Muslims, other two religious groups – Catholics and Orthodox Christians –

share the same understanding. Hence the practice of religious rites, if ever acceptable, was age and gender specific.

Family and Muslim Identity in the UK

The UK's participants are part of second or, for two of them, third generation of immigrants and the majority (eight out of ten) talked about their parents arriving to the UK either from Pakistan or Bangladesh in 1960s and 1970s. The women did not talk about details of immigration or parents lives when they newly arrived to the UK, however, that must have had an important influence on the way the way parents perceived and practiced both their family life as well as the religious life.

All of my research participants were born and brought up in London or one of the other main UK cities and are mostly educated at a post-graduate level (7 out of 10). This is important to note since the majority of participants' families migrated to the UK from the rural parts of Pakistan, Bangladesh and North Africa and, while their parents had very basic educations (not higher than secondary level; some did say that their mothers were near to illiterate when they migrated to the UK), only one participant from the UK has a mother who is educated to university level. The majority come from working-class family backgrounds where fathers usually went out for work while mothers stayed at home, concerned with the majority of homemaking tasks. However, on the whole, a detailed analysis of the cultural, practical and economic reasons that influenced this family set up in the UK is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Educational achievements of the women I interviewed do not fall within Muhammad's (2005) conclusion which states that 'the level of education of parents' and class seem to be 'key factors' in determining the level of educational achievements of daughters. It might be the case that only as far as my research participants are concerned, women succeeded against the odds and defied multiple barriers or possible pre-determining factors such as family background, class, racial/religious prejudices and family cultural understandings. Accordingly, I can extrapolate Brah's findings in regards to employment (1996:142) and say that, based on the level of education of my UK participants, that the rural origin of their parents and a lack of (higher) parental

education was neither determining nor deterring factor in the education of their daughters.

Nat's account describes the relationship between religion and culture that the majority of women in the UK talked about:

> The household that I come from is really culturally based...the principals came from...they came from my mum and dad's background...they, they are originally from Pakistan...so a lot of the culture...the way they think ties up with the way they've been brought up...when they came over here...they sort of stuck with those values and those principles and stuff...and then...as I was growing up I did not have an Islamic influence...I mean we did the main stuff like fasting and praying...but it was more cultural...yeah...it was about tradition...it gets confused...it was about people...it was about society...it wasn't really about the religion...

Like Nat, the majority of the women I interviewed talked about the importance of cultural aspects of their family life and the way it influenced their early perceptions and understanding of Islam. As pointed out by Kandiyoti, 'women are also considered to be the custodians of cultural particularisms by virtue of being less assimilated, both culturally and linguistically, into the wider society. Immigrant women reproduce their culture through the continued use of their native language, the persistence of culinary and other habits, and the socialisation of the young' (1991:435). Tariq Ramadan argues how Islam was presented within the immigrant family context:

> by means of a whole series of rules, interdictions or prohibitions, rulings which explain Islam within the framework of a specific relation of protection from an environment which is perceived as too permissive or even hostile. This was mainly, the attitude of the first generation whose members, with a weak knowledge of Islam, sought first to protect themselves from the loss of their traditions (1999:3).

One of the oft repeated phrases that research participants related to their parents when asked about religious practices was 'it's just how we do things'. All of the research

participants from the UK understood this 'how we do things' to be quite distanced from their own understanding of Islam, the one they came to discover independently of their families'. Raz's response exemplifies this well:

> It came from the family....my mother...the main parts...you know...we fasted during Ramadan...dad went to the mosque...it was more like – this is it - how we do things...did not really question it much

Zar talked about how her parents' approach to Islamic morals and practices influenced her:

> Dad taught me the basics…how to pray…always reminded me of prayer times, and asked me to pray…but mum…mum was more about Islamic morals…how to behave…how to be a good person…and she was also more focused on spiritual side of things…when I was bullied at primary school, she said that Islam says not to retaliate…not to use bad or offensive language…She would always say 'that is not how a good Muslim should behave'…that always stuck with me…

For Sam it was her mother who influenced her attitude towards the basic Islamic rituals:

> Yes...Mum is the one who gave me the basics...I saw her reading her *namaz* [Urdu/Persian for obligatory prayers]...dad was somewhere there too [chuckles]…I mean, I saw him pray but spending more time with mum had a greater impact on me in that respect I suppose…

Mona, as many other women I interviewed in the UK, talked positively about the religious rites which involved all family members:

> I grew up watching my parents pray and fast but I did not understand it much…it was not really ever explained…exactly why…it was just what we need to 'do' because we are Muslim…I really did not think of it much as a child…I did enjoy Ramadan time when all members of the family would gather…that always felt like a special time…

132

Just like for some of the women from Bosnia, whose family members observed Ramadan, for Mona and other women I interviewed in the UK, Ramadan, as a sacred practice, had multiple meanings. Using the same phrase as Mona, Morgan makes this observation in a chapter called 'Time, Space and Family Practice':

> It was seen as a special time for the practice of religion, as an opportunity to link to kin and community and defined a sense of wider Islamic world. It also could be linked to the growing maturity of children as they were seen to be 'old enough' to participate fully in the periods of fasting (2011:78).

In both cases – Bosnia and the UK – where religion was present during the childhood, it was done in such a way where everyday parenting (or grand-parenting in Bosnian case) practices was linked with elements of an ethnic, cultural and religious identity. As pointed out by Bartkowski, it has been shown that religion enhances the parent-child bond and that religion and spirituality are meaningful to many children (2007:517). Raz, one of the UK participants whose parents came from Pakistan, described just how listening to her mother reciting Qur'an from her bedroom made her feel:

> I remember…I must have been very young…don't think I even started going to school…mum would often recite Qur'an downstairs…and she would stop as soon as one of us [children] would appear…it really made me feel peaceful and calm…it was really comforting…

Parents, usually mothers, also arranged the religious classes with the local imam and this would include the other children from the neighbourhood or family. This type of education is called '*madrasa*', especially within Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. *Madrasa* are supplementary classes, usually held at the local mosque although two of my research participants talked about attending the classes at imam's home and at their local community centre. For my participants, the attendance varied from going most of the days of the week to only once or two times during the week. Afshar relates Parker- Jenkins finding from 1991 which claims that 90 percent of Muslim children in the UK 'at some time or another' attend *madrasa*s and 'most do not stay long or learn much while they are there' (1998:119). As pointed out in Joly's paper

and confirmed by my research participants, children are 'simply taught to decipher the Qur'an' without paying much attention to understanding; hence learning the Qur'an and some basic Islamic education were the main objectives (1987:15). The imams were mostly from South Asia and usually spoke very little English and since the Qur'an is written in classical Arabic the majority of my research participants described the whole experience as 'linguistically confusing': while imams knew Quran and Arabic well, their understanding and pronunciation of Arabic was heavily influenced by either Urdu or Bengali, depending on where they originated from. This education was described by my participants as very traditional as it focused on memorising by heart without questioning or detailed explanation. Raz described the setting of her madressa:

> There would be a van…we [children] used to call it 'mosque van'…that would come to pick all the kids from the street and take us to the madresa…the place was a room in an old community centre…we would sit in a U-shape arrangement, there were wooden benches…with a *qari* [teacher] in front of us…he was from Pakistan and only spoke Urdu or Punjabi…he always had a cane…for disciplining those of us who didn't behave well…

This was also noted by Jacobson in her study where she goes further and says that 'the teachers are often authoritarian' and that they 'frequently use corporal punishment' (1998: 112). In fact, all of the participants who mentioned *madrasa* talked about their experiences in a negative light and some did mention experiences which would amount to an abuse however they asked for that to be left out of my analysis. Mona talked about her experience:

> I went to *madrasa* at first every weekend and later it was more often…I really did not like it there…I don't feel like I've got anything from it really…

Raz's memory of attending *madrasa* is one of 'bad feeling':

> Mum arranged it… for me to attend the *madrasa*…all the kids from the neighbourhood went…I hated it! We were thought how to read the Qur'an by this imam who was very strict…I never connect that experience with my Muslim identity…I have no connection, just a bad feeling…I spoke to my parents about

it…told them I don't like it…they still insisted that I should go…but after few times…they realised that it made me unhappy and that I did not want to engage with any Islamic rituals [at home] as I did before…before attending…I used to love praying with my mum…she would sit with me, on the prayer mat even when she could not pray herself [menstruating women are not required to perform five obligatory prayers]…anyway…mum realised that going to *madrasa* was actually putting me off Islam and I stopped going…

Considering that the women I interviewed would have attended *madrasas* between late 1980 to early 2000s, I find that Joly's study from 1987 on Birmingham's Muslim community provides a good base to understanding of my participants' experiences with *madrasas* and, more generally, the way they related to their parents' view of Islam. For Raz's mother, as for the parents of other British participants, the main concern was to ensure that Raz is 'not lost to Islam' (Joly, 1987) and by enrolling her to *madrasa*, her mother's motives were probably focused around concern for providing a cultural and religious continuity in a constantly challenging environment where everything about one's identity and community is questioned and often attacked.

It is important to emphasise that all of the research participants in the UK talked about *madrasa* experiences negatively. Their deeper knowledge and understanding of Islam came usually as a result of personal study and self searching while the basic practices were already present within family context. The family influence was always mentioned and talked about but the focus was always that the majority of family religious practices were influenced by culturally specific understandings of Islam. In some way, any knowledge gained in *madrasa* was an unpleasant addition of that understanding. This is very different from the experiences of *mektebs* that Bosnian women talked about. Half of the interviewed women talked about going to *mekteb* during and alongside to their primary school education. *Mektebs* in Bosnia are organised by centralised Islamic community – *Rijaset* which on their official website states:

Mektebs education can be conducted by the muallim/a (either male or female teacher) with: at least secondary religious education (completed *Medresa*), or higher education (higher *Medresa* and Islamic pedagogy degree/teacher training)

or University degree (those who completed *Medresa* and Islamic Theology degree, primarily a degree in Islamic Studies, with specialising imams and theology).[111]

Mektebs are highly organised, planned and regulated and they are tailored to mirror children's primary education in their approach to learning: holidays, lesson plans, termed reports and also daily 'diary' where, on each attendance, the observations about each child's progress is made. Additionally, there are regular exams, grading system, regional competitions and prises/certificates; everything is planned and structured centrally even the minimum size requirements (44-55 sq meters) and equipment needed for the room where the classes take place is specified and regulated. This illustrates the system of primary religious education that has developed over hundreds of years with understanding of both traditional and modern pedagogical practices. The women who attended *mektebs* during any part of their childhood related a positive experience which is very different from the experiences of the women in UK *madresas*. Muba, a woman in her twenties, talked about her eagerness to attend *mekteb* classes during the most difficult part of the 1990s war:

> when we were little we went to mekteb…Sanja, it was in the war…grenades all around us…and we [children] would run to mekteb…as there were also snipers…that was a special connection…mum used to say to us that we don't need to go…or to go when it's quieter… possibly it [experience] stayed with us…somewhere, person takes those roots…

It is in this context, given the pivotal position of women in the relation to the community, that the women's identities are often utilised for different political, economic and cultural aims.

In both cases (Bosnia and in the UK), Anderson's discussion of the concept of national identity of 'imagined communities' can be applied. Anderson argues that nationalism should be considered as analogous to kinship and religion (1991). In this context, where

---

[111] Taken from the Mekteb Regulations, Part IV, Article 8.
http://www.rijaset.ba/mekteb/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4:pravilnik-o-mektebima-i-mektebskoj-nastavi&catid=19&Itemid=149 Accessed on 10/05/2013

nation is representing a sort of 'big family' or, indeed religious entity, it is believed that women assume roles of carriers of traditions and symbols of group where 'appropriate models of womanhood are to be found in scripture'. Elma, a woman from Bosnia, talked about this:

> I think that the state that women are at the moment...women need to take the responsibility for it...they want career, work...this and that...but...simply...in all those attempts to be the same as men...they lose their own true essence...they lose the sense of their own worth and their own rights...

Elma's notion of women's 'true essence' is further qualified by her understanding of importance of mother role:

> Mother...that is the best career that exists for a woman... the best, the most exhausting, the most beautiful, the most sensible, the most protective [laughs as making up a word for it in Bosnian]...yes…we are witnessing a birth of a new Bosnian word [laughs]...

In fact, Elma's high esteem for motherhood is quite common in both Bosnia and the UK. For Muslims, the importance and value of mothers'/grandmothers' care is interwoven with the understanding of status of mothers as found in Qur'anic and Hadiths (Prophetic narrations) textual reference. This verse from the Qur'an clearly demonstrates how Islam, a strongly monotheistic religion, contextualises 'goodness' to parents by giving it as important position as believing in one God:

> Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him; and that you be good to your parents. If one of them or both reach old age in your life, do not say to them a word of the faintest complaint or disrespect, nor shout at them; but address them in terms of honour (17:23)

While both parents are to be respected and treated with outmost kindness and care, both the Qur'an and Hadith privilege mother's role over one of father's. This Hadith is deemed important and is often repeated within Muslim communities and families; it is

also a Hadith that becomes an important empowerment tool once a Muslim woman becomes a mother:

> A man came to the Prophet and said, 'O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship? The Prophet said: Your mother. The man said, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man further asked, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man asked again, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your father. (both in Bukhari 5625 and in Muslim 139)[112]

Furthermore, the Qur'an states: 'We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents; in pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth' (46:15) while one of the Hadith states:

> The Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) said: Your Heaven lies under the feet of your mother (Ahmad, Nasai).

Qur'an also states: 'And We have enjoined on man [meaning human] to be dutiful and good to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship upon weakness and hardship. The duration of carrying him (in the womb) and weaning is two years. So thank Me [God] and to your parents; unto Me is the final destination' (31:14). The Qur'an and Hadiths acknowledge the hardships and challenges of motherhood and in that sense mothers have a greater right – three times the rights of that of a father – due to the experiences during the various stages of child's life from pregnancy and delivery to nursing and raising the child. With gratefulness and worship to God mentioned within the same verse, the above Qur'anic verses are understood as the basic Islamic teachings – being grateful, respectful and loving to parents – and are very important part of practising Islam. In traditional Islamic scholarship, women and family are considered to be the foundations of community; they are at the heart of Muslim society. However, it should be noted, that, in Islam, the status of women does not suddenly 'become exalted' according to the need(s) of the community; their roles as human beings, mothers, wives,

---

[112] Sahih Al-*Bukhari* and Sahih *Muslim* are books containing collections of Prophet Muhammad's traditions. They are considered as primary sources of Islamic teachings and practice second only to Qur'an. Ahmad and Nasai are further two collections of Hadiths.

daughters and sisters, as stated in the Qur'an and Sunnah, are praised and valued regardless of the time and external factors (economy, politics etc). In other words, their Islamic rights are permanently granted. Islam, therefore understands the significance of s woman's agency in the development of religion and a religious identity, however it never reduces her to be a mere tool; her role is fully appreciated and will be rewarded in the Hereafter.

Muslims believe that there is wisdom behind each circumstance or event in the past, present and future and the Qur'an says: 'God is the Greatest of planners' (8:30). Since God chose Khadija to be first convert, and Summeya to be a first martyr; Islam makes it very clear as to the importance of the role of women in establishing identity based on Islamic faith. As well as being the key source of their identity, the wisdom of Islamic teaching has profound liberating effect on the women as one of the Bosnian research participants, Jenna, said:

> that ['liberating effect'] is the result of women not knowing their rights [within Islam]...here in Bosnia...an average housewife...all her life works...nobody sees her or hears her..she does not have time to discuss the issues...or solve problems...

However, one cannot deny that the majority of Muslim societies in the past and present curtail(ed) the rights given to women by Islam fourteen centuries ago. In most cases, the deteriorating status of women is caused by the effect of dominating social customs. For example: the arrangement of marriage without consent of the woman, prohibition of education, prohibition of employment, prohibition to vote, etc. For the mothers of my research participants in both communities – Bosnia and the UK – because of different reasons this was also true. Although education and involvement in public life increased, the patriarchal family norms and socially acceptable understandings remained the determining factors of what is acceptable or not for a woman in communist Bosnia and, later, in war and post-war Bosnia. The women in the UK, those who immigrated as the young women from Muslim societies, 'were less influenced by conditions outside the household and involved in the socialization of their children' (Khan, 1976:229) and, as a result, remained more traditional than the men. Their daughters (my research

participants) were considered to be 'more vulnerable in British society' and described by Muslim leaders of the time as:

> the mothers of tomorrow: they will be the ones who transmit a proper Muslim way of life and values to children to come, as their prime responsibility is to be the upbringing of the family. Hence their crucial importance. They could jeopardise the whole family structure if they did not conform. As culture intertwines with religion the whole family honour ("izzat") can be thrown into disrepute by a daughter's behaviour (Joly, 1987:17).

The majority of women I interviewed in the UK understood that the fundamental factor that influenced their parents' view of life was the concept, or an ideal, of kingship brought from their homeland where the rights and duties exist in a complex network and extend from the immediate family to the extended family and where '[H]e, or she, is not an individual agent acting on his own behalf but exists only in relation to family and kin' (Khan, 1976:225). Although Khan dealt with Pakistani British community, this particular statement can also apply to the participants in Bosnia where the needs of family often take precedence over the needs or wants of an individual and more so if that individual happens to be female. This notion that women are the 'guardians' of faith and/or tradition (Tett, 1994; Khan, 1976) has also been discussed by Valentine Moghadam who argues that when the group identity becomes 'intensified', importance of women is raised as they become the 'symbol' of community. Moreover, in those circumstances, according to Moghadam, women become duty-bound in their role of the reproduction of the group, whereby the positions of motherhood and wifehood become 'exalted' and 'fetishized' while, at the same time, issues of honour or shame 'become overlaid with highly emotive cultural and ethnic meanings' (Tett, 1994:138). However, the women I interviewed, in both countries, have managed to negotiate and rebel against this complex interplay of various structures and factors and forge their own understandings and identities by using Islam.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the role of family to the religious identity of the women I interviewed in Bosnia and the UK. The differences in the ways families shaped participants' understanding of Islam are mainly due to different socio-historical factors that shaped their families' understanding of Islam. These factors had an enormous impact on how they perceived Islam and its rites and how, in turn, this was communicated to their daughters. In Bosnia, it was the strong influence of an atheist communist legacy and parents' (or families') which internalised fear/dislike of Islam. During the communist period Islam, was considered as a backward religion where anything, no matter how trivial or small, seen to be as 'practicing' Islam was viewed and met with condemnation. Basic, early religious education was mostly absent in Bosnian women's childhood because of communist views, as the majority of *mektebs* were abolished by the state until just before the war (from 1989). *Mektebs* became active during the war and began functioning properly after the war to the present, offering a highly structured religious education to children of primary school age. While there are now numerous mektebs across Bosnia, this was not so when my research participants were of attending age and half of them reported of attending a mekteb at some point during or just after the war. Bosnian participants' parents mostly had a non-religious outlook on life before 1992-1996 war where the primary focus was, especially in urban areas, attaining education and a career. At least one of parents of the women I interviewed was highly educated and both parents, to various degrees, were focused on their careers during their daughters' childhood. Therefore, parents' perception of Islam in Bosnia was informed by socialist ideals, parents wanting their daughters to follow the suit and be focused on their education and careers; practicing of religion, in most of the cases, was seen as a 'blocking factor' (*kočnica*) in achieving these. Because the majority of the women I interviewed in Bosnia had strong connection to their paternal or maternal grandmothers (they were often their caregivers while mothers were at work), their earliest memories or connections to Islam, if present at all, came from the grandmothers.

Context in the UK is mostly informed by parents' experiences of immigration and settling in a completely new environment which was often hostile to their own cultural traditions. Religion was, in that sense, considered to be an important part of preserving cultural identity and family traditions which were rooted in the same culture. As the majority of my UK participants were women whose parents immigrated either from Pakistan or Bangladesh, the cultural traditions from those two countries were most prominent in parents' understanding and practice of Islam and the ways it was conveyed to their daughters. In fact, all of the women I interviewed, clearly expressed the distinction between their own understanding and their parents 'cultural understanding' of Islam. In the case of Bosnian women, the culture was not explicitly mentioned however certain cultural traits, specific to 'Bosnian way of life', were mentioned. The patriarchal family system, within both communities, influenced the way religion is understood and practiced. For Bosnian women, patriarchy was infused with anti-religious communist and socialist attitudes and for the women in the UK, it related to the homeland culture. In both communities, the initial, out-of home religious education was initiated and organised by parents but there are huge differences between Bosnia and the UK in the way these classes were arranged and structured. In Bosnia, parents of the women who attended *mektebs*, might have been encouraging such education initially but, according to them, it was more to do with daughters wanting to attend. For instance, one of the women I interviewed described insisting on attending her classes in the underground shelter even during the war, while shelling was at its hardest in Sarajevo. Also the level of education of mekteb teachers – both religious and non-religious – needed to be quite substantial in Bosnian case. Women in the UK did not enjoy the same level of education in *madresas* and their parents were more insistent on daughters' attending; women were usually taught by a teacher who was either from Pakistan or Bangladesh and did not speak much English. All of the women mentioned generally negative experiences in the *madresas* that they attended, without any religious meaning. The meaning and importance of *madresas* given by women's parents in the UK was more to do with sense of preserving their homeland cultural identity than just simply gaining a religious knowledge.

One of the main similarities between the two groups of women is an understanding of the importance of presence or absence of religion (and religious practices) in the family life during their childhood or early adolescence to their current perception of own religious identity. Considering the chronological order of the dominant themes of their responses to my open ended initial question about their Muslim identity, in all cases (with only one exception), in both countries, women started by narrating about their family's religious practices and background (or lack of the same). In this sense, while my research participants expressed the understanding of the importance of their families' input and influence on their religious identity, what emerged later on during the interviews, is that the sense of their Muslim identity is mostly shaped by their own respective and independent spiritual or educational journeys. These understandings were often in opposition to their parents' understanding of Islam or what it means to be a Muslim woman in Bosnia or the UK. The religious practices, symbols and meanings that the women I interviewed chose to adopt during their religious development and independent of their families, are usually met with opposition from parents (and other family members) and need to be skilfully negotiated especially if still sharing the same living space or being financially dependent on their parents' help. Nowhere does this tension become more serious and prominent than when the visibility of this, almost independent and achieved character (Parsons, 1951) of religious identity becomes an issue. This is well illustrated by the topic of my next chapter (Chapter Four) – hijab – in which I discuss the meanings of this religious symbol of clothing for participants' understanding of their Muslim identity and how negotiating the same and using this visible marker to do so, is often quite challenging and met with contempt by their families as well as the respective societies they live in. Also, because of the lack of family support in most of the cases, women often seek to find spaces where their achieved religious identity is accepted and nurtured such as those provided by the Muslim women's organisations which I discuss in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four

Hijab and Identity

You can no more tell the extent of a Muslim woman's sense of personal bodily integrity or piety from 45inches of cloth than you can spot a fly on the wall at two thousand feet.(Amina Wadud 2006:219-220)

In the previous chapter I discussed the way in which family life shapes the religious identity of my research participants. I demonstrated that the family background plays an important role in the development of my participants' Muslim religious identity. In particular, I have shown that in most of the cases, the female members of the immediate family play a crucial role in forming the participants' gendered understanding of Islam. This chapter focuses on the concept of hijab and its significance for the participants' Muslim identity. I draw from the participants' personal views and interpretations of the hijab. Dealing with a question – 'what does hijab mean to the women who wear it and why are they wearing it?' – is at the core of this chapter. Since the research participants are residents of two European countries – Bosnia and the UK – I investigate the similarities and differences relating to the hijab experience within two different socio-political contexts. This chapter will not be discussing in depth whether or not it is obligatory for Muslim women to wear hijab (or any head cover for that matter) from a theological point of view, since I feel this is beyond the scope of this research, and requires a thorough knowledge of both classical Arabic language and Islamic texts. However, the sense of 'obligation' to wear the hijab will be discussed in so far as the women who took part in this research understand this as a religious obligation and what it means to them. Also, when women talked about hijab, they did not dwell on religious rulings; their focus was on how they experience hijab and what it means to them.

Why the *Hijab*?

Initially, when I was thinking about the interviews and how to formulate the questions, I wanted to avoid the topic of the *hijab* because, as a Muslim woman who wears the *hijab* herself, I feel that both the media and academia have paid too much attention to this piece of cloth. It has come to be one of the main markers of Muslim presence in the West and the only issue that Muslim women seem to be concerned with (Byng, 2010; Wadud, 2006). Since the attacks on New York (9/11) and London (7/7) there has been significantly more media attention on Islam in general and, in particular, on Muslim women who wear the *hijab*/veil (Byng, 2010; Haw, 2009). As a result, there is also a large body of literature in the West discussing Muslim women's dress (e.g. Ahmed, 2011; Edmunds, 2011; Meer, Dwyer and Modood, 2010; Williamson and Khiabany, 2010; Gökariksel and Secor 2010; Navarro 2010; Tarlo 2010; Lazreg 2009; Afshar 2008; Dwyer and Shah, 2008; Oksenvag, 2008; Ruby, 2005) and focusing mainly on the deliberation about the veil or different veiling practices amongst Muslim women. Most recent work has been more inclusive of women's own voices and experiences; however, the *hijab*/veil has largely been portrayed as a symbol of difference and otherness, where the wearing of the *hijab*/veil is considered to also be a sign of backwardness, oppression and patriarchal dress norms (Ahmed, 1992). The terms *hijab* and veil are often used interchangeably despite the fact that both terms have multiple meanings and are rooted in many cultures/religions including European and Western. For Muslim women, the most prevalent form of veiling in Europe is the headscarf – where hair and neck are covered (McGoldrick, 2006:4). As argued by Scott, even the conflation of the terms *hijab* and veil is not coincidental and indicates the 'deep level of anxiety about the ways in which Islam is understood to handle the relations of the sexes' (2007:16). The routine use of the term 'veil', especially in the media[113], implies that the wearer's entire body

---

[113] For example see:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2007/03/12/veiled_event_feature.shtml Accessed on 08/01/2013;
http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/citizen-khans-alia-how-the-hijab-got-sexy-8194410.html?origin=internalSearch Accessed on 08/01/2013;
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2093129/Al--Turkish-fashion-magazine-created-women-wear-headscarves.html Accessed on 08/01/2013

and face are hidden from the view, when, in the majority of cases, the faces are perfectly visible (ibid). For Bullock, using of the term 'veil' is also problematic as it is 'laden with the negative stereotypes' and reduces the practice to only one type of Muslim women's dress code (2007:L). Possibly agreeing with both Scott's and Bullock's view, the women who took part in this research did not use the term 'veil' at all in their interviews and responses; however, I do use it (although sparingly) but mostly in relation to full face and body cover (*niqab*) or, like Scott, in order to reflect 'the way in which the words were deployed in the debates' on Muslim women's dress (ibid). Throughout this chapter, the word *hijab* and scarf/headscarf are used interchangeably as is the phrase 'to cover' which is in a way synonymous with *hijab*. On the same note, a woman who wears the *hijab* is often referred to as 'covered' or a '*hijabi*'. In the UK the word *hijab* is more prominent than in Bosnia where women also use Bosnian language words such as *marama* or *mahrama* (scarf) and a verb *pokrivena* (covered). Since the meaning of the words is the same when translated in English throughout this chapter I only use the term *hijab* and English words[114]. The *hijab* has wider meanings of modesty, privacy and morality and hence it is, what Bullock calls, 'a complex notion encompassing action and apparel', which can include covering of the face (2007:LI). This wider meaning is derived from the many literal meanings of the word *hijab* in Arabic. According to the modern Arabic to English Dictionary the word '*hijab*' stands for 'veil' or 'seclusion' and in its verb form it means 'to shield' (Awde and Smith, 2004:77). However, El-Guindi claims that the word *hijab* is not an Arabic word for 'veil' but rather a term which 'has gradually developed a set of related meanings' (1999:152). Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines *hijab* as 'the traditional covering for the hair and neck that is worn by Muslim women'[115] and this meaning is used in this chapter. All of the women who wore hijab at the time of the interviews, in both countries, had different styles and fashions of hijab but in all cases it covered all of their hair, neck and ears in a similar way as shown on Fig. 6.

---

[114] I have not interviewed any women wearing *niqab* (full face and body cover) in either Bosnia or the UK and I appreciate that their experiences of covering might be very different to my research participants'.
[115] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hijab Accessed on 20/03/2012

Figure 6.[116] Style of hijab as worn by the research participants.

As *hijab* in Arabic also means a partition, or barrier, it is interesting how those particular meanings of the word appear to be indicative of women's actual experiences of *hijab* in present times Europe. A recent article in the *Guardian* states that 'South Asian Muslim women have the highest rate of unemployment in terms of both religion and ethnicity in the UK' and a comment from one of the respondents who wears hijab is quite telling: 'I've been through numerous interviews for my first job. Needless to say, I feel I'm not getting the job as employers see I wear hijab and look for reasons to turn me down' (Francois-Cerrah, 2012)[117]. From her response, it is clear that this particular British Muslim woman, who wears the hijab, feels that the visual aspect of the hijab is indeed a barrier to her finding a job. At the same time, some European governments, such as France, considered the *hijab* to be a symbol of religious extremism and therefore a threat to the public interest (Edmunds, 2011:11). Indeed, as a result, the French government banned the hijab from state schools in 2004, followed by the 2010 (affective as of 11 April 2011) ban on the face veil in public spaces[118]. As Scott points out, the actions of the French government have inspired other European governments 'to follow the suit in what is fast becoming a consolidation of sides in a clash between 'Islam' and 'the West' (2007: 19). Is the *hijab* a symbol representing a partition between two clashing civilizations (Huntington, 1993) – Western and Islamic – for the women who wear it or have an intention of wearing it? Is it a 'mark of separation'[119] or perhaps a 'battleground for the two competing conceptions of self and society – Western and Islamist' (Göle, 2000)? In Western Europe, it has been a focal point of discussion for some time. In

---

[116] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13031397 Accessed on 25/12/2012
[117] http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/dec/10/muslim-women-prejudice-getting-job?INTCMP=SRCH Accessed on 10/12/2012
[118] http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/ta/ta0524.asp and
http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/09/14/france.burqa.ban/?hpt=T1 Accessed on 10/12/2012
[119] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6058672.stm Accessed on 20/03/2012

1986, Nielsen comments on the response of 'European structures to the presence of Muslim communities': 'In West Germany, head covering worn by Turkish girls and women sometimes appears to have become the exclusive test of integration in the public mind' (1988:76). Based on what I have read, heard, experienced and seen so far, it is often the case that Muslim women's voices are either completely absent or ignored in the midst of the complex analysis and the search for definitive answers. I do not aim to prove or answer any of these questions and thus arrive at a certain 'judgement' but rather, (similarly to Contractor, 2012; Tarlo, 2010; Bullock, 2007 et al.) to focus and privilege women's own experiences and views on the hijab. I do so in a hope of contesting the prevalent negative stereotypes which can, and do, have devastating effects on the Muslim women who wear hijab in Europe.

In the UK, according to the latest research conducted by The Equality and Human Rights Commission, 'Muslims appear to experience religious discrimination with a frequency and seriousness that is proportionately greater than that experienced by those of other religions' (2011). The report goes further and states that, based on *research* evidence, the visible aspects of religious difference continue to be 'a particularly salient part of 'religious discrimination', especially in relation to Muslim women and clothing and following 9/11 in relation to physical attacks on Muslims and others perceived to be Muslims by virtue of aspects of their clothing'. The women who wear the *hijab* are 'considered to be the most 'visual identifiers' of Islam or Muslims in general' and therefore the most obvious targets of verbal and physical abuse (ibid.). Based on the prevalent Islamophobic attitudes, the 'war against terrorism' became the war against anything that symbolizes Islam. It is fair to say the spotlight is focused on Islam and all its aspects and followers, both male and female. However, since women who wear the hijab or veil, are more visibly Muslim, there is more focus on them (Ahmad, 2010; Osler and Hussain, 2005:142). The negative portrayal of Islam, usually personified by a veiled woman, in the post 9/11 and 7/7 media, indirectly but unfortunately associates or assumes a link with terrorism. As a result of this, the attitude towards Muslims tends to be a negative or even hostile one (Ahmad, 2010; Osler and Hussain, 2005). There have been numerous incidents of Muslim women in hijab being attacked. In Denmark for instance, a Muslim woman was thrown from a moving taxi (Allen, 2010). One of the

most severe cases occurred in Germany – the case of Marwa el-Sherbini. Marwa was stabbed 18 times, while in court, protesting about being called a 'terrorist' and an 'Islamic whore' when playing in the park with her son. Her attacker killed her in the court[120]. Muslim women's appearances are discussed by both Muslims and non-Muslims and used to categorize women for different purposes and aims with social and political implications which can and do have serious and, in Marwa's case, tragic consequences.

Although there are no official data yet, the attacks on Muslim women in Bosnia who wear the hijab are not unheard of, even in towns with a Muslim majority such as Sarajevo. In Bosnia, however, the reasons for the attack or abuse can be multiple and have roots in both Islamophobia (which can be exhibited even by other Muslims) as well as in the inter-ethnic hatred. In one recent incident, a woman's scarf was pulled off her head while she was on public transport and this was done by another woman (of the same ethnic background) who claimed that 'she was agitated by the sight of the headscarf'[121]. A friend narrated a traumatic experience of being verbally assaulted in the city's shopping centre by two young men, making references to her being 'wrapped' and telling her that she should have been 'finished' in the last war; the abusers identified themselves as ethnic Serbs by saying that they were 'fed up' of seeing the 'wrapped-up Muslim whores who escaped the rape in the war'.

More often than not, the ascribed meanings that others give to Muslim women's dress have more significance to others than they do to the women themselves. This is another reason why I wanted to avoid the hijab as a subject in itself – the complexity of the issues surrounding it. - I was afraid to get into the middle of untangling what seemed like a bowl of spaghetti. From the theological discourses on Islamic dress codes and notions of oppression/repression to what constitutes femininity and gaze; to media, academia, Islamophobia, stereotypes, and fashion - in all honesty - it just seemed too overwhelming for me to tackle. Although I do discuss some of these issues in this

---

[120] http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jul/07/german-trial-hijab-murder-egypt Accessed on 20/03/2012

[121] http://www.akos.ba/zena-napadnuta-u-tramvaju-u-sarajevu-psihicka-bolesnica-joj-pokusala-strgnuti-maramu/ Accessed on 12/11/2012

chapter, I do so only with the purpose to contextualise the subject of the *hijab* as told by my research participants.

As in Contractor's experiences (2012), women who took part in this research made the *hijab* one of the most prominent features in their responses during the interviews and focus group discussions. It is important to note that the *hijab* was mentioned as a part of the 'story' of their Muslim identity rather than a topic in itself. As research participants talked about their religious identity, they talked about the importance of the modest dress code that goes hand in hand with the perceived increased sense of religious identity. In women's discussion of general modesty, the topic of hijab was highlighted as the personal, visible symbol that affirms women's religious identity. The feminist methodology emphasis on the active role of participants in all of the stages of the research together with the women's passion and enthusiasm about their *hijab* experiences, made me re-examine my initial aversion to the topic. I felt I needed to tell *their* story about the *hijab*. Furthermore, their responses prompted me to send a follow-up email to ten of the research participants (both from Bosnia and the UK) asking two specific questions about the hijab:

1) *What does the hijab mean to you and why are you wearing it?*

2) *If you wear the hijab because you believe that wearing the hijab is obligatory and therefore fard (religious obligation), I would like you to tell me more about this.*

Both questions seemed very obvious since the majority of women already talked about what the hijab means to them during the interviews and they also expressed that they wear it (or intend to wear it in the future) because they understand it to be a religious obligation. However, as one of them admitted to me in her reply, answering and thinking about the written questions gave the research participants an opportunity to reflect and write about the subject for a longer period of time (compared to when asked during the interviews) and to this effect, one of research participants, Raz wrote:

> I have to thank you for this opportunity to reflect on this Sanja. Wearing a headscarf has become a habit for me and writing this has really made me explore my reasons.

For me, women's written answers provided further clarity on what hijab means to them. They all responded positively and the majority of answers were quite lengthy and comprehensive. This further confirmed how strongly they feel about wearing the hijab; for them hijab means much more than just a piece of cloth. So, on one side are the meanings that society (including media, academia, politics etc.) wishes to assign to Muslim women's head covering and, on the other side, are multiple meanings that women themselves ascribe to the same piece of cloth. This chapter focuses on the women's i.e. wearers' meanings and experiences of hijab. Their answers, together with their responses from the interviews, form the basis of this chapter. I use the phrases and words routinely used by the research participants in their responses. The structure of the chapter is also guided by the participants' responses; I tried my best to keep the *story* of hijab as women told it. The majority of research participants in both countries wore the *hijab*. Out of twenty (10 in the UK and 10 in Bosnia) individually interviewed women four did not wear the *hijab* at the time of the interviews. The majority of women who took part in the focus groups also wore the *hijab* or mentioned that they are intending to do so in the future.

Starting off: Becoming a *Hijabi*

What makes a university educated Bosnian Muslim woman or British Muslim woman living in a country's capital city such as Sarajevo or London decide to wear the hijab? How do they arrive at their decision?

I am going to start with my own story of the hijab in order to acknowledge my role in constructing participants' stories as I am not and cannot be an independent and 'objective' observer in this process. By doing so, I acknowledge that my experiences of the hijab are an 'integral part' of this research and therefore, they cannot be separated from my analysis and discussion of my participants' experiences of the hijab (Stanley

and Wise, 1993:60). My intention, throughout the research process, was to ensure that the relationship between the women I interviewed and myself, as a researcher, was non-hierarchical and, as much as possible, based on a certain level of reciprocity. So, during the interviews, I shared my own story (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007:332-334) 'judiciously' and when I felt there was an 'invitation signal' to do so from the research participants (Chatzifotiou, 2000:6.5). As a feminist researcher, I understand that my own experiences influence and help the understanding of my participants' experiences and, as Cotterill and Letherby put it: 'their lives are filtered through us and the filtered stories of our lives are present (whether we admit it or not) in our written accounts' (1993:74). Added to this is my 'emotional engagement' with this particular subject which also influenced my analysis of women's views (Stanley and Wise, 2005). Most of the responses were so thoughtful and heartfelt that it was difficult for me, as a fellow Muslim who wears the hijab, not to feel emotional and deeply affected. I felt particularly affected when women talked about experiencing the negative, offensive or hostile responses to their external appearances just because they were visibly Muslim i.e. just because of the hijab. Two of my research participants broke down in tears while talking about their experiences, admitting that was the first time they talked to anyone about what happened to them. As highlighted by Dickson-Swift et al., research on sensitive topics 'can raise difficulties not only for them [research participants], but also for the researcher who is listening to the story' (2007:338) as often, participants' views on the hijab resonated with mine as I also wear the hijab and have gone through what could be deemed a 'process' of hijab. Their responses made me reflect on my own experiences of wearing the hijab perhaps for the first time since I started to wear it. I questioned my motives, I re-examined my knowledge, I re-evaluated various sources and this is also reflected in the chapter.

On many levels, I could identify with the participants in both countries who were already wearing the hijab as well as with those who were seriously thinking about adopting the hijab at some stage of their lives. I understood their more general, non-country specific experiences and also the issues they faced because they are part of either British or Bosnian society. Having spent most of my adult life in the UK as a Muslim and as a *hijabi,* I could relate more to the particular social experiences of the

British Muslim women I interviewed. However, in terms of family perceptions and reactions to the hijab, I was more familiar with the experiences of the Bosnian Muslim women I interviewed.

I started wearing the hijab during the summer of 1999. I appeared in my central London office wearing a hijab and nobody expected it. Although I considered myself a practicing Muslim not many people were aware of that and were surprised. For them, I became Muslim from that moment – with the scarf on my head. Rana, a professional Muslim woman in her late 20s, who works in a highly competitive London City environment, talked about her first experiences of arriving at work with the hijab and, similar to my own experiences, she expressed just how surprised her co-workers were:

> [smiles]…yeah…[raises the eyebrows]…I walked in…and just said 'good morning' to my colleagues…hahahaha…one of them spilled their tea…I think…and then asked…what happened to me…if I was ok…and if I will still be ok to go to the meeting with our manager [male]…everyone stared at me that day…like I have undergone a major metamorphosis…but it was still me…under that scarf…only better…[smiles]

For me and for the majority women I interviewed (both from the UK and Bosnia), donning the hijab was a next step. In a way it was a natural progression in our spiritual growth. Many research participants also talked about a gradual aspect of becoming a *hijabi* and how making a final decision to start wearing it was not always easy or clear cut. Emma Tarlo (2010) uses a very apt phrase to describe this phase as 'growing into hijab' and she associates it with both women's own spiritual development and the outside social influences on this development. The women I interviewed mentioned different internal and social factors and pressures that were at play during their transitional stages of the hijab. Raz, who is a British Muslim living in London, described her early stage of wearing the hijab, somewhat comically as being a 'convertible hijabi':

> I grappled with deciding to wear it for a long time and when I did, I went through an early period of recognising myself as a 'convertible hijabi ' (on and

153

off as I felt inclined, sometimes due to societal/peer pressure and sometimes just due to my youth and personal whim).

I will deal with the some of the British and Bosnian 'societal/peer pressures' that Raz mentions later on in this chapter. But for now, I would like to highlight the process of negotiation that the majority of women I interviewed experienced during the process of 'growing into hijab'. It is the negotiation between internal and spiritual aspects of the hijab and the external expectations and pressures of the society that women live in. One of the research participant's accounts illustrates this process of negotiation well. Almasa, who lives in Sarajevo and leads a very active public life (she is a part-time TV presenter and journalist), talked about reactions of others to her early stages of adopting the hijab:

> …especially the way people related to me while I was covered…it was respectful…it felt strange, on the way out [of the mosque], to take my scarf off…then I had a chat with my sister…'maybe we should stop wearing those really tight clothes'…'but yes, we cannot do it right away'…Then we [herself and sister] started to wear longer clothes…we had two tunics and two skirts between us [laughs]…believe me Sanja, we combined them in so many ways [laughs]…In 2005, my male friends asked me what was going on with my clothes…they used to ask me 'when are you going to start wearing normal clothes?'…I said – 'I AM wearing normal clothes! [laughs]…

Almasa also talked about how she made it one of her goals:

> …to constantly expand [her] knowledge, not only Islamic knowledge but all…only then I can widen my horizons…I have less dilemmas…less unanswered questions and I can build my own vision of world…

She continued by describing how she felt one particular evening:

> I read Qur'an…I cried and cried…I just felt like I could not carry on in the same way…I feel that I should do something, but because of the friends, I didn't dare… So yes…that night I felt like I was torn…I said to myself that I cannot carry on like that…I have to calm down…I can't be here and there…it did not

feel normal…I opened the Qur'an and the verses were there…they offered me comfort…in the morning, when I woke up, I decided that I will start wearing hijab…but it felt strange…I wanted to do it but it did not feel like a good time…I cannot explain it…

Almasa's account is interesting because it shows the complexity of 'growing into hijab' in a Bosnian context. There is interplay of the positive and negative factors. She starts with a positive by describing how the few occasions of wearing the hijab made her feel 'respectful'; an experience also described by the Egyptian women interviewed by Bullock (2007:101-102) and Canadian Muslim women interviewed by Ruby (2006:59). However, she was not ready to adopt the hijab 'right away' but rather went through the phase of re-adjusting her dress code to one which conceals the body shape more than her existing dress code did. The negative challenges presented from outside, in the way of comments by her peers (and parents, see page 33), provided not only a pressure but also deep spiritual dilemmas and identity questioning; illustrated by her comments 'I felt like I was torn' and 'I can't be here and there'. Almasa's way of dealing with this was to 'expand her knowledge' which led her to researching and reading of the primary Islamic text – the Qur'an. Other women also talked about the importance of being 'ready' to wear the hijab and related it to their deeply spiritual experience resulting from and relating to time spent in prayer. A British woman who is a trainee doctor, Sam said:

> I know it sounds so corny [chuckles] but I prayed for the first time in a while…I did this prayer to Allah [God]…and I was crying…one of those really spiritual moments…when you feel like you need help…and no-one else can give it to you apart from God…I did that…and like, *alhamdulillah* [an Arabic phrase meaning 'Praise to God']…the next few weeks I just kind of got this feeling where…I was like…yes…I am going to change now…and try slowly implement certain things in my life…and I decided to start wearing hijab which I wanted to do for so long…

Amira, who is a Bosnian woman and, at the time of the interview, in her final year of a university degree in Economics, also related how her conviction (in decision) to wear the hijab came from the prayer:

and I kept making *dua* [Arabic for supplication/prayer] to God…if it is *khayr* [Arabic for good] for me to cover my hair…please show me a way...then I had a dream…and I was convinced that I needed to cover…I was hundred percent sure…that was the sign that I needed…

For the practising Muslims such as Sam, Amira and other women who took part in this research, the very act of reading the Qur'an represents a form of worship and the Qur'an encourages the believers to engage actively with its text and calls itself 'the Book to you [humans] clarifying everything' (The Qur'an 6:114); the repeated recitation of Qur'anic verses constitute the main part of five daily prayers. Because of the Muslims' belief that the Qur'an is the word of God and that it contains the guidance for all humankind, the engagement with and understanding of Qur'anic text 'becomes important as a tool of expression and as a means of uniting the individual with the source of the message, God' (Barazangi, 2006:57). For Almasa and the other women I interviewed, Qur'anic verses provided both spiritual comfort as well as the practical 'answers' to their prayers so, in the next section, I examine the way women I interviewed related their own experiences and understanding of the hijab to the sense of religious obligation as supported by Islamic texts.

Hijab: Between the Text and Practice

Fard al-Ayn or *Wajib Ayni* in Islamic law refers to the religious obligations that must be performed by each individual Muslim: they apply to anyone who declares herself/himself a Muslim. As mentioned before, believing in the oneness of God, performing five daily prayers, obligatory charity (*zakat*), fasting during the month of Ramadan and pilgrimage (*Hajj*) all fall in the *fard* category according to the classical Sunni scholars. Individual obligation is contrasted with communal obligation (*fard al-kifayah*) which must be fulfilled by the Muslim community as a whole, such as caring for the poor and hungry[122]. Also, the performance of *fard* deeds leads a believer to earning a spiritual reward, while not performing *fard* deeds is considered a sin for which

---

[122] http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e625 Accessed on 02/01/2013

a believer would be held spiritually accountable. Juristically, the command of a fard is communicated by a definite (*qat'i*) text wherein there is no ambiguity and the textual evidence (the Qur'an or Hadith) is clear and specific. To act upon it and to believe in it is binding on all of those who are believers and the denial of any fard deeds renders one to come out of the folds of Islam (Kamali, 2003:414). A slightly shortened and simpler version of this explanation of *fard* was sent in a follow-up email, as a footnote to one of the questions I asked ten of my research participants. I did not want to sound patronising as all of the women who received (and responded to) my email questions are highly educated and, I would assume, know very well what *fard* means. My purpose was to clarify the meaning of *fard* as a religious obligation and how, according to the rules of Islamic jurisprudence, a ruling becomes *fard* and how, subsequently, wearing of the hijab could be classified as *fard*.

Sam, who is a British Muslim, explained her view of hijab wearing as a *fard*:

> I personally believe hijab is obligatory and this was the belief that first led me to wear it. As far as justifying this belief, I'm not a legal scholar but I follow the consensus of the majority of Sunni scholars throughout the history of Islam who deem it an obligation. I'm aware of one or two Hadiths where the Prophet s.a.w[123] asked women to uncover only their faces and hands. I'm not aware of any where women were bare-headed. Possibly this implies a grey area and I'd find it really interesting to learn more, but my instinct and sense of 'rightness' enforces my belief in hijab's obligation.

It is interesting that Sam does not go into specifics, she does not refer or quote Qur'anic verses; she is comfortable with putting her trust in the decision made by the Islamic scholars. The consensus among the four main schools of Islamic law[124], based on the Qur'anic verses is indeed that Muslim women are required to cover all of the body with

---

[123] Arabic abbreviation for 'sallallahu alayhi wa salaam' which can be translated as 'may Allah bless him and grant him peace' or 'peace be upon him'(p.b.u.h)

[124] There are four main Sunni Islamic schools of legal thought or *madhhabs*. Beginning in about the mid-eighth century, a number of masters made distinctive contributions to the discipline that stimulated the emergence of separate traditions or schools. The most important masters for the Sunnis are Abū Hanīfah (d. about 767), Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795), Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfī (d. 820), and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), associated respectively with the Hanafī, Mālikī, Shāfī, and Hanbalī schools.
http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0473?_hi=5&_pos=19 Accessed on 02/01/2013

the exception of hands, face and feet. Sam also refers to Hadiths that talk about hijab as a religious obligation but rejects the other aspect of, as she puts it – 'fardness' – that denying of a *fard* deed removes a believer from the fold of Islam:

> When it comes to telling other people what to do or think etc I think there's a huge difference between fiqh-y (Islamic law) opinions and the gentleness and mercy preached by the Prophet s.a.w and indeed the vast mercy of Allah…saying that someone who denies hijab's fardness is out of the fold of Islam seems a bit harsh!... Um but obviously this is not a theological debate. So yes, in summary, those collections of Hadiths (the Hadith of Asma, the women of the Ansar etc) and the Qur'anic text are sufficient for me to believe it's fard and my own personal experience also enforces my belief.

The way Sam navigates between the concept of *fard* (as defined by classical Islamic jurists) and the hijab as *fard* according to the textual evidence she was familiar with is very interesting. She accepts that her decision is based predominantly on her personal belief, experiences and a sense of 'rightness' based on her understanding and perception of the textual evidence; and it is within those parameters that she accepts the wearing of hijab as a religious obligation. Only one woman I interviewed – Asa – referred to the specific textual evidences in relation to hijab and not only did she quote Qur'anic verses and a relevant Hadith (also mentioned by Sam), she also further qualified her sources; by naming a particular Hadith 'mursal' (Prophetic tradition of dubious authority) she indicated at the level of her knowledge of Islamic texts and the familiarity with terminology related to the authenticity of Hadith literature[125]. The scholars of Hadith Sciences have differed (and still do) over the use of the *mursal* Hadiths as the proof regarding the matters of belief and worship; while there are some who do not use it (and, hence, reject *mursal* Hadiths) there are also scholars who do accept them as the valid evidence for deriving religious rulings. Asa, is a Bosnian Muslim woman who is doing a post graduate degree related to Islam and she said:

---

[125] Within Islamic studies, there is a whole subject – Hadith Sciences – dedicated to studying and categorising of different types of Hadith. *Mursal* falls into the category of 'discontinued' Hadith (*al-Hadith Ghayr al-Muttasil*); whose chain of transmitters does not extend all the way back to the Prophet and hence some scholars consider *mursal* Hadiths as weak (*da'eef*).

> I do consider it [hijab] a fard, as mentioned in the Qur'an ["O Prophet! Tell your
> wives and daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks
> (jalabib) close round them (when they go abroad)..." (33:59)] and explained by
> Prophet s.a.w to Asma, daughter of Abu Bakr r.a.: 'Ayesha reported that Asma'
> the daughter of Abu Bakr came to the Messenger of Allah while wearing thin
> clothing. He approached her and said: 'O Asma! When a girl reaches the
> menstrual age, it is not proper that anything should remain exposed except this
> and this. He pointed to the face and hands' [Abu Dawud, hadith *mursal*].

Asa added:

> I also do believe every woman has a right to *chose* to cover or not, as she is
> responsible for that in front of Allah alone.

Asa's use of the 'weak' Hadith in support of her view is in line with many of Islamic
scholars in the past (and present) who have used (and are still using) weak Hadiths as
long as 'they encourage or promote pious behaviour' (Mahmood, 2005:97); she also
emphasises the 'right to chose' to which I will return later. The following verses, cited
from the Qur'an, mentioned by Asa and referred to by other women I interviewed, are
regarded by the majority of classical Islamic scholars as the clear verses that deal with
Islamic dress for *both* genders and the aspect(s) of modesty in this context:

Tell to the believing men
 To lower their gaze and guard
 Their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them
 And tell the believing women
 To lower their gaze
 And to be mindful of their chastity
 And not to display their adornment
 Beyond what may be apparent thereof
 Let them draw their coverings (*khimar*) over their bosoms
 And let them not display their adornments
 To any but their husbands, or their fathers…

(The Qur'an, 24:30-31, Ali 1988, 904-905)

Also:

O Prophet!

Tell thy wives and daughters

And the believing women

That they should cast over them

Some of their outer garment

That is most convenient

That they should be known

(As such) and not molested

Truly, if the Hypocrites

And those in whose hearts is a disease

Desist not, we shall certainly

Stir up against thee

(The Qur'an, 33:59-60, Ali 1988, 1126-1127)

Farah, one of the British research participants said:

> Having learnt more about my faith I do believe that hijab, or to be accurate, a
> *khimar* (which covers the bosom as well as the hair) is fard.

By using *khimar* as a more accurate term Farah indicates that she, like Asa in Bosnia, has spent time investigating the textual references of the hijab. By textual references, I mean the above Qur'anic verses specifically. In the Qur'an, the word hijab appears numerous times; however in each of its occurrences, it does not refer to women's dress code and it is not mentioned in the above verses. Qur'anic use of the word hijab (or *al-hijab*) usually denotes the difference from or a spatial partition. The word hijab (*al-hijab*) is mentioned in the Qur'an (in non-gendered contexts) separating the deity from mortals (42:51), wrongdoers from the righteous (7:46, 41:5), believers from unbelievers (17:45), and light from darkness and day from night (38:32). The interpretation of the above verses can differ and is a subject of debate among Islamic scholars and, in

particular, the interpretation of the word *khimar* (which loosely means 'covering'). Some of the Islamic scholars view these Qur'anic verses as the evidence that proves it is indeed a religious obligation to wear hijab or even, according to the minority view, the *niqab* (face cover). Others, such as Hassan, claim that the meaning of *kihmar* does not imply headscarf:

> What is semantically clear, even after an analysis of various translations and even if one uses the word veil in translation – and one doesn't need to have a superb command of the Arabic language for this – is an order that the woman's bosom be covered, not that the woman's head be covered. The emphasis or concern is about the 'exposed bosom,' not 'uncovered' head. The woman must take her cloth, shawl, whatever she is wearing and cover or shield her bosom from view (2001).

Academics, such as Barlas (2002), argue that in the case where hijab is regarded as a religious obligation, Islamic scholars disregard the natural process of gradual progress throughout the centuries since the Qur'an was revealed. Moreover, the scholars which hold such a position, pay no attention to the present-day needs and circumstances of Muslims in comparison to the needs and circumstances of the very first Muslim communities and, as Cragg, states: 'One cannot proceed to the abidingness of the Qur'an, in word and meaning, unless one intelligently proceeds from its historical ground and circumstance' (1994,114). The scholars who hold such a view consider their interpretations and practices as the 'original' and therefore true ones for all Muslims. They also justify the covering of a woman's body by stating that seeing the female body is sexually corrupting for the men, therefore it is necessary to conceal it from the male gaze in order to prevent any possible form of harassment. Other Muslim scholars opt to see the practice of hijab/veiling within the context of the times, cultural traditions, and the surrounding society one is part of, for the obvious reason that what is considered modest or daring/revealing in one society or culture may not be considered so in another. However, the minimum requirements regarding Islamic dress and what is modest for both genders, male and female, are very clearly stated.

I also made a decision to wear the hijab after a careful consideration of the Islamic textual evidence in regards to a woman's dress code; but my decision was mainly due to the feeling I had for a number of years. That feeling I still cannot define or describe accurately but suffice to say that I thought about it long and hard and decided that it was what *I* wanted to do. For me, Qur'anic verses that focus on general, righteous behaviour in all aspects of one's life were the ones that influenced my decision to start wearing the hijab: 'we have provided you with garments to cover your bodies, as well as for luxury. But the best garment is the garment of righteousness (*taqwa*) . . .' (The Qur'an 7:26). I could not find any specific verse in the Qur'an that gives a clear instruction (ie. obligation) to Muslim women to cover their head or hair and, hence, I do not consider the hijab to be a religious obligation; but the majority of women I interviewed, in both countries, mentioned that they feel that wearing the hijab is a religious obligation supported by the Islamic primary texts (Qur'anic and Hadith[126] literature). For example, Asa talked about what makes her think that wearing the hijab is a religious obligation sourced from the Islamic texts (Hadith and the Qur'an):

> Yes I do believe that the wearing of the hijab is fard. As this is a direct request/obligation from God. I have come to this view from the various Hadiths on the subject and Qur'anic verses.

By having a view that wearing the hijab is 'a direct request/obligation' Asa is, maybe inadvertently, placing the practice and importance of the hijab on the same level as praying, fasting, pilgrimage, obligatory charity and a belief in the oneness of God – known as the five core pillars of Islam. Farah, who describes herself as 'born and bred Londoner', also understands the religious aspect of 'request' to wear the hijab quite seriously and considers it a 'good deed' with positive implications that stretch beyond temporal life:

> I also wear it, as I mentioned before, because it pleases our Lord. By pleasing him we are making our afterlife a better place. At the end of the day, what we do

---

[126] Hadith/Hadiths - report of the sayings or actions of Muhammad or his companions, together with the tradition of its chain of transmission. Hadiths are revered and received as a major source of religious law and moral guidance, second only to the authority of the Qurān, the holy book of Islam. http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/251132/Hadith Accessed on 19/12/2012

for Allah is also what we are doing for ourselves. By performing a good deed we are ensuring a better afterlife for ourselves.

Indeed, Wadud calls the hijab (ironically) a 'sixth pillar' because of the 'disproportionate symbolic significance both within and without Muslim communities' (Wadud, 2006:219); perhaps this was one of the reasons for my reluctance to give the topic of the hijab any special attention in the first instance. However, by listening to and considering my research participants' accounts, my own views on the hijab as a religious obligation were challenged and certain dualities exposed: I am committed to and choose to wear the hijab even though I do not deem it to be a religious obligation as per the definition of religious obligation (*fard*) in classical Islamic jurisprudence[127].

Hijab as a Choice

Today, most Muslim women living in Europe have access to various sources of information and therefore come across a plethora of lectures, publications, websites, books etc. For some of the women, this leads to practicing their religion the way they would like to do it, without choosing to adapt the hijab. However for the women I interviewed, their increased religiosity led to further questioning of their own identity and eventually resulted in them adopting the hijab. One such source which seeks to provide 'guidance to Muslims in Europe' is The European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR); their statement on the 2003 French ban on head covering in public schools stated that 'hijab is a matter of worship and a Shari'i (religious) obligation and not just a religious or political symbol. It is something that the Muslim woman regards as an important part of her legal practice of the teaching of her religion' (Tucker, 2008:209). I am unsure of how influential ECFR's decisions, statements and 'guidance'

---

[127] Basic principles of Islamic jurisprudence are based on *shari'a* (God's way)*, usul al-fiqh* (classical Islamic legal theory) and *fiqh* (human understanding). 'While the *shari'a* is regarded as immutable, *fiqh* is the diverse body of legal opinions that is the product of human reasoning and engagement with the foundational sources of authority in Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunnah [derived from Hadtih]. In this dichotomy, God is considered infallible, while humankind's attempt to understand God's way is imperfect and fallible. Islamic legal theory holds that humans can and should strive to understand God's way, but human faculties can never deliver certain answers; they can merely reach reasoned deductions of God's will.'http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/internationalstudies/documents/swp/WP12.pdf Accessed on 02/01/2013

are on Muslim women in Europe or, specifically, in the UK or Bosnia, but none of my research participants mentioned it or any other similar source of information. They only referred to the Qur'an and Hadith when discussing the hijab as *fard*. The most prolific material in both Bosnian and UK mosques, prayer rooms and other places where Muslims gather, does however come from, what most would describe as 'conservative' or 'traditional' sources,. These are often translations of materials produced outside Europe. For example, in one of the Muslim prayer rooms that I visited few times, (at a leading UK university) the majority of the pamphlets were produced in Saudi Arabia. One of them was the booklet called – 'The Hijab....Why?' – it seemed to be quite popular as there were only two left on the shelf in the women's praying area;. Its language was harsh, officious and judgemental: 'Examining the various conditions about the Hijab one can clearly recognise that many of the Young Muslim women are not fulfilling these conditions. They consider what they put on now wrongly as "Hijab"'(1993:45).

Perhaps, the relationship between the religious educational sources and European Muslim women's choices could be explored further another time; what usually becomes important in such discussions (especially on the topic of Muslim women's dress) is a question – what kind of 'sources' are involved? How can they be categorised – are they conservative, traditionalist, Islamist, progressive, modern? Although the veil has always been a controversial topic in modern Europe (Ahmed, 1992), the events of 9/11 and 7/7 and the French hijab ban in 2004[128] have made the subject of Muslim women's dress prominent in the debates on what constitutes modernity (Williamson and Khiabany, 2010). These debates involve meddling with or inventing different categories for the purposes of (mainly) producing an 'us' versus 'them' worldview. To this effect, Joppke claims that 'the Islamic headscarf is a provocation which cannot be suppressed unless the West denies its own values' while he questions 'the modernity of the headscarf' as a something that women choose for themselves rather than imposed by 'traditionalist milieux' (2009:4-5). For these reasons, I do not agree with the categorical classification of Islamic scholarly thought and practice into either conservatives/traditionalists or

---

[128] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3474673.stm Accessed on 19/03/2012

moderates/progressives as has been done in the past by both Muslim and Western commentators (Joppke, 2009; Barlas, 2002). This is not to say that there are no significant differences in understanding and approaches, however they cannot be easily categorised and to do so would be an oversimplification of various Islamic scholarly approaches since the approaches overlap and understandings are related to different contexts (historical, geographical, political). The problematic nature of the categorisation of Muslims (and hence Islamic scholarship and vice versa) in post 9/11 climate was expressed in Modood and Ahmad's research project which highlighted a term 'moderate' as 'a divisive term sorting Muslims into 'good' and 'bad' Muslims and therefore unhelpful' (Modood and Ahmad, 2007:191-193). After 9/11, various European governments, motivated by security concerns, have tried to reposition their state policies and proactively encourage 'moderate' European Islam where the main concern was 'to produce the right kind of Muslim' (Haddad and Golson, 2007:488). Hence, the term 'moderate', when contrasted with the term 'conservative' or 'traditional', in the present European context, can mean 'a right kind' or 'acceptable' Muslim as opposed to 'not a right kind' of Muslim.

The women who took part in this research did not use such categories when talking about the hijab and I really would not want to ascribe the categories to them or to their views. Moreover, I certainly would not want to categorise them into 'good'/ 'right kind' and 'bad'/ 'wrong kind' of Muslims according to their choices and sources of information i.e. scholarly knowledge that influenced their decision to adopt hijab. In the middle of different discourses and different categories, women's voices are often lost and reduced to whatever rationale a particular commentator has. Usually this rationale is positioned somewhere between being coerced to wear the hijab (by the Islamic patriarchy) or having a false consciousness and, in both cases, Muslim women are portrayed as 'devoid of agency' (Bilge, 2010). The option that they decide(d) to wear hijab as a free choice is nonexistent it seems. Bilge points toward Mahmood's (2005) example of an Egyptian sociologist, Sherifa Zufur (who conducted research among veiled university students in contemporary Cairo) to illustrate this point and asks a valid question:

Although a majority of her interviewees have given piety as their primary reason for taking up the veil, the sociologist asserts that their 'real' motivations resided in socio-economic opportunities that veiling opens in Egyptian society. The underlying logic of this replacing of the religious explanations given by respondents about their veiling by the sociologist's own rationale should be questioned. Is it because certain choices cannot be qualified as choices? (Bilge, 2010)

The women who took part in this research expressed a variety of views which sometimes overlapped and, sometimes, even contradicted each other. While discussion of the *hijab* was the common element in all of the answers, they were adamant that wearing or not wearing the hijab was (or should be) entirely their own choice and that discovering and experiencing hijab was a result of their spiritual journey. Their emphasis on *choice* is possibly because it is usual for Muslim women and, in particular those who decide to adopt the hijab or veil, to feel continuous pressure to defend themselves, their identity, appearance or their beliefs (Afshar, 2008); their choices are treated with a suspicion. To illustrate, Nadiya Takolia's confession in *the Guardian*'s article titled '*The hijab has liberated me from society's expectations of women*' talked about how wearing the hijab has made her feel 'political, feminist and empowering' but was met by a barrage of negative and sceptical readers' comments;. One that received over 1000 'likes' (by the *Guardian* readers) stated:

I don't really care how "empowering" you find it, it's still a symbol of female oppression in the vast majority of the world.[129]

I agree with Bilge's account that 'the veil has become an over-determined cultural signifier predominantly disqualifying its wearer as a free-willed agentic subject, since one cannot voluntarily choose to wear such a symbol of female submission, while at the same time making her a dangerous agent, a civilisational threat to Western modernity' (2010). Amira, a Bosnian woman, talked about the ways global events and politics

---

[129] http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/may/28/hijab-society-women-religious-political?INTCMP=SRCH Accessed on 10/06/2012

caused even her family to suspect her decision to wear hijab as being genuinely independent:

> my family suspected that someone influenced me [to wear hijab]…after 11th of September…they thought that I am not making an independent decision…they said that I would never do that if I was in a 'normal' state of mind…the whole family really took off…like I was the one who organized the twin towers to be demolished [shakes head]…really everyone was scared…but I did not give up…the decision was mine…I [alone] asked for guidance [from God]…sincerely…and I got it…

In this context, some of the research participants also pointed towards the basic postulates in Islamic creed found in the Qur'an – the freedom of choice. This freedom of choice applies to every human being, to both women and men. The Qur'an states that every human being has a right and freedom to believe or not believe in God: 'If it had been thy Lord's Will, they would all have believed, - All who were on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!'(Surah 10, verse 99). To this effect the Qur'an states in Surah 2 verse 256: 'Let there be no compulsion in religion'[130]. Asiya, the only one of the British participants who did not wear hijab, referred to this verse, she said:

> There is no compulsion in religion…How can then anyone force anything else on anybody!

Asiya explained how she has been thinking about wearing hijab but feels that 'the time needs to be right' for her to finally make that decision. It is interesting how Nat, a British Muslim, relates the sense of obligation (*fard*) to choice. Although an act may be deemed as a religious obligation, it still remains a choice and one should perform it out of conviction not out of force. She also connects the sense of benefit of obligatory rulings to one's life:

> In terms of it being fard, yes I was brought up to believe it was. However, this is not the reason I still wear it. I rarely do things just because they are 'fard'; it's

---

[130] The Qur'anic quotes are taken from *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, a translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

because I want to. I own my beliefs and my relationship to God, and so if after a decade of wearing the headscarf, if I no longer wanted to, I would not. I think Islam has a lot of interpretations but more than anything, it represents choice.

Raz, who also is a British woman living in London said:

While I recognise wearing hijab as fard especially in regards to it being an individual obligation, I don't think it would be accurate to say that this is the only reason why I chose to wear it. Like all our fard duties it is once again, deeply personal. No one can do it for you and no one can will you into doing it. I think instead the value that I place on wearing the hijab, more so now, is closely linked to understanding its spiritual merits.

From her extensive and clear response, it is evident that Raz has thought about the relationship between the concept of *fard* and the hijab as *fard* in depth. Her understanding of *fard* as a religious obligation is based on a sense of personal duty and gaining 'spiritual merits' for fulfilling that duty should be of the individual's concern only. Raz makes the connection between her positive experience of wearing hijab's and the spiritual benefits that are associated with fulfilling religious obligations:

All the things that have been decreed fard for us are plentiful in benefits and seeing those benefits helps me value why it is fard and should be fard. I think I can recognise now how beneficial the hijab (both in conceptual and physical meaning) is to promoting the qualities that people should possess for their own welfare.

Raz's response shows that she is very aware of the possible negative aspects of accepting the hijab as a religious obligation (applicable to *all* Muslim women) with all that it entails. Almost paradoxically, she is happy to admit that *she* recognizes that wearing of the hijab is a religious obligation but, at the same time, is 'weary' to 'hammer' the obligation aspect of hijab for the fear of negative and restrictive implications that it might have on other women:

However, I am weary (though perhaps through ignorance) to hammer the obligation aspect of Fard even though I legitimately recognise it. This is because

I think sometimes Fard hijab is monopolised to perpetuate patriarchal systems and justify unfair societal and even economic control. The obligation (or sinful) aspect is used to socially engineer environments where then other forms of gender discrimination is legitimised.

One of the British Muslim women, Tan (who considers wearing of the hijab to be a religious obligation) described how, for her, wearing of hijab leads to a personal 'feeling of fulfilment'. She also mentions how the choice (provided by Islam) to behave in a certain way, leads to accepting the challenges that come with your choices; the freedom and ability to choose and subsequently follow a religious rule adds to one's life:

People getting involved in faith usually rids it of any liberty, but when an individual can look at an Islamic ruling and think about what it may add to their life, there is no better feeling of fulfilment. Perhaps it is linked to the image of modesty, which, when interpreted wrongly, suggests a blandness and invisibility, but to me, wearing the hijab is the ideal challenge against which to live your life if you choose to take it up. Can you engage in a society so obsessed with instant pleasure when wearing the hijab? If so, you've done extremely well. That's why I wear it - Islam provides the choice, I take it and I usually win the battles it inevitably presents.

The concept of Islamic dress is an internal relationship one has to him/herself. It is a comprehensive concept, the idea of the 'inner hijab', with its focus on self-restraint. The outer manifestation is a reminder to oneself, since one is accountable to God (only). It is not just external modesty that matters, but modesty in all aspects of life: spiritual modesty, intellectual modesty etc. The women I interviewed talked about this extensively; in fact, the discussion of inner aspects of hijab was one of the main points in *their* story on hijab and Tan's explanation is a good example of this:

To me, the hijab means freedom. It means a complete cut from societal norms which enable you to be judged in moments by mass audiences. It instead encourages working on the opposite; qualities more internal that take time for people to discover and know. It encourages individuality, because by hiding

something so easily visible, you are able to focus on improving the invisible. It has enabled me to work on myself and making my mind as independent from those around me as my dress code is.

Another British woman Zar said:

> As I have matured, the hijab has progressed to be something more innate and profound and less of a projection outward. I believe for myself, the hijab is deeply spiritual and also very alive; it provokes a consciousness of oneself but also of one's character in relation to others. ......

> The hijab, for me, encourages a mind set and affirms ideas of humility and modesty but not on our outward arrangement instead on our mentality and character.

Farah, who also comes from London, made a connection between the sense of obligation of wearing hijab and hijab's role in assisting the inner, spiritual development or 'purifying' one's heart:

> However I understand that in our faith the externals are assistants to purifying our heart and I am angered when people talk about the sin of not wearing a hijab but ignore the sin of speaking injuriously to others or of gossiping or having arrogance in one's heart.

Our 'inner identity' is communicated and related to others through our 'outer identity' and the connection between body, clothing and identity has been widely discussed and acknowledged (Bovone, 2012:73). In this sense, clothing plays a special part in our 'complex communicative staging' as humans usually present themselves dressed in social interactions. However, as pointed out by Woodward, clothing is not used to just 'straightforwardly communicate' our inner selves to others,: wearing 'the particular item of clothing enacts an internal and behavioural change in the woman' (2007:21) and, on a social level, this typically results in locating ourselves symbolically in, what Davies calls, 'some structured universe of status claims and life-style attachments' (Davies, 1992:4).

Hijab and Others

In Goffman's view, dress is important in social interaction (1959, 1963) and, according to him, one of the three features of dress is using it to successfully play a role. We recognise that we have both a personal and a social identity. In every act of getting dressed, we are dealing with issues of identity, asking ourselves who we are and who we wish to be (Evenson and Trayte, 1999).

When I started wearing hijab, my family members were very worried about my safety and the possible negative effects of my dress choice. My brother and father were particularly worried and hoped that my 'hijab phase' would soon pass and I would be back to 'normal'. The family concern for safety and future prospects, particularly in relation to employment was also echoed by the majority of research participants in Bosnia.

Since 1999, hijab has been part of me and my identity. I was lucky enough to never experience any severe reactions to hijab and my experiences of hijab in the UK are very positive. In the UK, I find non-Muslims generally curious about the hijab and, in most situations, ready to engage in the dialogue. I was asked, on numerous occasions, in public and private, to speak about my experiences of being a British hijabi and I was often met with frank but mostly pleasant questions and responses. To me as a hijabi in the UK, the principal obstruction and challenge is the negative influence of the media. In Bosnia however, I often feel that I need to explain myself fully when meeting new people. My non-Muslim name and my Muslim dress code do not match. Walking around Sarajevo (which has a majority Muslim population), going to the mosques, attending events - I am one of many hijabi women and I 'blend in' quite well until I am asked about my name. Things change when I want to visit my family in the Serb part of Sarajevo (the part known as Republika Srpska). If unaccompanied, I put myself in a serious danger of being harassed or attacked. A hijabi woman simply does not venture onto the Serb territory alone, it is considered almost like an open provocation or simply a stupidity. My hijab makes me and marks me as a part one group – *Bosnyaks* (Bosnian

Muslims[131]) - and also differentiates me from the other group – Bosnian Serbs. In this respect my experiences of hijab in the Bosnian context are therefore quite different to the experiences of my research participants all of whom were Muslims from Muslim families. This is not to say that the Muslim women I interviewed in Bosnia did not have any problems with wearing hijab just because they came from Muslim families or, more accurately, from families with Muslim heritage.

In Bosnia, seeing a woman wearing hijab was very rare before the recent war. Most of the women who covered their hair before the war (during the 1980s) were from rural areas and they could be from any of the three dominant ethnic nationalities. There were some differences in the way their hair was covered, colours of the scarf used and how the rest of the outfit looked. Women belonging to Serb or Croat ethnic background (Christian Orthodox and Christian Catholic respectively) wore mainly black or dark coloured scarves while the women from *Boshnyaks* background wore more colourful scarves as in Fig. 7.

Figure 7. (left to right): Bosnian Serb women, a Bosnian Muslim woman and Bosnian Croat women with various head covering.

It was also rare to see a woman below the age of 65 wearing a scarf of any kind. The headscarf in pre-war Bosnia was therefore associated mainly with rural women over a certain age, as in other South-Eastern European and Mediterranean countries. Hijab, as worn nowadays in Sarajevo for example, was very rare indeed. Throughout my childhood, until I was 16, I can maybe recall seeing a woman in hijab maybe only a

---

[131] *Boshnyak* is a term stands for a Bosnian Muslims to differentiate between an ethnic and religious affiliation. See https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bk.html Accessed on 19/02/2012

handful of times. However, post-war Bosnia experienced resurgence in the number of women adopting the hijab. Symbolic expressions of Muslim identity such as wearing hijab, regular visits to the mosque, attendance of Islamic circles and talks, became much more common after the war (Helms, 2007; Oksenvag, 2008). Since 1996, with every visit to Sarajevo, I noticed that the number of women who wear hijab increased significantly. However, even though Sarajevo has a majority Muslim population – 78. 3% [132] - women who wear hijab are not exempt from negative stereotypes and possible harassment. This negative attitude towards hijab in Bosnia has roots in Bosnian history, long before the recent war and before the Communist government came to power in 1945. As Bonfiglioli points out: "…in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the interwar period, Serbian, Croatian and Slovene elites perceived the regions which had for a long time been dominated by the Ottoman Empire – the republics of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and the regions of Kosovo and Metohija – as the most backward and underdeveloped areas, notably because of the diffusion of Islam"[133]. The veiling was adopted by the majority of women in the towns, be they Muslim or non-Muslim, as this was considered 'decent' rather than oppressive. After the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, came the communists who saw the veil as the main obstacle in 'including' Muslim women in the economy of the newly founded country. Also, the communist government in its essence was very anti-religious and religious symbols were discouraged. In fact, convince Bosnian women about the 'benefits' of de-veiling. The Bosnian newspaper, Oslobođenje in 1947, wrote about meeting of Muslim scholars regarding the issue of veil, claiming that they fully support the action of de-veiling as a need and result of the current economic and social circumstances (245, 9. VII 1947). However, few women stopped wearing the veil and, those who did so, were (mainly) from the big cities (Milišić, 1999). For example, in the town of Višegrad, which had (according to records) one of the highest numbers of women who wore the veil, out of 6800 women only 482

---

[132] http://www.sarajevo.ba/en/stream.php?kat=142 official page for Sarajevo city; accessed on 28/11/2012 'In 1998, Sarajevo demographic picture was changed. Population (274.526 citizens) decreased for more than 26%. New category appeared in the population's structure – refugees, creating situation in which those inhabiting Sarajevo were no more exclusively representatives of the city population. Percentage of the native population remained above 2/3 (67. 3%). Percentage of Boshnyak population grew significantly (78. 3%). Age structure changed as well – city population got older (14. 4% were children up to 14. 67, 9% were those from 15 to 64, and 17. 7% were 65 and older).'

[133] http://www.citsee.eu/citsee-story/becoming-citizens-politics-women%E2%80%99s-emancipation-socialist-yugoslavia Accessed on 26/11/2012

decided to take the veil off[134]. However, some Bosnian Muslim women, even after this 'official' and scholarly encouragement, chose to keep the veil and the great majority remained veiled until 1950, when the socialist state brought in the law forbidding covering of the face and head (known as '*zar i feredža*'). Veiling was to be punishable with the penalty of three months of imprisonment. The law also stipulated that if anybody forced a woman to wear a veil, the punishment would be up to two years imprisonment. The result was achieved and most of the women in Bosnian cities adopted European dress; while women in the rural areas maintained traditional attire (until the 1970s).

In her analysis of de-veiling in Turkey and Iran, Ellen L. Fleischmann (1999) points out that the 'symbolic value of women's emancipation was more important than the substance. Thus, seemingly trivial issues such as the women's dress, for example, became highly charged and imbued with meaning'. Unlike Turkey and Iran, the issue of de-veiling in Bosnia had another dimension: by symbolically constructing veiling as a sign of 'backwardness' and 'oppression' the Communist party created the notion of 'otherness'. Hence, the new social boundaries were formed to differentiate those who were 'advanced' from those 'others' who were 'backward'. The 'advanced' Muslims were the ones who shunned religion and religious practices and focused on work and education. The 'backward' Muslims were the ones who exhibited any form of religious affinity or practice, even in its superficial forms. For women who wore the face veil (*niqab*) this had serious implications. I was fortunate to be able to hear the story of one such woman who has since passed away. Nana (Bosnian for grandmother) N, wore *niqab* all of her adult life until her mid twenties when the law was passed. She said that before the law, she was an active member of society and that majority of Muslim women who she knew (in Sarajevo) wore the face veil. She talked fondly about attending a college and *medresa* (religious school), which was a 'big deal' for 'girls of that time'; she regularly visited shops, mosques, theatres, she had a part-time job as a tutor. The ban on veil imposed an unwanted stop to all of her public life activities, she felt uncomfortable to go out 'naked', she said: 'I felt exposed and naked without my

---

[134] A CK SK BiH, PK KP BiH, K - 435/1950., Informacije o skidanju zara na terenu Sarajevske oblasti do 4. XI 1950. (data from Central Commitee of Communist Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

veil'. Until her late 60s Nana N did not venture out of her house unless it was necessary. Her son and daughter would do most 'outside jobs' for her. Later on, she had to go out more as she was left by herself but, as she described: 'I never felt free again…without my veil'. Her story was an emotional one; I remember that we both cried. To her, being forced to take off her niqab by the new legislation also meant the loss of her identity. Her feelings of preference for the veil might be very unique and rare but they made me re-think about the current attitudes Bosnian Muslims have towards the veil and 'covering' in general and how effective the act of criminalization of veil was in internalizing the aversion towards women's covering in the Bosnian Muslim subconscious. For example, Senida talked about her experiences of wearing hijab in 1996 (about a year after the war ended) and 2008:

> At that time there were about 100 [figure of speech] covered sisters in the city [Sarajevo]. After performing the prayer in the mosque, at the exit, an old Muslim man started to shout at me repeatedly 'take that thing off your head!. I was shocked and hurt, but nobody [people coming from the mosque] was prepared to intervene and console me. Now, it is a completely different story. There are tens of thousands of us [women wearing hijab] and it is part of life, nobody is bothered by it.

As it happens, all of the women interviewed experienced at least one incident similar to Senida's. *Bosnyaks* in Sarajevo in the years just after the war, perceived the hijab as something bad and oppressive. Well illustrated by the choice of words used by the old man – 'take *that thing* off…' Not only did Bosnian Muslim women have to contest the stereotypes from the West but also from Bosnia itself: a legacy of the Yugoslav Communist policy on veiling. By banning the veil in 1950 the communist government gave a clear message to a large number of Muslim women that a particular symbol of their identity is not only disliked, but a criminal act. The Communist government's relentless emphasis on de-veiling is a clear example of how symbols of women's identities are used as a tool to establish new ideology. At its best, the removing of the veil narrative in the former Yugoslavia was sold under the banner of women's emancipation and serious efforts to encourage education and participation in the labour

market. To me, Nana N's experience exposed another dimension to this narrative - she stopped her education and public engagements – when forced by law to remove her veil. She claimed that her experiences were not isolated but shared by other women, her peers. It is unfortunate that this cannot be explored further since Nana N's generation is mostly deceased.

Therefore, until late 1990s the number of women who wore hijab was relatively small as this practice was considered backward. Even, in the capital city of Sarajevo, which was/and is the home of a Muslim religious secondary school and the Islamic University, seeing a woman in hijab was a rarity. Considering the attitudes towards the hijab in Bosnia prior to the 1992-1995 war, it is not surprising that the majority of the interviewed women in Bosnia pointed out that they actually came across opposition to wearing hijab from their own families. Elma and Senida said that the opposition was mainly caused by their parents' genuine worry that hijab would be major obstacle ('*kočnica'*) in their everyday lives: in terms of finding employment, higher education and so on. It is interesting to note here the legacy of the communist regime in the perception of hijab by the parents. Nur (who started to wear hijab soon after her interview) said:

> my parents were everything to me…they supported me, throughout my education…to me…the priority was to listen to my parents…and I could not understand many of my friends who decided to cover [start wearing hijab] without thinking of the consequences…so, their parents stopped talking to them, threatened to throw them out…to me that was just too much…I could not even bear to think about it…my mum just could not take it…so my feeling for covering just dropped

Although Nur wanted to wear hijab for some time, she felt that she just could not take the emotional burden of her parents' possible reaction. She expressed a deep sense of guilt and concern about her decision to wear hijab and the way it would have caused to hurt to her parents. Her decision was to wait and complete her degree and then wear it. It seems that she needed to prove herself a dedicated student and daughter before wearing

the hijab. Like Nur, most of the interviewed women talked about their experiences of informing parents about their decision to wear hijab. Even families which women described as 'religiously' orientated or 'practising' were not receptive towards their daughters adopting hijab. Women often employed some sort of 'strategy' to deal with the negativities or expected negative outcomes as they did not want to upset their close family members with their decisions. Senida expressed her father's worry on how hijab might influence her studies:

> on the way to university…my father was trying to persuade me that it would be better for me to wait…until I complete my university degree…I knew he meant well…but what I felt was stronger…it was a big thing for me…

Almasa talks about her experiences of 'coming out' as a hijabi to her parents:

> in the evening I came back home…and told my parents that I wanted to talk to them…mum was ready…she was just waiting [decision to wear hijab]…but to my dad, it was a shock…I said…I made my decision…If you are going to support me, fine…and if not, don't try to talk me out because it will not work…this is my decision…between me and Allah…nothing to do with you…you don't need to get angry…it is my way of life…from tomorrow I will start wearing hijab…at first, dad was quiet then he exploded…he just needed to get it all out…I started to cry, my sister started to talk…she had similar thoughts…yes, it came as a shock…but it was good…all the negative energy was cleared up…Alhamdulillah [thanks to God]…

Almasa's account demonstrates how difficult and emotionally charged the decision to wear hijab in Bosnia can be for a woman who decides to wear it and for her family too. Those emotions are real and born out of real concern for their daughter's' future prospects of education, employment and career as expressed by Nina:

> …and I always…had this idea [wanting to cover]…parents were rightly worried…what would happen…if I decide to cover…that would be like…where would you go? Where would you find employment?...but when I started my degree I decided to do it…and it felt natural to me…I really did not think about it as a big

step…maybe because I was so young…maybe for the women who cover after university or at a later stage of their lives...it is maybe difficult to break that model of thinking…

The experiences of British Muslim women I interviewed are in, this respect, quite different to the Bosnian Muslim women. The Muslim population in the UK is very diverse. Many have pointed towards ethnic, religious and social heterogeneity of Muslims in the UK. Pauly quotes Husband to 'underscore' and emphasise this diversity: 'there are many cross-cutting variables of nationality, ethnicity, past background, current residence and work, and denominational commitment within Islam that fracture the notion of a homogenous Muslim community in Britain' (Pauly, 2004: 100). The majority of Muslims in the UK (about two-thirds) are of South Asian origins - Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian. However there are also Muslims whose origins are from North Africa, Turkish Cyprus, Turkey, Iran, Somalia, Nigeria, Yemen, Middle East, Malaysia and other countries.

My research participants from the UK were mainly of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin; two of the women were of North African Arab origin. Women have talked about their cultural heritage and how it influenced both their understanding of Islam and development of their religious identity, however none of the women explicitly mentioned their cultural heritage in relation to hijab. So I had to make inferences from what I already heard from the women, during the interviews and from my personal knowledge of South Asian cultural norms. I have close friends who are British Muslims and whose parents are of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian origin; I have spent time at their homes, heard and observed many facets of their respective parental cultures and the way they relate to it. The main point to note here (as already mentioned) is the distinction the women made between the cultural understandings of Islam as practiced or told by parents (and usually via the mother) and Islam as they themselves came to discover and, subsequently, practice it. This is also noted by Jacobson who points toward an increased tendency of South Asian Muslims in Britain to differentiate between religion itself and ethno-cultural influence on their religious identity (Jacobson, 1998: 32). Asiya whose parents came from Pakistan in late 1960s, talked about this:

> A lot of the culture…ties in with the principles they [parents] are brought up with…so…as I was growing up…I didn't sort of have an Islamic influence…I mean…we did the main things like fasting and praying..it was more cultural…it was about tradition…it gets confused…it was about people, about society…it wasn't really about the religion…and I think it was what I was looking for…not just what people thought, what society thought [Pakistani community]…

In the UK, women were also anxious and sometimes met with hostile reactions when they stated to wear hijab. This came primarily from outside, as Sam said:

> but I was scared about what people are going to think of…and stuff…and then I told myself…what a horrible reason…do you care what people think?...or is that what you want to be like…coward…so…I did that…and I feel grateful…that my prayers were answered…

She also described her concerns of letting her parents know that she wishes to wear hijab. She described feeling nervous and was anxious of her mother's reaction:

> I did not know how she would react…she always liked when I wore *sharwal-khamiz* (traditional South-East Asian dress)…but hijab…that was different…

Only three of the interviewed women in the UK came from a family where their mothers also wear hijab. Fatima was the only woman I interviewed who started wearing hijab at an early age, following advice from her parents:

> I wear it because I am comfortable in it. As a child I was advised to wear it by my parents, by the time I was 12 I became used to wearing it and wore it constantly.

The rest of the women talked about their mothers covering their hair with the *dupatta* – quite long piece of cloth, made of light-weight material that is usually placed across the shoulders but sometimes used to loosely cover the hair too. *Dupatta* is mostly part of the set – *shalwar* khamiz (longer tunic and loose, usually drawstring trousers) – or, rarely, with *sari* and, unlike their mothers, none of the interviewed women wore *dupatta*, *shalwar khamiz* or *sari*. That is not to say that some of the research participants did not

have what Tarlo describes as 'Eastern feel' (Tarlo, 2010:73) style of dress; however, their hijab was worn with jeans, dresses, tunics, a combination of dress/skirt and trousers – 'hybrid and contemporary fashionable, visibly Muslim outfits' (ibid). Barnes and Eicher emphasise the importance of clothing in socialising of children to customary gender roles (1993). These roles are usually installed by wearing of clothes bought by and worn by parents. For the majority of UK research participants, if their mothers wore *shalwar khamiz*, they were also expected to wear the same.

This was particularly important at times of celebrations, family gatherings, weddings and occasion/places where they can be seen in their *shalwar khamiz* by members of their wider community or extended family. It was important to be seen as a 'good Pakistani' girl; it signified loyalty to the cultural norms as well as respect and obedience for the family. As Sam pointed out:

> It was irrelevant if the shalwar khamiz were in line with Islamic dress code…some were really see-through, some were tight…as long as you wear shalwar khamiz…you are considered to be a good daughter…especially when there is an event…this really did not make any sense to me…although I actually liked most of my shalwar khamiz sets…

By choosing to wear hijab and not wear *shalwar khamiz* (except, perhaps for the special occasions) women rebel(ed) against their family cultural norms. This was echoed in Tan's statement:

> Another aspect of hijab I love is the slightly rebellious nature of it in rejecting traditional views of beauty.

 For some parents, their daughters' style of dress is deemed to be 'Western' and there is no discussion if their daughter's dress code is Western *and* Islamic - the importance was given to whether or not one looked Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Indian enough. Bovone talks about clothing as a basic element of the particular 'situated system of activity' – it is an interactive relationship - in which we choose out of our 'multiple self-identifications' and privilege one of them depending on the situation we find ourselves in (2012:72). Some participants talked about ways of navigating (or 'privileging')

through what they believed to be Islamic dress and what was expected to be worn by their ethno-cultural norms. Raz said:

> When I am at home…and when aunties are going to visit….I just change into my shalwar khamiz…mum is happy…when I want to go out I put my hijab, jeans and tunic…and my boots…mum is not too happy…but she respects it now…I know that I am doing what I [emphasis] feel is right as a Muslim…

If considered as piece of clothing, in a fashion sense, hijab can be seen as integral to a way women define themselves in terms of social affinities, their sense of belonging and social recognition but, also, in terms of defining themselves as different from the mainstream British society and often their own family's cultural sartorial expectations (Gonzales and Bovone, 2012:29). Drawing from Kant's views, Gonzales summarises this experience as the 'tendency to assimilate and, simultaneously, the tendency to distinguish ourselves from others' (ibid). I found it interesting to hear about simultaneous sense of 'rebelliousness' and 'belonging' that hijab provided for some of the women. Elma, a Bosnian woman, talked about this sense of belonging:

> Hijab provides a sense of security, a sense of belonging and personality........ I experience a small joy every time I approach another woman wearing a hijab, as I do when greeted by men by *Selam* (shorter version of Asalaamu Alaykum) for it is obvious we belong to the same religion.

Belonging was also important to another of my Bosnian research participants she said:

> I am honoured to be allowed to be a part of this blessed group [Muslim women who wear hijab] and I hope things will be different for our daughters Insha'Allah [God willing].

Similarly Zar, a British Muslim, she said:

> I also appreciate how it [hijab] shows that I am Muslim and reminds me of the responsibilities that come with it.

Farah, a British Muslim, talked about her experiences of women's participation in British society. Her views are in agreement with the other participants that Muslim

women who wear hijab are negatively portrayed as inactive and oppressed members of society. She said:

> All the women I know who rock [slang for wear/support] the hijab/niqab, here in the UK, are proactive members of this society and consider themselves equal,. It is others who do not see it that way. Hijab/niqab is *their* choice! If they feel that, by wearing it, they are better people and therefore better Muslims – it is irrelevant what or who inspired/initiated it.[her emphasis]

Rana (British participant) said:

> There are sporadic moments when people inspire you…and support you [in wearing hijab]…but don't expect anyone to throw you a party…[laughs]…when you start covering…mostly people are very cynical…

This statement from Farah captures the essence of how the interviewed women felt about hijab: "…people don't just follow cultures and norms, and under that mass amount of fabric there are intelligent brains and women that feel from what they have learnt it is a requirement! Why is it an issue anyway…"

Conclusion

Historically, the 'issue' of women's dress has always been a point of debate mainly for the men - in any society – Muslim/non-Muslim. How long, how short, what material, colour - women's bodies have often represented the battlefield for what it means to belong to a particular ethnic, racial, social and religious group. The cultural norms inform and play a big part in Muslim women's decisions and choices. Women who took part in this research see hijab as a part of who they are and, as far as they are concerned, wearing of particular clothes comes with a certain level of spiritual awareness. Understanding what it means to be religious and how to express it depends on the culture the women find themselves in. On a macro level, it is the country where they live and cultural norms and, on a micro level, the particular family life, upbringing and friendships they make. Women I interviewed often described in great detail how their

outward appearance and the clothes they chose to wear reflected what was happening inside them, on a spiritual level. Their choice to cover can also be interpreted decide to don hijab are usually faced with a double opposition. In particular, in the case of Bosnians, usually the first opposition comes from their own families, even if the family members are practicing Muslims themselves; their genuine concern about the women's limited future prospects in employment, education and society results in their apprehension towards hijab. In the case of the Muslim women in the UK, the parents concern that their own cultural perceptions of Islam are often challenged by their daughter's' self-discovered Islam. The second opposition, which is effective in both countries, comes from the respective societies the women find themselves in.

Although I also wear hijab, there were times when I found it quite challenging to reconcile with what seemed like obvious paradoxes and contradictions in research participants' accounts and experiences of hijab. To women who took part in this research, hijab has a multitude of meanings and, while some experiences are similar, there are many that differ from woman to woman. What can be said about the hijab is that it plays an active normative function in women's lives and, sometimes, its function is indeed paradoxical.

Chapter Five

Identity and Muslim Women's Organisations

The existence of religious (or spiritual) beliefs influences the way people see themselves. This 'does not happen in isolation' but, instead, 'necessarily in relation to others' (Day, 2008:2) and 'through religious or spiritual lenses' (Çarkoğlu, 2008:111). In his empirical study involving several different societies, Geertz found that religious understandings provide humans with the way to meaningfully place themselves in relation to others and the world around them (1973). Therefore, as with other aspects of identity, one's religious identity is relational and a constantly negotiated 'social practice' (Collins, 1996). As stated by Çarkoğlu, 'religions evolve in a community of believers', and notwithstanding the individual spiritual gains mentioned by my research participants in earlier chapters, being active or seeking out social environments which help to 'internalise' religious 'rhetorical as well as doctrinal perspectives' helps the believers to gain 'social return' alongside /in addition to individual spiritual gain. In n other words, their religious identity drives and helps them to achieve both their personal and public objectives (2008:111).

In this chapter, I explore the interplay between the religious understanding of self and others in different organisational settings. I consider the ways in which Muslim women's organisations operate; I explore the relationship between organisations and women members (or the women who are their users) and the role they have (if any) on individual and collective senses of Muslim identity.

One outcome of the violence (the war in Bosnia, 7/7 in the UK and the effects of 9/11 in the US) is the formation of new Muslim women's organisations. One such organisation was a main collaborator in this study – the Women's National Commission (WNC) – which helped to establish Muslim Women's Network (MWN) in 2003. Both the WNC and MWN were government initiated and funded organisations. Since 2007 MWN is no longer government funded and the WNC ceased to exist in December 2010. In Bosnia, I consider the work of two popular grassroots Muslim women's organisations – *Nahla*

and *Kewser*. Bosnian Muslim women, who took part in this research, sought out the organisations which would allow them to express and develop their religious identity and find likeminded women. Conversely, organisations or networks can also be set-up to seek out the individuals with a particular religious identity, with the intention to address certain socio-political problems or issues, as was the case with the Muslim Women's Network in the UK.

The women's organisations in Bosnia are approached from two aspects – vertical – where I explore the influence of the organisations on the Muslim women's identity, by considering the views of the directors or women who are directly involved in the running of these organizations, and – horizontal – by looking into the ways that the users/group members perceive the organizations in terms of their religious identity development. In Bosnia, Muslim women who took part in this research highlighted the impact and importance of grassroots, women's NGOs in promoting, nurturing and re-shaping their Muslim identity. The successful collaboration with the organisations in Bosnia and the UK, offered this research a unique insight into the work of three Muslim women's organisations in two different European Muslim communities and was vital in highlighting the connection between the increased sense of women's religious identity, agency and empowerment.

Muslim Women's Organisations in Bosnia

Before the war in Bosnia, during the era of socialism and communism, there were no official Muslim women's organisations. Generally, in pre-1989 socialist Yugoslavia, non-governmental women's organisations did not exist except those that were state run and focused around wider socialist/communist ideals. As Bagic states, these organisations 'functioned primarily as the mechanism of women's mobilisation on the part of the communist elite' (2006:144). The Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ) and the Conference for the Social Activity of Women (CSAW) were two officially approved organisations in Yugoslavia and they both consisted of a central, national body and a number of semi-independent, regional units in each of the republics. The AFŽ was formed during the Second World War and functioned until 1953 when it was dissolved

by the central governing body, as according to some records, it was gaining a strong political momentum and having a great influence on women's emancipation. More importantly, its efforts were starting to divert from its original task – building the socialist state (Lóránd, 2007:19). The CSAW was formed in 1961 and was meant to bring together the various women's initiatives of the time, to function at every level of society and in order to change women's condition by guiding them to direct action (Dobos, 1983:50); the main focus of organisation was to challenge the duality of women's roles as 'housekeepers' and as active participants in a socialist society and how to overcome this 'conflict' of roles (ibid). Unlike other communist Eastern European countries, this degree of 'openness' to ideas in Yugoslavia allowed for new social movements to emerge and grow independently from the socialist state; such as feminism, whose beginnings were marked by an international feminist conference held in Belgrade in 1978 (Bagic, 2006:143). Therefore, the socialist state provided some limited opportunities for women to organise within the officially approved parameters and ideals. Those ideals and parameters did not include religion or religious identity at any level, so there were no women's organisations that could have Islam as the main point of reference. Some Muslim Bosnian women did take part and were members of the official communist women's organisations; however, for that to be possible they would have needed to be members of the Communist Party and therefore self-declared atheists. An example of a non-governmental organisation established in 1939 called 'Young Muslims' (*Mladi Muslimani*[135]), which had promotion of Islamic principles as one of its core aims, was used as a major deterrent in establishing any similar groups or organisations. Young Muslims' members were heavily persecuted by the communist regime from the very beginning and in 1945/46 many of its members were imprisoned and some were killed. In 1983, thirteen Bosnian Muslim intellectuals (who were part of Young Muslims) were sentenced to a total of 90 years in prison[136] . Any organisation besides the Communist Party approved and regularly vetted Islamic Community of Bosnia (*Islamska Zajednica*) (Kamberović, 2009:73) was persecuted. One of my

---

[135] http://www.mm.co.ba/mm/index.php/bs/udruzenje-danas/historijat/405-kratak-prikaz-nastanka-i-historijskog-razvitka-mm Accessed on 27/07/2013

[136] Known as 'Sarajevo Process' http://www.mm.co.ba/mm/index.php/bs/udruzenje-danas/historijat/230-proces-iz-1983 Accessed on 10/07/2013

research participants mentioned her family's experiences as they were practicing Muslims and some of her family members belonged to Young Muslims:

> This was before the war…I was 7 years old…yes I remember my mum telling me about one of the hardest time of her life…when she was pregnant with me…she was following the case [court] of Young Muslims…it had a bad effect on her…my grandfather was constantly questioned…He lived in the old part of Sarajevo city…one of my grandmother's brothers was in the prison for quite a long time because he was a member of Young Muslims…

Therefore, the emergence of Muslim women's NGOs in Bosnia (as well as numerous other local and international NGOs) should be placed within post-war civil society development. According to Fagan, the building of civil society was 'core to the international community's peace-building efforts' in Bosnia with its focus on the development of NGOs. Fagan further says:

> What is envisaged is a sector of advocacy organizations; schools for democracy in the Tocquevillian sense, that will, through their advocacy role, bring about a new culture of interaction and political engagement based on compromise, tolerance and participation… these NGOs will represent an alternative to the nationalist-ridden political elites, and imbue a new generation with notions of tolerance, compromise and moderation (2006:407).

Mentioning Kewser and Nahla, Fazlic notes that, after the social and political changes in the region, 'a number of organizations have been established as tools for promoting education, skills and sport among Muslim women' (2011:176). Nahla and Kewser are the first organisations managed by and aimed at Bosnian Muslim women; they are both based in Sarajevo and both NGOs are well recognised, public organisations in mainstream Bosnia.

Most of the Muslim women in Bosnia would have had some experience or contact with their work (relief during the war; educational, cultural e.g. the form of magazines they publish). Nahla was established in 2001 by a group of young Muslim women and their

mission statement (in English) in 2011 was 'to provide the space for the Bosnian woman in which she could feel safe and accepted and get a chance to learn, socialize, broaden and enrich her knowledge and acquire different skills needed to efficiently perform job [sic.] and actively participate in social life."[137] Their most recent statement, under the title 'Our Vision' indicates the widening of their views:

> To be recognized in the society for a professional, innovative approach and high level of social responsibility, to become the initiators of positive social change and establish dialogue and cooperation between different social groups in order to make our country a better place to live.

Nahla is a very popular NGO (or, as they call themselves, Women's Educational Centre), particularly with women aged 18-40. It has about 3000 regular members and many more occasional users. Nahla was established by a group of young Muslim women 'to provide the space for the Bosnian woman in which she could feel safe and accepted and get a chance to learn, socialize, broaden and enrich her knowledge and acquire different skills needed to efficiently perform job and actively participate in social life.'[138]

Kewser is also a Muslim women's organisation but their activities differ to those of Nahla's. They are focused mainly on cultural productions and media. Kewser was established in 1994, during the war in the city of Zenica with the mission 'to help women and children in the field of education and upbringing in the spirit of the Islamic faith and culture'. The head office is now in Sarajevo. They publish a bi-monthly Muslim women's (family) magazine called *Zehra* and they also have a choir made up of 17 young, hijab-wearing Muslim women. During the past two years, Kewser has also expanded its media efforts to include a TV Zehra programme every two weeks. The magazine, the choir and TV programme are very popular and have a strong following throughout Bosnia.

---

[137] For more on Nahla see their website (also available in English) at http://english.nahla.ba/ Accessed on 01/08/2013

[138] Taken from their leaflet produced and printed in 2007.

The director of Kewser, Sadika, talked about how the organisation started during the war:

> me and my friends started from the small gathering ...how to help...how to survive that time...in the best way...especially in regards to the women and family...Our first activities were educational in character and they stayed such to this day...We started in the city of Zenica...and the nursery remains still there [with the same name]. Here in Sarajevo we made a central Kewser's office but we have the members from all the parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. All our activates were developing gradually, with some oscillations...we had an idea what we wanted to achieve and what it is needed in this time, how to help women, families and society at large...the first activities were based on gatherings where we would focus on helping women in every sense – humanitarian, counselling...in every sense...

> Then, we established the children's choir [religious music - *ilahije*], in Zenica. We carried on with that in Sarajevo...establishing the choir...then we started the newsletter...soon we realised that there is a need for a magazine which will focus on women and family...to treat wider topics...So we established 'Zehra' in 2001. Then Mosus Pejgamberov [you are introducing a phrase without an explanation as to what it is/means]...we started that in the beginning in a way...but it was more like small performances...and they did not have the same name but the purpose was the same. So the Mosus has grown into the tradition now, it has been running for 6 years now in Zetra [major event venue in Sarajevo]. Then we established TV Zehra. We wanted to treat similar topics as in magazine but in a different format to reach as many people as we can...because not everybody has the opportunity to read the magazine...and for those who prefer to watch rather then read...it proved to be a success, we had a really positive feedback...lot of people contacted us to congratulate...

> Of course, we started all this like the amateurs but soon we saw it grow into something more bigger/professional.

Maddock states that 'Women develop and work in community-based projects because within them they can find the space and opportunity to develop their own ways of working…' 1999:20) and Sadika's account of the way Kewser operates shows that women at Kewser have developed their own models of organisation - ones to suit their needs and their lifestyles.

Every year, Kewser organises a major cultural event in the capital, called 'Prophet's (Prophet Muhammed p.b.u.h) Musk' (*Mosus Pejgamberov*). It usually lasts 7 days culminating in a large scale concert at Zetra Olympic Hall with around 10,000 attendees. Mer, one of the women working in Kewser, is a mother of two and in her early 30s; she expressed how the flexibility offered by Kewser suits her family responsibilities. She has been involved in the majority of Kewser's projects and initiatives:

> Kewser was not on my list of aspirations…I cannot say that I came here by coincidence but I came with a different intention…I just wanted to collaborate with the women here…but then I became more active and it's been 4 years now…and…Kewser, as an organisation, has projects that are always developing… it always grows…I say 'if you come to Kewser once, you'll come to Kewser all the time'…because the projects are always expanding and when you connect yourself once, you'll always have the place to get involved again…because of that, Kewser, as a work place suits me really well…better than any other place could…because of the working time…because of non-existent pressures and because of the flexibility which it offers…it is a place where everybody can develop their potentials and new ideas…the activities which concern me in Kewser are connected to the current projects…I work wherever I'm needed…I don't have a strictly defined role…I'm always doing a few projects at once…some of them are similar to each other while others are completely different…I work on TV Zehra…magazine Zehra…I write for Zehra…or sometimes I do the interviews…we are all part of the cohesive team…and we help each other with the projects…we do everything together and

try to complete the common aim…I mean…the project that we work on…We all do everything…there are no divisions…no hierarchy…

I asked Mer to comment on the fact that Kewser is a women's only organisation. I wanted find out if, according to her experience, that affects its efficiency. Here is how she responded:

> I think that every organisation should have some sort of structure…with clearly defined roles and duties of all the members…but, in an organisation such as Kewser, we have roughly defined roles…for example, the editor of magazine Zehra will not get herself too involved with TV Zehra…maybe it is something we lack sometimes…so that things are left ambiguous sometimes…here in Kewser…but we are different…it is a different sort of organisation….

Mer's account of the way women in Kewser work illustrates that, as a team, they are doing a great deal in order 'to create parity of skills and knowledge' but they also have an understanding of 'differentials in knowledge, commitment and skills' between each other and attempt 'to find ways of reducing and eliminating' these differentials with the aim of distributing work in a non-hierarchal manner (Brown, 1992:171).

She also explained why she thinks that Kewser is different from other organisations:

> Because here…there is a different idea/aim that guides us all…Here we work on the projects that are not concerned with material gain/character…Here, we work on projects that should evolve us globally as Bosnian Muslims…So, we work on the projects which have wide appeal…projects like magazine Zehra…so that we would offer an alternative to the women, so that they can have a magazine where they can find all that a Muslim woman needs to know in a modern society…we also have a TV Zehra, so we can offer an alternative to women, mothers, families…content which is relevant to a Muslim woman in the modern society…so that they are informed…so we are trying to provide alternatives to Muslims, both men and women…TV has a great impact on our lives…and sometimes we see and get things that we do not like…Zehra is like a search engine…final product…that we can offer to a Muslim woman…

I wanted to know about how decisions are made and how are they communicated within the organisation. I also wanted to know in which way Kewser influences her personally:

> Projects are done so…the editor of the TV Zehra and the director [of Kewser]…we have a meeting at the beginning of the month to decide what projects and topics we want to cover…same is with Zehra magazine…nobody here works by themselves…if one has an idea…it is discussed…how to implement it…Kewser is very particular…we are able to discuss things all the time…we are able to exchange ideas…we are able to exchange our experiences…and to increase consciousness…like what happened earlier today [relating to a discussion in Kewser's office before the interview]…in Kewser, you find that there is a continuous possibility to wake-up your conscience from the state of slumber…in every moment…what do I want to say by this…when you find yourself lulled by some routines/practices in your private life…you can always evaluate yourself here…if that is right or not…so…we are connected here both personally and professionally…more than in any other organisation…

I then asked if she can comment on other organisations; if the environment is the same:

> No…I don't believe so…there are formalities in the other organisations…here, we do not have formalities…sometimes it is tricky…but what we have connectedness...if one of us comes with problems…there will always be somebody to listen to you…there are days when we have so much work, but then there are days that we just discuss things…but it is all productive and useful…

Amel is one of the key individuals in Kewser. She has been involved in its work since the start. She describes her experiences with Kewser:

> I finished my university…and I also completed a journalism course…I met Sadika [Kewser's director] in Zenica…and then I started getting into Kewser…and its activities…Sadika was a synonym for Kewser…and she was…I moved to Sarajevo in 1996...Kewser also moved to Sarajevo…and then

we slowly started to organise meetings, gatherings, ideas were born…idea for a magazine was one of the first…then radio…then TV Zehra…but most importantly, what I found in Kewser was a support and abode for myself…people who think alike…although even here we do not have same personalities…and we have different visions but we have the same aim…we work well and unify our different personalities within the team…I think that Kewser has a positive effect…on the whole society…not only Muslims…we try to unfold a positive image…to break down the stereotypes about covered women…generally, we fight for women rights…I like it…because Sadika…I've seen other organisations…belonging to different groups…Salafi…errrr…but they all seemed narrow…I wanted something with a wide appeal…someplace where you can always learn something new…research and expand…question…not accepting anything blindly…or literally…you know…Yes…that is it…

It is clear from Amel's response, how the quality of relationships between herself and other women at Kewser contributes to her feeling that she does meaningful work, which was also echoed by Mer's use of words 'we have connectedness'. The importance of *connectedness* to others has been mentioned by Riesman as vital for the understanding of individual sense of self (1992:10). Moreover, as the findings of research conducted by Lips-Wiersma show, this is so not only because the work is interesting but also because Amel and Mer feel it is 'worthwhile' in a spiritual sense too (2002). I also asked Amel about Kewser's influence on her personally. She talked about how the women-only space in Kweser makes her feel and what effect it has on her:

More than positive. My intention was always…for me to give to the society through Kewser…it was more like that…than what I would gain from Kewser…I never considered how much I will gain in that sense…but every time when the other opportunities came up…the thing that tipped the balance and made me stay here was exactly that…what I get from Kewser…you know…other thing which is important…we don't have much contact with men…we are not isolated but we work in a women's only space…where you

feel comfortable and relaxed…we know that chemistry is a strange thing…you can never be sure that, with your behaviour, you can cause somebody to think one thing or another…here, we are free from that…you can breathe easily…

Since Amel is considered to be one of the key women in Kewser, and one that has spent over 10 years working for it, I wanted to ask her about how she sees Kewser's development over the years:

> I never paid any attention…but popularity [Kewser's] has increased…but that signifies that we are better known…that people know about us…if they are reading the magazine…watching TV Zehra…it means that they are influenced by us…we always insist on good values…I think that is what people have come to recognise about us…and something that makes us popular with people of different views…different generations…levels of education…we are following the rule 'just work hard and God will see your efforts'…you know…we are not concerned how many members we have…how many girls in the choir…at the end it is God who changes people…our role is to try hard…how many people will change because of us…only God knows that…

Sehija (pronounced Sehiya), director of Nahla, talked about 'a unique' way in which Nahla developed:

> When I came back from my studies…from Malaysia…I came back [to Bosnia] at the end of 1998…I started to work at school as a teacher of Arabic…see, this sort of mission, my desire, my need to work with women, started in my adolescence…when I felt that I needed something like that…nothing like that existed then …we [Muslim women] did not have any space to socialise…also, during the war, I worked in charity organisations, while I was in Zagreb…with refugees from Bosnia [left Bosnia during the war and went to Croatia]…but working with women there made me realise that's where work needs to be done…it seems like on this Balkan terrain…there was a lot of suffering…but it seems like the women suffered the most…in everything that happened women

194

were at the centre…so while I was studying, that was on my mind all the time…I wanted to finish my studies as soon as possible so that I can go back to Bosnia and work with women…so I don't think it all happened as a coincidence…I was thinking about this for 10 or 15 years…it was like my life's mission…so when I came back…I spend some time looking into other organisations and their activities…and it became clear to me that there was nothing save occasional educational courses for women…and there was no continuity, it was all temporary…so it was important to me to start something which would have stability…which would offer Bosnian Muslim women something more lasting…at that time I really did not know how to do it…I just knew what I would like it [organisation] to be…

Like Sadika (director and founder of Kewser), Sehija understood the needs of Muslim women in their own surrounding and had a strong interest and need to 'do something' for Muslim women. For Sehija, caring and providing for the needs of Bosnian Muslim women (Boshnyakinye) was a 'life mission' with a strong spiritual connection and meaning, she also said: 'I feel that Allah wanted me to do this, it was a part of His plan for me'. Sehija's (and Sadika's) stance is in line with a study conducted by Lips-Wiersma which indicated that '[S]pirituality influences individual's beliefs of what are worthwhile purposes, and these purposes in turn influence career behaviour' (2002:514) as her 'career' is being director of Nahla. In this respect, Lips-Weirsma identified four significant and meaningful purposes which Sehija mentioned in her response about Nahla – 'serving others', 'developing and becoming self', 'unity with others' and 'expressing self' (ibid). Furthermore, the purposes and aims for the directors of both Nahla and Kewser, as well as for the other interviewed women who work or contribute to these two organisations, are informed by their Islamic faith. The Qur'an describes true believers – *muttaqin* – as those 'investing in the Hereafter (*akhirah*)' by performing good deeds, being kind and charitable to people and also sharing from one's blessings (*rizq*) which 'includes everything given to humans in this world such as wealth, knowledge, time, and power' (Calis, 2012). There are numerous verses in the Qur'an that remind 'Muslims of their social responsibilities, which extend beyond their personal relationship with God' (ibid) with an ultimate aim of seeking God's (*Allah*'s) pleasure

and a place in Paradise (*Jennah*). Therefore, for a believer, the type of life in the Hereafter is contingent on how life is lived in this world. For example, the Qur'an[139] says:

> Announce to those who believe and have done good deeds, glad tidings of gardens under which rivers flow [Paradise] (Surah 2:15)

> But those who believe and do good deeds are people of Paradise (Surah 2:82)

> In order that He[140] [Allah] may recompense those who have believed and done right (Surah 34:4)

Furthermore, as pointed out by Bakar, 'Islam is emphasizing here the teaching that as a religion it is offering every individual man or woman, the possibility of posthumous salvation through an active and meaningful participation in societal salvation' (2009:10). Kewser's Mer's comment 'there is a different idea/aim that guides us all…Here we work on the projects that are not concerned with material gain/character' illustrates this well. The concept of 'spiritual investment' mentioned in the Qur'an is what drives and inspires women in Kewser and Nahla, to borrow Amel's words, 'just work hard and God will see your efforts'.

Amel also commented on how the post-war availability of information related to Islam has influenced a change in Muslim women's attitudes and perception of religion. I asked about what role Kewser's plays in that process:

> yes…we work with mass media and internet…the best indicator is that people know about us…if you are interested you can ask anybody…that is how you can judge our popularity…

> now young women know…I think the difference now is the access to the literature…and understanding of the religion…that is different…now anybody

---

[139] From Al-Qur'an, Contemporary Translation by Ahmed Ali (1993)

[140] Allah is genderless, without partner, progeny and nothing is equal to Allah. As Barlas explains, Qur'an maintains that humans (and therefore human languages) cannot grasp Allah's divine reality and 'cannot be explained by way of similitude' hence references to Allah as 'He' do 'not mean that God is male or like one' (2002:105) as Islam rejects anthropomorphism. For more on this see Barlas 2002 p.99-109

can search on internet and read about Islam…what Islam says about different issues…what the Qur'an says…and then use your own reasoning and figure it out…what is ok…I think that is the biggest difference…in relation to before the war…so…also when you look now…there has never been more girls with a little clothes on…

Amel's comments also deal with the topics of my previous chapters – hijab and family – and are very illustrative of the triangular relationship between women's own understanding (and practicing) of religion, the role of their families'/cultures, and the organisations they are involved with. Her words 'there has never been more girls with a little clothes on…' might seem a bit confusing[141] at first, however, what she tried to explain to me was the following: the freedom for women to express their religious identity and find out about Islam (and other religions) in post-war Bosnia does not necessarily lead to obvious, visible signs of religious devotion but, at the same time, post-war 'resurgence'[142] in women wearing Islamic dress (hijab) does not always mean an increase in religiosity. There are many forms of religiosity and many ways of expressing it (Fukuyama, 2001; Voas and Crockett, 2005). In the Bosnian context, outward appearance is, at best, just one of the many facets of one's identity and it can be used to express oneself in a particular way in order to 'convey an impression to others' that is 'likely to evoke' a specific and wanted response (Goffman, 1969:3-5). Because of its unique geographical position and history, Bosnia (and, more specifically, Sarajevo) is a place of contrasts and contradictions that outsiders, and sometimes Bosnians like Amel, might find difficult to grasp or make sense of and, more importantly, might find difficult to apply their 'untested stereotypes' to (ibid). My experiences, during my last visit to Sarajevo in August 2010, also made me question my own stereotypes about religiosity and outward appearance. It was the fasting month of Ramadan and the city mosques were so full of worshipers that courtyards were used to provide extra praying space. On my regular trip to the mosque, in a trolleybus, two young women boarded at one of the stops. Since both of them were scantily dressed in

---

[141] This is possibly because her phrases could not be translated into English to convey the original meaning in Bosnian.
[142] http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-03-09/world/37579134_1_head-scarves-hijab-bosnian-muslims Accessed on 20/07/2013

little more than beachwear, I was positively shocked when one said to the other: 'Have you remembered your scarf and skirt? [she looked inside her handbag] We will go for our night prayers to the Old Town Mosque tonight'. Here Göle's phrase (about 'new European Muslims') of 'double cultural capital' can be applied loosely[143]. She claims that because 'a double cultural capital' Muslim in Europe can define themselves by their religiosity but also because of 'learned techniques of self–representation in public spaces', gained from their secular environments, they can 'circulate between different activities and spaces such as home, class, youth associations, and urban leisure space' (2007:5). In this sense, outward expression of self (in behaviour, dress sense, partaking in communal ritual practices) or 'performance' is, as Goffman says, 'socialised' and adapted 'to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented' (1969:30). The chapter titled, 'Hijab and Muslim Women's Identity' discusses these issues further but, for now, it is important to note the importance of Muslim women's organisations in the shaping of this debate and how they 'make it possible' for women to express religious identity.

Munira is a woman in her 20s who has been involved in various projects at Kewser from her teenage years. She started by joining the choir, from where her involvement with Kewser developed further. She talked about how seeing positive, female, Muslim role models influenced her decision to adopt hijab:

> At the end of 2005, I started my new diary…and I wrote all my aims, goals, wishes for the year to come…What I want from my life in the next year…what I want to change…I wrote it all down…one of the things, it happened while I was looking at the magazine…I already started going to Kewser in 4th grade…so we [sister] started singing in the choir…so that influenced me…In the magazine there was a picture of a young lady, covered…she looked very similar to you…[both laugh]… It was Zehra…but it was not you [laughs]…but it really impressed me…she looked so modern, so fresh, radiant…she was covered, but she looked beautiful…she was totally cool…it really left a big impression on

---

[143] I say 'loosely' because Göle's observations are based on Muslim communities in the EU countries. The concept of 'secular knowledge' in Bosnian socio-political and historical contexts is notably different. I would argue that, in Bosnian case, there could be 'multiple' rather than 'double' cultural capitals at play.

me…today, it is normal to see a woman dressed like that…so…I cut the picture out…and I put it in my diary…and I wrote…"if I want to do this [start wearing hijab]…what do I need to change in my life? What is it that does not go with the picture…what do I need to be like to do that?" …and I came up with about 10 points…from the change of places where I go out…all those things that I thought were not good…I started my university covered…I had friends at Kewser who were supportive… still it was a bit uncomfortable…not many girls were covered at university…but then I found a few friends…

I ask her about Kewser and if it had any impact on her identity as a Muslim:

Before, my connection with Islam…it was a big connection…and this might sound pathetic…but even today many people feel that way…were *ilahije* [religious songs]…and the concerts…whenever I would go to those concerts I felt like I was part of something beautiful…it was really emotional as well…so there was an audition…my sister told me…so we went and we were accepted [in the Kewser choir]…lots of the girls were covered…that really helped me…it was my first experience with hijab…two friends from Kewser were really my role models…the way I wanted to be…they were both successful, both at university…I saw that they did not have any problems…they had normal lives…they were my support…another thing is that Kewser made it possible for me to do all the things that I always wanted to do but within Islam…to sing but not like half-naked pop singer…there was hijab fashion show and I was a model…so, there were many things that I took part in…Kewser made it possible but within Islam…you are able to present Islam as it is…you give a good example…you show the beautiful side…in that way the organisation [Kewser], from my experience, make it possible to fulfil your wishes within Islam…nothing is problematic…organisations help a lot…you see other people who are going through similar things…and are able to support each other and share experiences…

For Munira, Kewser not only provided a space where she was able to meet and socialise with like-minded young women, it also provided support for her developing Muslim

identity. The choice of activities (choir, magazine, TV show, and yearly concert) is not coincidental but a testament to Kewser's knowledge and understanding of young Muslim women's needs in Bosnia. This has made it a very well-known organisation, where Muslim women feel they can express their religious and creative identities without compromising one or the other.

Figure 8. Women after an event in Kewser.

Figure 9. A lecture in Nahla.

Meli, who started by attending some of the Nahla's classes and now works for Nahla, talked about her first experiences of the organisation very passionately. She emphasised the positive influence of Nahla in providing a space where women can meet, learn and socialise:

> My sister, who is older than me, who was going to Nahla regularly...she invited me many, many times to go with her…I kept telling her that I was not interested…she was annoying me with her constant 'invitations'…and then…one day in August…I just told her: 'can you please put my name down for

the 'Islamic school' course at Nahla'…she was shocked!...she almost lost her breath…and just said 'ok'…it was really funny…she did not make a single comment…so that is how I started going to Nahla…I started talking to others there…I met other women and we started socialising…outside Nahla and in-between our classes…I used to really enjoy those times…it really made me feel happier and more fulfilled…it was like re-charging my batteries…I felt like I found a group of women I can really relate to…they are young, successful, intelligent…they have a desire to succeed and desire to show Islam in a positive light…so when we go through the tough time…we are there for each other…

UK Muslim Women and Government: Women's National Commission and Muslim Women's Network

Following their immigration to the UK in the 60s and 70s, because of a number of challenges and pressures from the wider society as well as from their own communities, Muslim women in the UK have been providing support and help for each other for decades and prior to formation of any official organisations, groups or networks (Gilliat-Ray, 2010:216). Movement can be noted from migration and formation of communities to identity, belonging and cultural difference (Modood, 2005). In this context, the Muslim organisations developed to accommodate the needs of this developing community, such as Muslim Council of Britain, Islamic Society of Britain and The Association of British Muslims.

Although the majority of Muslim immigrants came from the Indian subcontinent, it is important to note that Muslim women who came to the UK in the 60s and 70s did not all come from the same country, class, race or education background. These factors, which were already part of their identities before arrival to the UK, met with the existing, dynamic and complex make-up of the respective British cities (and regions) on their arrival. Therefore, 'being a Muslim 'immigrant'' meant 'different things to different women' (Afshar, 1998:123) and the manner in which migrant women (irrespective of their religious background) started to organise and form networks depended not only on

their own backgrounds, but also on the socio-economical and political climate of the British cities they settled in. As Yasmin Ali points out, from the beginning of this mass - migration period, women were not totally excluded 'from the ranks of appointed community representatives' (1998:2). However, she also highlights the fact that, because of the patterns of mass-migration, few working-class women would have even been present in the UK in the 1960s to be appointed as representatives; hence, those positions were taken by women who came from 'migrant aristocracy', usually wives of doctors and academics (ibid). Ali further explains how this influenced early 'race relations' policy:

> Recognising their role as 'interpreters' of their own working class to white authority, such women could collude in stereotyping working-class women, whilst retaining - the exception proving the rule - their own relative autonomy. …. Such an inherent class bias in the initial construction of the community leadership also points to an ethnic bias, in that the urban educated middle class from the subcontinent did not necessarily share the same ethnic profile as the mass of working-class migrants they were called upon to represent (1998:2).

Wilson also mentions class as an important factor in her important 1978 work on Asian women in Britain:

> For the middle class Asians their working-class sisters do not really exist…The proportion of Asian women in Britain who are as well-off as Mrs H. is minute, but they are often the ones who are prominent on race-relations bodies and community relations sub-committees. It is they who hold dialogue with the establishment spokesmen, sitting side by side with white experts and a few Asian men on the 'problems' and 'needs' of Asian women (1978:48-49).

Both Ali's and Wilson's accounts are in agreement and provide a valuable insight into the ways in which South Asian migrant women's (like the mothers of the majority of my UK research participants) class influenced their prospects of organising and relating within their own communities and with the host society. Moreover, these accounts indicate how the concept of a 'Muslim woman' was created in the British context over

this time and why, as Brah points out, 'it is crucial to make distinction between 'Muslim woman' as a discursive category of 'representation' and Muslim women as embodied, situated, historical subjects with varying and diverse personal or collective biographies and social orientations' (1996:131). For example, certain lived experiences of the Asian Muslim women that settled in wealthy West London and came from educated middle-class families in East Africa, might have little or no similarities with those of Asian Muslim women that came from the rural Punjab region of Pakistan and settled in the poorer areas of West Yorkshire; but, at the same time, there could be 'certain cultural specificities' that are shared (ibid) between both sets of women. Therefore, is important to keep in mind different contexts that women came *from* and came *to* when considering how migrant women organised and developed women's organisations/networks in the UK.

Werbner, in her research on Manchester's Pakistani migrant women during the 1970s, emphasised the importance of 'extra-domestic, women-centred networks' in providing the support within the community; women in these networks, she found, were 'vocal and assertive, vigorous and affectionate' forming friendships rapidly (1991:220). Later, Werbner researched a Pakistani women's association based in Manchester – *Al-Masoom* – which was established in 1990 and 'dominated Pakistani women activism in the city' for six years until it split in 1996. Werbner made it clear that *Al-Masoom* was not a secular women's organisation and that its members and main activists were 'pious Muslims who pray regularly, fast on Ramadan and give voluntary time to teaching young children the Koran' and like women associated with *Kewser* and *Nahla* in Bosnia, women involved with *Al-Masoom* were informed and influenced by Qur'anic principles which maintain that Islam is an egalitarian religion that guarantees women's rights (2000:320). An important aspect of *Al-Masoom's* very successful civic activism which focused on wider, international and humanitarian causes (fundraising, organising protests against atrocities in Bosnia and Kashmir, providing emergency relief to disaster stricken regions[144]) was that the organisation gained the 'right to speak in the diasporic public sphere in Manchester on issues relating especially to women's rights' which in

---

[144] http://www.almasoomtrust.org.uk/biography.html Accessed on 10/08/2013

turn 'enabled women to break into a tabooed space previously preserved for male public activists' (ibid). Based on her research, Werbner stands firm in claiming that 'diaspora women' were not marked by 'passivity and oppression' but rather, because of their challenging position, by activism which later gained a more public character.

The WNC was an official collaborative body for this research and my relationship with it was a close one. After writing the initial email explaining my research, I was invited to stay at the WNC offices on two separate occasions: 28th July-1st August, 2008 and 7-10th July, 2009. The WNC was[145] a United Kingdom advisory non-departmental public body (NDPB) set up in 1969 to advise government on women's views, to act as an umbrella body for UK-based women's groups in their dealings with government. Their own description, on the WNC website (now defunct and archived[146]) is as follows:

> As the only official, national body working on women's equality we have a special role to fulfil and an important remit within the equality machinery in the UK. Our independent voice, bringing the informed voice of women to government, especially women who may not represented by mainstream organisations, is unique.

However, in 1990, Gelb described the WNC as limited by governmental constrains 'because of its close ties to the incumbent administration' (1990:98) and, significant to this research, is her following remark:

> In addition, the scope of its membership is limited by the requirement that member groups must have been in existence a number of years and must have a national presence and membership…although non member groups are occasionally invited to participate in the WNC deliberations on an ad hoc basis (ibid).

I could gather, from the interviews with the women who were involved with setting up of the MWN, that the individual Muslim women were, in a way, 'headhunted' to be part

---

[145] The WNC was abolished on 31st of December 2010 by the Government, in the process popularly known as eliminating 'quangos'.
[146] http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110412093219/http:/www.thewnc.org.uk/ Accessed on 12/07/2013

of the network; either through personal connections or their work with Muslim communities nationwide. Halford and Leonard, in their discussion on performance pressures experienced by women managers within organisations, talk about how these pressures intensify even further if the racial identity of marginalised groups is considered (2001:114-115). Although their discussion is focused on a work organisations environment, parts of the analysis can be applied to the MWN. As with the promotion of black workers to the managerial positions as a 'form of affirmative action and equal-opportunity programmes', MWN was set up as a reaction to outside events in the hope of providing the Government with a Muslim women's voice, where up to then (circa 2004) Muslim women's voice was, for the most part, excluded from the important and relevant decisions made by Government. As highlighted by Halford and Leonard, this exclusion was not a choice but rather 'a structural constraint' (ibid) linked to their marginalised position within British society (Dwyer, 2000; Spalek and Lambert, 2008).

On their promotional leaflet from 2007, MWN invites readers to join 'and help create a critical mass of voices that cannot be ignored by our communities or by policy and decision makers' with a mission 'to mainstream the voices of Muslim women to government' (MWN-UK 2007).

Problems with MWN at present can be explained by Maddock:

> Major problem for NGOs, is that they are often hard-pressed to become more like mainstream organisations in order to secure grants and credibility, as funders prefer to invest in organisations which have management and structure systems similar to their own….The relationships are often based on flexibility, local connectedness, staff commitment and motivation and informality (1999: 20- 22).

Lubna is a British Muslim of South Asian family background. A self-defined feminist, she was working for the WNC even before MWN was formed; later, she was one of the MWN's board members. Lubna was directly involved in facilitating and producing '*She Who Disputes*'[147], a report produced by MWN (while still part of the WNC), based on

---

[147] http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/go_files/downloads/992754-shewhodisputesnov06.pdf Accessed on 05/06/2013

the 'direct words of over 200 Muslim women' who took part in a series of nationwide listening events[148]. This is what she said about her experiences with MWN:

> WNC something that came about half time with Fawcett, half time with WNC …NGO and government ….however MWN was becoming a bigger part of work of WNC…so directors of WNC asked me if I wanted to get involved…it was in 2004, it started before I got involved…what originally happened with MWN was…it was originally set up as an ad hoc group because the minister for women at the time [named]. …her constituency at the time was Leicester which has high number of Muslims…what she felt it was…that often the voices of Muslim men were heard not Muslim women…so there was a group…she thought [named minister] if the group expanded, it would be more cohesive group that could bring its views to government…then she turned to WNC and asked them to expand this group, to turn it into something…so that WNC can act as a bridge between the group of women and government…because the whole role of WNC is to enable women's organizations to reach government…and, of course, the ultimate aim is that those organisations no longer need WNC so that WNC can remove itself from the equation and those groups can be in direct contact with the government…that was happening with MWN when I came on board…I think there was about…I don't know…12-13 different women there, in the group…the idea was to expand the group and diversify it to make sure more women were involved…and it was also about how to…it was about the group deciding what they wanted as an aim [for the group] but also how they identified…so you had some women who identified as Muslim but were not necessarily religious, if you like…or practicing…however, you had some women who were very practicing…so…at first there was a lot of tension within the group…when I first started…it needed to be clear that the group was not about the religion of Islam…it was about the identity…community…Muslim is not just a single identity...it is a diverse identity…it took a long time to get the group to that place…the group was very good in the sense that they said from the

---

very beginning 'we do not represent every Muslim woman out there…we do not claim that either'…which was the right approach to take I think…Muslim community is so diverse…

Lubna's account illustrates that it was quite challenging for WNC to form a group of Muslim women who should be representative of a very diverse British Muslim community and its struggles, in this respect, continued until the MWN became independent. Mary was a deputy director of WNC at the time of interview and she had this to say about how WNC helped to form MWN:

> P. H. was very concerned that there was no voice for Muslim women within the mainstream...she asked WNC…she asked J.V.…who was WNC director…and she asked [J.V] to set up a group made up of some of the women who she [PH] met on constituency basis…so we got those women in and we also added to it…from Muslim Council of Britain and various other people…and had some meetings…and that grew a bit…and…it all became a bit difficult…but that is the point…as it was growing…we took it forward…what we used to do, in the beginning…we would hold it as a normal WNC working group…so we would have…we tried to make it as representative as possible…hmmmm…we tried to get other speakers from government to come in and talk about their consultations…and that worked well to begin with but…than…some of the group were unhappy…because they felt that we were setting the agenda…ermmm…and that we were just getting the government to come and talk at them…

The feeling of 'setting the agenda' for the MWN was not the only problem for the women who were part of the MWN at the time, another one was inability to reach out to Muslim women. Haifa talked about this. She was involved in MWN at the beginning of its functioning as she was one of the Commissioners at WNC. She was also part of the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group which was launched in 2008 by the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown:

To be honest…they are still not reaching out to women…and…we really have to look at why, after all of these years, we still are not having really strong Muslim women's organizations that can really reach out and provide a vision for women…with the WNC…in theory, it is a very good idea…you know…that you can get public appointments and get women to the heart of the Commission…and give the women an opportunity to influence public policy…that is really, really good…it was a good experience for me…gave me an insight how government operates…how do we influence ministers…what are the emerging discussions around making policies…that is very important for women…

WNC did initially set up MWN…but then they made it independent…[discussion about limited government budget hence the limited number of projects they can do]

Going back to WNC and MWN…they are very important platforms but I don't think that they have done enough to actually harness the voices of Muslim women, they could do much more…there is actually a generation of Muslim women that are confident and very different to the previous generations and from men…I feel more confident that the leadership and change is going to come from women, especially European Muslim women…issues like forced marriages, domestic violence etc…these are still big issues in our communities that still haven't been addressed…For us, Islam gave us freedom from our families and from the cultural pressures…what our parents were telling us was quite different from what we used to hear from talks and organizations at the time when I was growing up…they presented us with a very different vision…for the first time…I think for many women…you see them wearing hijab, becoming activists…because they want to get away from the restrictions in their own family…in their own communities…and this Islamic activist model presents them with a very powerful model and it gives them a lot of freedoms…the issue than is how do they take that forward?...

Haifa's remark about how MWN has not done 'enough to actually harness the voices of Muslim women' resonated with me and I wanted to further examine how 'connected' is MWN with Muslim women in the UK. I decided to do this by considering their 'activity' on a social networking site. Social networking sites such as *Facebook* have become very popular tools in present day online communication (also with a real impact on offline communication) and interaction. They are used by individual users as well as organisations, groups, networks, companies and governments to share information and establish links as well as to sell and promote products, raise awareness, share ideas and campaigns. Researchers have found that *Facebook*, in some instances, 'provides multiple communication opportunities, both public and private, broadcast and targeted, lightweight and more substantive' (Ellison et al., 2011:889) and can also be used to predict the social capital of an individual, group or organization based on the number of 'friendships' (ibid), people in the *Facebook* 'group' or 'likes'[149]. As Waters et al. has rightly pointed out, '[W]ith an average of 250,000 people registering to use Facebook daily, organizations cannot ignore the social networking phenomenon' (2009:102). From 2006 *Facebook* has allowed organizations to be registered on their networking site and since, many for-profit and non-profit organizations have joined in order to reach as many people as possible through a key advantage that has a huge potential of speedy growth - relationships (Waters et al., 2009). It is not surprising therefore that all three organizations – MWN, Kewser and Nahla – are present on *Facebook*, where they have their own page and often a separate group too. I am aware that the information provided through *Facebook* in terms of organisations' members and activity may not be an accurate reflection of their actual, offline level of popularity or influence on (and engagement with) Muslim women in their respective localities, but given the recent research on social networking sites and their effects on the relationship and level of participation between the non-profit organisations and their stakeholders/users (Waters et al., 2009), the data provided cannot be ignored. The information given by *Facebook* about this type of online organisational activity (number of 'members', 'friends', 'likes'

---

[149] From more on virtual social interactions and social capital see Kittilson and Dalton (2011): 'Virtual civil society: the new frontier of social capital?'. See also Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C. and Lampe, C. (2007), The Benefits of Facebook "Friends:" Social Capital and College Students' Use of Online Social Network Sites. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 12: 1143–1168.

and 'comments') offers, at the very least, a sense of the organisations' actual level of activity and engagement.

On *Facebook*, MWN describes itself as 'an independent national network of individual Muslim women and Muslim women's organizations across the UK' with the aim 'to provide a channel between Muslim women and government and provide a platform to network and share knowledge, skills and experiences '[150]. The number of people who are 'members' of the group is just over 420, about the same number of people who 'like' them on their page[151]. Statistics given by the social networking website show that the number of people talking about MWN has progressively decreased over the summer months (2013). Nahla has over 3220 'friends' and a very active page updated daily (or a few times per week) by the group administrators, informing their 'friends' (online members) about their current courses, activities, projects and talks[152]. Keswer has over 1070 friends and their page does not seem to be as active; it is updated a few times per month by the group administrators[153].

Shelina Zahra Janmohamed is a quite well-known and influential person in British Muslim circles (and wider) – she was among the top 30 Muslim women in 'The Muslim Women Power List' – which was organised by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, *the Times* and *Emel* in 2009[154]. Herself a British Asian Muslim, she is a writer, commentator and a public figure. Her novel *Love in a Headscarf: Muslim woman seeks the One,* has been translated into several languages and published across the globe. In India it was one of the bestsellers in 2010[155]. She contributes to the Guardian, where she is a 'commentator on British Islam and Muslim women'[156]; she has written for *the Times*, *the National*, *the Muslim News* and *Emel* (British Muslim lifestyle magazine); she also has a very successful blog called *Spirit2*. I happen to be her acquaintance, we

---

[150] https://www.facebook.com/groups/115327731214/ Accessed on 22/06/2013
[151] https://www.facebook.com/groups/115327731214/ Accessed on 22/06/2013
[152] https://www.facebook.com/cei.nahla Accessed on 06/07/2013

[153] https://www.facebook.com/kewser.zehra Accessed on 06/07/2013
[154] http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/key-projects/muslim-women-power-list/ and also http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/gallery/2009/mar/25/muslim-women-power-list both Accessed on 20/06/2013
[155]155 http://www.spirit21.co.uk/category/love-in-a-headscarf/ Accessed on 20/06/2013
[156] http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/shelinazahrajanmohamed Accessed on 20/06/2013

share a number of friends and we are 'friends' on the social network site where she has over 5200 other friends and where she is 'followed by' 5944 people worldwide[157]. On 17th of June 2013, Shelina posted the following question on her social network page: 'Which Muslim women's organisations in the UK are you aware of? I am looking for organisations or Muslim women who are leaders/influencers please.'[158]

The question posed by Shelina immediately caught my attention and could not have come at a better time for me: she is a person of influence and, with so many followers, there was a strong possibility that her question would have been read by a great number of people. I hoped that the responses would provide me with a strong indication of the present situation regarding Muslim women's organisations in the UK and, more specifically, I wanted to gauge the popularity of the MWN. I waited for the responses from her 5944 followers (and friends) and was disappointed to find that, compared to her previous daily posts, not many people responded (10 in total from the UK) and the discussion/commentary was quite brief. While I cannot be certain whether the poor level of response to Shelina's question was a true reflection of the whole situation in the UK, it did seem that her followers (and Facebook friends) were generally unaware of any bigger, well-known, national Muslim women's organisation. Mentioned organisations (once only, and by different individuals) were *Amirah* Foundation (Birmingham based, established in 2011), Muslimah Writers Alliance, Muslim Women's Sport Foundation and *An-Nisa*. The organisations mentioned, except for *An-Nisa*, to which I will return later, deal with quite specific issues e.g. sports participation, literary projects, domestic violence, homelessness etc. The Muslim Women's Network was also mentioned, but by one of the key women involved in its work at present and, she commented: 'MWN is definitely the place to start your search with over 500 network members across the UK…' However, there was no response to this comment from Shelina, or indeed from anyone else, in support or negation of this statement. The key point here is that MWN was not mentioned by anyone else but a person directly involved with MWN. This can indicate their unknown status among the general population of British Muslim women at

---

[157] For more information on 'following' see http://www.facebook.com/help/www/279614732052951 Accessed on 01/07/2013
[158] Shelina has given me a permission to use this information for the purpose of this chapter.

best and, at worst, the hostility and caution directed towards a government founded organisation with predefined aims and goals which 'fit into government agenda'. One of the comments on a different thread (and there was over 100 comments) discussing the work of MWN and their lack of involvement in a particular initiative illustrates this: "…maybe there are no funding opportunities or it does not fit into some government agenda that they need to capitulate to in order to stay relevant". Another comment left by a Muslim woman on a same thread, said: "…to be honest I don't even know what they actually do". This is echoed by Haifa's words too 'after all of these years, we still are not having really strong Muslim women's organizations that can really reach out and provide a vision for women'.

I now return to *An-Nisa* Society which describes itself as '…a [sic]women managed organisation working for the welfare of Muslim families. It was established in 1985 by a group of young Muslim women.'[159] Seeing *An-Nisa*'s name mentioned in Shelina's Facebook responses, reminded me of reading about it previously in a paper by Maumoon where she uses it as an example of religious gender activism of 'Muslim communities in diaspora' with active women participants who deal with issues relevant to women (2007:270). An-Nisa was also mentioned by Gillat-Ray as an example of women's activism in the UK and as a 'well established' and 'an agenda setting organisation' based in London; it 'works to improve the provision of Muslim-sensitive social services, and to influence government policy on issues that affect women and families' (2010:217). On the other hand, Allen claims that An-Nisa acted as 'a grassroots catalyst' in the aftermath of Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses in 1989; a time when a negative media portrayal of the Muslims in the UK reduced them to a 'homogenised' and 'essentialised' community which represented a threat to the West (2010:44). At the time, the increased need for social and political engagement was such that Muslims in the UK needed not only to be more active but also 'to self-identify more distinctly in order to address and tackle their own political causes and problems' (Allen 2010:10). Therefore, *An-Nisa* is often used as one of the main examples of British Muslim political and social activism and, more specifically, Muslim women's activism.

---

[159] Taken from http://www.an-nisa.org/ Accessed on 30/07/2013

One of its founders, Humera Khan, is often invited to talks, radio and TV programmes and is a well-known public figure. In her book titled *Visibly Muslim*, Tarlo has devoted a whole section to Khan where she describes her as someone who 'recognised the need to value the social, political, aesthetic and religious backgrounds of new Muslim migrants whilst at the same time recognising the importance of adaptation and transformation' (2010:36). Perhaps this ability to recognise the importance of transformation and adaptation is one of the reasons why An-Nisa, a grassroots organisation, has survived and evolved during the past 28 years of its existence. Although researching An-Nisa was not part of my initial plan, after reading so much about *An-Nisa Society* and its co-founder Humera Khan, I was interested to hear the views of someone who had first-hand expertise of setting up and running this/a British grassroots Muslim women's organisation. I also wanted to see if there are any similarities with the organisations in Bosnia. I was fortunate to arrange a brief and informal telephone interview at short notice. At the very beginning of our conversation, Humera wanted to make it clear that, despite its name[160], An-Nisa, at present, is not only focused on women's issues:

> We are an organisation managed by women but we work for the welfare of the Muslim families. Although we are called An-Nisa, which means 'women'…for us that more about feminist potential…but means more than the fact that we are women…we are thinking of changing it…because when you come across as a women's group like that…they think all you do is domestic violence…but we are not that kind of a group…I suppose you can say we are a civil society group…it's about welfare…and about focusing within the Muslim community…and what needs to be done within the context of families…because we think that families are at the root of many problems…we work with men but they are not on our management committee…

She also talked about how Muslim women in the UK traditionally organised themselves within already existing, male dominated organisations or groups and how it was important for the *An-Nisa Society* to be independent:

---

[160] An-Nisa is a 4th chapter (Surah) of Qur'an and it translates, from Arabic, as 'The Women' or 'Women'. This Surah deals with variety of issues that were facing early Muslim community.

Historically in Britain, how women organised…Muslim women…they organised as being part of the 'sisters section'…which is a very different thing…you are not independent…you are part of a wider theological or ideological group…so this was important for us [to be independent]…we saw ourselves as British Muslims…the first and the second generation…and most of our members were people who either came here in the 60s or were born here…and growing up as Muslims was very difficult…of course before 9/11 nobody talked much about Muslims [in the UK]…we grew up in a time when there was absolutely nothing for us…you would not even come across Muslim's art project or anything like that…and of course it's all changed after 9/11 where everybody talked about Muslims for the wrong reasons…

And:

(about MWN)There isn't really a viable Muslim women's network in Britain…there isn't something that is capacity built…or got a clear voice…

I was involved with it…when it was set up…it was complex politics…

An-Nisa has many similarities with Nahla and Kewser. It is a grassroots organisation which was started by passionate, young, Muslim women who wanted to actively engage and challenge not just society at large but also their own communities. As with Nahla and Kewser, the founders/directors of An-Nisa have a non-hierarchal approach to managing their organisation.

Conclusion

The female only spaces, provided by the NGOs in Bosnia, where women take part in various social activities (such as concerts, talks, discussions etc.) encourage a positive sense of belonging and of having a Muslim identity. They do so by providing both the personal confidence and the group confidence of being a Muslim woman by providing tools to challenge the stereotypes. In the case of the WNC and MWN in the UK, this study highlights the importance of the existence of government initiated/funded Muslim women's organisations/networks in the UK. Bodies such as the Muslim Women's

Network provide ways of influencing policies by taking into account Muslim women's views on different issues. This affects their own communities as well as British society at large, therefore encouraging the active participation of Muslim women in civil society.

Conclusions

I was about 6 years old, spending a quiet afternoon at my grandmother's (nena's) home. After hearing the doorbell, my grandmother went to the door. While still in the dining room I heard the cheerful sound of women greeting each other from the hallway. Nena sounded very pleased to see this mysterious visitor. After a few minutes, a woman in her early 50s entered the dining room. My nena introduced her to me as my great-aunt. She came with presents, two full bags, both hands busy; carrying a bottle of milk, cheese pots, eggs and some vegetables. It seemed like she collected all the produce from her farm and brought it for my nena. This tall, strong built woman with a kind and smiley face invited me for a kiss and a hug, which is the cultural norm in Bosnia when adults greet young children. And I refused. I refused and said that she 'stinks'. Of course, she did not stink. My nena was a bit embarrassed by my very unusual reaction and by my apparent lack of manners and respect towards an older person. Being in the privileged position of favourite grandchild, nena was instantly forgiving and just carried on as normal. However, for years after, the story was often narrated among close family members, at gatherings, with nena's jovial twists to the story. Nobody discussed the event in anything other than a humorous manner. This woman was my father's aunt, Aunt Cherima, whom I had not met before as it was her first visit in years. She lived in a village, in the hills of Western Bosnia and she wore clothes that were different from the clothes of the other women in the town and in my family. These were traditional Muslim clothes that were rarely seen in cities and towns (see Chapter Four): loose trousers (*dimiye*) which needed to be hand-sewn (as they were not available in any shops), a loose top and a colourful, patterned headscarf. That afternoon and her image are forever entrenched in my memory. Why did I refuse her hug? Why did I make an insulting remark? About 17 years later, while in London, I was finally beginning to understand. At the airport, waiting for my father to arrive from Bosnia for a visit, I was feeling very anxious. He was to see me for the first time, after almost a year, and for the first time, with the hijab covering my hair. When he saw me, he was shocked and not at all pleased about my 'change'. With obvious disapproval on his face, he remarked 'You look like Aunt Cherima'. Aunt Cherima, the woman I refused to hug as a young child, because I

found her attire so off-putting that I invented an insulting reason not to even approach her. How can that deep-seated prejudice exist in such a young person? Where did it come from? If it was not from my family, was it from the outside environment? Perhaps, by not addressing the event in a serious (and admonishing) manner, my family had inadvertently further encouraged my prejudices. Bosnia, at that time, was a very different Bosnia to that of 2009- 2010 when the fieldwork for this research took place. In 2012 Bosnia became the first country in Europe to have a female mayor who wears a hijab. Amra Babić, now a mayor of Visoko (a town close to Sarajevo), celebrated her election victory with the following statement:

> Finally we have overcome our own prejudices…The one about women in politics, then the one about hijab-wearing women — and even the one about hijab-wearing women in politics.[161]

As for great-aunt Cherima, she was 'being Muslim the Bosnian way'; as were Muslim rural women in Tone Bringa's (1995) ethnographic study with the same title.

I set out to do this research motivated by two unsettling realities related to the communities of Muslim women (I feel) I belong to. In the UK, it was the chasm between the disproportionate media and public attention on Muslim women (see Introduction) and, at the same time, a lack of Muslim women's own voices in such discussions. I experienced and observed how on a practical, real-life level, the negative media portrayals seriously affected the everyday lives of Muslim women in the UK, especially women who display visual symbols of their religious identity such as the hijab (see Introduction and Chapter Five). As Allen and Nielsen's (2002) report on behalf of the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia stated, visual identity as a Muslim was the main factor in determining who was to be a victim of an Islamophobic attack after 9/11, and therefore Muslim women who wore the hijab were more likely to be attacked. An article by Myriam Francois-Cerrah in the *Guardian*, further illustrates how the 'portrayal of Muslim women in the media as passive victims, or as problems, undoubtedly renders them less desirable to prospective employers', and

---

[161] http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/31/world/europe/31iht-letter31.html?_r=0 Accessed on 29/09/2013

many experience difficulties finding employment and within the workplace too.[162] The women I knew, British-born practicing Muslims, were definitely not passive or oppressed. On the contrary, they were probably the most confident women I have ever come across. I felt their voices needed to be heard.

As for Bosnia, it was a case of double disadvantage, all I ever heard or saw in the British media, about Bosnian women (of any of the three ethnicities) maintained only one image – the victims of war (see Chapter One). What happened during the1992-1995 war constituted the most horrific, systematic and planned gender violence and cannot be forgotten. The consequences of those acts are permanent. However, this essentialised portrayal of Bosnian women should be understood in the wider context of the whole Balkan region. Several studies (for example Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Bringa, 1995; Robinson 2004 and Helms 2007) trace Edward Said's ideas on Western representations of the Orient (1978) to the representations of the Balkans in the West, producing what is termed the 'Balkanist' representations (see Chapter One). More specifically, Bridget Robinson highlights 'the role of the British print media in articulating and representing Bosnia as a place in the geographical imagination'. She further emphasizes how the constant use, in British print media and popular discourse, of words such as 'ethnicity', 'ethnic', 'ethnic hatreds' and 'ethnic violence' contributed to essentialist depictions and explanations of the war in Bosnia (2004:395). A Hollywood actress, Angelina Jolie, as recently as 2011, directed the movie 'In a Land of Blood and Honey' which was described as 'a blunt and brutal look at genocide and ethnic cleansing' (Thorpe, 2011)[163] in Bosnia. Therefore, even now, 18 years after the war has ended, whenever Bosnia is mentioned in the British media or popular discourse, it is almost exclusively about what happened during the war. In such discourses and portrayals, Bosnian women appear as passive, voiceless victims 'all the more because the iconic image of the Bosnian war victim was a backward, rural Muslim woman who confirmed the orientalising stereotypes of 'the Balkans' (Helms 2012:195). Enter my late great-aunt Cherima. I cannot say how many images of women, wearing similar clothes to hers, I have seen on

---

[162] http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/10/muslim-women-prejudice-getting-job Accessed on 24/09/2013
[163] http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/dec/18/angelina-jolie-bosnia-war-film Accessed on 28/09/2013

British TV screens and newspapers during the past 18 years. What I now know about great-aunt Cherima is something I did not pick up on as a child; I simply could not perceive it. My perceptions (then) were influenced and obscured by the image of 'the Muslim' as constructed by the language of Yugoslavian communist propaganda (see Chapters Three and Four). This language, communicated through state controlled media and education, as well as public discourse, was camouflaged as 'brotherhood and unity' but had the consequence of normalising Islamophobia. My father would call me 'Cherima' when he was irritated by my 'religious ways', but it was only later that I found out she had been a strong woman – both physically and emotionally. She managed a farm, her land and her numerous children all by herself as she was a four-time-widow. She became more familiar to me through the ethnographic work of Tone Bringa (1995) which focuses on Bosnian Muslims' lives in a rural village located near Sarajevo. More generally, however, literature that described the lives or experiences of Bosnian Muslims in any other than in a derogatory fashion, or as victims of war was hard to find. I know many practicing Bosnian Muslim women who are intelligent, hard-working, independent, ambitious and active contributors to their society and who do not like to be associated with the war victim image. Their voices need to be heard.

Therefore, in this study I wanted to focus on 'women's talk' in order to provide an opportunity to express Muslim women's otherwise 'muted' voices and, as I explain in detail in Chapter Two, my influence comes from Spender's work on language, where 'women's talk' is valued (1998). I spent considerable time deliberating the research design for this study and I believe it has resulted in the richness of the information obtained, as well as in the empowering aspect of interviews that the women mentioned. My primary concern was to eliminate the impression of official researcher/researched relationship and to make the women feel comfortable in talking to me and sharing their stories. Therefore, in both countries, I wanted to hear from the women who self-identify as practising Muslims and who are educated at university level. Because of the limited time, by selecting women of a similar background and education level to myself, I wanted to minimise the difference and reduce the power of the researcher in the research process. I used already existing networks established from my previous visits to Bosnia and the snowballing method, to recruit the individual women. I was always 'introduced'

prior to the interviews by a person who made the recommendation, which gave a sense of familiarity from the initial stage.

From the very beginning I knew that I did not want to go into the interviews with sheets of paper and with numerous questions which I could then tick off. I felt that this method would not yield the type of information I was hoping for; it would not include much listening and my main motivation was to listen to Muslim women's voices. Instead, we met at cafes, at homes or, specific to Bosnia, one of the courtyards of Sarajevo's numerous old town mosques. The interview setting resembled a meeting of female friends where experiences are shared (between the researcher and her research participants) rather than examined. We would sit and have coffee or tea and just talk. My only direction was 'could you tell me about your Muslim identity' which in itself created questions from them to me. Hence the process was an exchange but the focus was on their narratives and experiences. This method also provided a bond between my research participants and me, where women felt comfortable to talk in an unpressured and uninhibited manner. The majority of them commented (and a few felt a bit overwhelmed during the course of their interviews) on how this was the first time in their lives that somebody had been interested in hearing their side of the story of what Islam means to them. The majority also commented how they benefited from the process in a way they did not anticipate; by talking about their religious identities to me, they also learnt about themselves.

I used in-depth interviews and focus groups to hear women's views and experiences within the group setting and individually. The individual interviews were lengthy and the women felt comfortable talking about various topics as they were telling me *their* 'story' of *their* Muslim identity. They mentioned their family lives and background (see Chapter Two), their experiences of living in secular environments, stereotypes they faced, their experiences of hijab (see Chapter Four), their education and the development of religious identities. Some topics were specific to their socio-cultural and historical contexts. For example, Bosnian women talked about their experiences of war and its aftermath, while British women talked about tensions between their parents' culture and their own views and experiences of religion. Also, individual Bosnian

women talked about the Muslim women's organisations they were members of (either Nahla or Kewser and, sometimes, both) and the ways these organisations influenced their religious identity. The relationship with the two women's organisations in Bosnia – Nahla and Kewser – was established prior to this research, but after conducting the pilot fieldwork, this relationship deepened and both organisations were happy to take part. I interviewed the women involved with the functioning of these organisations (including directors) and gathered data though participant observation of the organisation's activities. This allowed me to gain insight into how the organisation started, their activities, plans and commitments and their role in the development of the religious identity of the Muslim women they serve. In the UK, collaboration with the Women's National Commission (WNC) facilitated the recruitment of women who were involved in setting up the Muslim Women's Network (MWN) (see Chapter Five). The help of WNC in this respect is invaluable as the women involved were very busy in their professional lives. With the time limitations, it would have been very challenging for me to arrange interviews by myself. It was much more effective to organise meetings through an official governmental body. This approach had an air of authority which made MWN women feel like they needed to make time to talk to me. Therefore, the interviews that followed were quite different from interviews with individual Muslim women or women involved with Nahla and Kewser, as the time and location was arranged by WNC. Although the feel and tone of the interviews was official and interviews did not involve a conversational 'exchange', they produced useful information about how MWN was formed by the WNC, its aims, objectives and initial activities. The in-depth interviews with individual women, interviews with women in Nahla and Kewser, interviews with women connected to MWN, focus groups in Bosnia as well as the observation of organisations' activities (all discussed in Chapter Two) produced rich and valuable information from which the main three themes of this thesis emerged.

This thesis has explored how certain events can trigger the questioning, and subsequent transformation, of individual and collective identities. Based on the responses of my research participants, I have found that violent events in Bosnia and the UK did indeed result in an initial re-evaluation of identity, but they are not the only factors in any

subsequent development. Other factors, such as the influence of women's close family as well as the wider socio-cultural and historic contexts are also important in this process.

Chapter Three considers the role of family on women understanding of their Muslim identity. All of twenty interviewed women started their 'story' by talking about their family religious practices or the absence of the same. This confirmed that, even in the case of religious identity, 'situating self' occurs through the development of a self-narrative that starts with one's family background (Lawler, 2008). Family background plays an important part in Muslim women's religious identity where family, in many ways, reflects women's socio-cultural and historical contexts. In the UK, my research participants strongly emphasised how their understanding of Islam was different from their parents' cultural understanding of Islam. Therefore, in both countries, while their parents' understanding of Islam was rooted in their respective cultures as well as heightened sense of preserving this culture (in often hostile environments), the women's understanding came from their own, independent search for religious identity. British Muslim women were able to use their independently gained Islamic knowledge as a tool of negotiation because parents were not hostile to religious expressions as in Bosnia. Participants who were born and raised in the UK did not see their parents' religious understanding, informed by the countries they came from, as relevant and applicable to their lives and their lived experiences as Muslim women. That is not to say that every part of the parents' cultural understanding of Islam was rejected, rather, while women were forging their own references and developing their own religious identities, they are in the process of constant negotiation with their parents' cultural heritage.

In Bosnia, the strong anti-religious legacy of communism had lasting effects on how the parents of my research participants viewed and perceived religion in general and Islam in particular. My findings indicate that, for the majority of Bosnian respondents, any exposure to Muslim religious rites or knowledge in early childhood came from paternal or maternal grandmothers who were usually their caregivers. This further illuminates the important role of female family members in maintaining 'religious performance' (Tapper, 1987) and collective Muslim identity during the anti-religious times. For the majority of interviewed Bosnian women, a decision to become more religious was

received with negativity and contempt from their families. In such a family environment, women needed to carefully negotiate the transformations of their identity as the majority still lived with their parents. These transformations were often reflected in women's external, visible behaviour such as the choice of clothing and, in particular, the choice to wear the hijab.

Chapter Four discusses the concept of hijab. For my research participants, the decision to wear the hijab is connected with spiritual growth and awareness of their religious identity. In this sense, women described, in a great detail, how one's outward appearance usually reflects one's level of spirituality which, in turn, is connected with a readiness to carry out religious obligations. However, the issue of hijab becomes more problematic in self-other dialogue and this is when the process of negotiation becomes particularly important. Arriving at the decision to wear hijab usually comes with a price and consequences on women's family lives and on their social lives. In some cases, the responses of Bosnian research participants' families were quite unpleasant, for example, parents threatening to make their daughters homeless, loss of friendships and loss of employment opportunities. The majority of interviewed women consider wearing of the hijab as a religious duty (supported by the sacred Islamic text), that they came to appreciate and understand. Adopting the hijab was a *process* during which the tensions between how they feel about hijab on one hand and how others see them on the other become more pronounced. A major finding of my study is that the decision to wear the hijab is a result of the women's own choice, based on much deliberation and negotiation. This is articulated by their profound responses in relation to hijab. Like the women in Ruby's study, for the Muslim women who took part in this research, the hijab 'is a positive statement of female identity' (2008).

In Chapter Five, the relevance of the grassroots organisations (Nahla and Kewser) in development and support of Muslim women's religious identity is clearly supported by my findings from Bosnia. In an environment which is often negative and over-burdened with stereotypical views of Islam, women's organisations act as safe and encouraging spaces where women can freely express their Muslim identity. Moreover, women felt that the organisations nurture a positive sense of their identity. One of the more

significant findings to emerge from this study is that the success of these grassroots organisations is dependent on the following factors: a good understanding of their membership/users and their needs; a good understanding of the socio-cultural contexts of their members; effective networking and responsiveness to members' needs and a perceived non-hierarchical structure with the focus on teamwork. My UK research participants (individual women I interviewed) did not mention any organisations they were particularly influenced by, but, rather loose and sporadic associations with various organisations and societies (for example, Islamic societies at their universities, talks by smaller organisations and so on); when questioned as to whether they had heard of the Muslim Women's Network or its activities, none of the women I interviewed had been aware of its existence.

As pointed out by Sophie Gilliat-Ray, in the post 7/7 climate, Muslim women were recruited into the government's anti-radicalisation and anti-terrorism strategy that resulted in several government-backed initiatives (2010:220). One such initiative was the Muslim Women's Network, whose initial set-up and activities were part of this study. In this respect, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Although, and as highlighted by Gilliat-Ray (ibid), it would be highly beneficial for the Muslim women to have a voice at both local and national level as well as to speak directly to government; the political urgency resulted in the setting-up of the network which, according to the women involved, was problematic from the very beginning.
2. The complexity of the organisational structure i.e. government-WNC-MWN-Muslim women, seriously impacted efficiency as the communication was not direct.
3. The agenda(s) were not set by the Muslim women themselves.
4. Being a top-down network, it struggled to gain as much support or trust of Muslim women as the grassroots organisations had in Bosnia. Therefore not having much impact on the UK Muslim women's religious identity.

Resolution 1887, made in July 2012 by the EU Parliamentary Assembly, is concerned with the 'Multiple discrimination against Muslim women in Europe' and the recommendation 7.2.2 states:

> to promote Muslim women's active empowerment, by establishing incentives for Muslim women's active participation in society, encouraging the development of Muslim women's organisations, facilitating the creation of networks and giving visibility to women who have been successful in European society[164]

There is, therefore, a recognised need for organisations, such as Nahla and Kewser in Bosnia, which provide a positive sense of female Muslim identity in Europe. The grassroots organisations which understand their local context and circumstances would benefit the women themselves, as well as the wider community. As stated by Nielsen:

> to achieve an impact, both broadly and within the community, in terms of public status and of delivering services…requires structural formats which can be linked together and can "speak" to each other (2003:32).

This, 'speaking' was not achieved by the top-down initiated MWN and, therefore, any potential for impact was lost. The emergence of the Muslim women's organisations in Bosnia and Muslim Women's Network in the UK, soon after or during the events of violence (the Bosnian war and 9/11 and 7/7 respectively), confirms that there was a need to deal with the changing circumstances which were causing the re-evaluation of Muslim women's religious identities. However, the motivations were different: in the UK, the motivation came from the political situation and government of the time and as a knee-jerk reaction to events of violence; while in Bosnia's, the motivation came from the need to share common experiences and nurture the religious identities of women.

My findings contribute to the nascent (and still scant) body of literature which deals with the experiences of Bosnian Muslim women beyond the essentialised victimhood paradigm and therefore enhances the understanding of Bosnian Muslim women as the active agents in their own development. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, there

---

[164] http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=18921&lang=en Accessed on 25/09/2013

has not been a study which compares the experiences of two indigenous communities of Muslim women in Europe: one that is centuries old (in Bosnia) and one that is emerging out of the legacy of Europe's mass immigration in the 1960s and 70s (in the UK). When discussing Muslim women in Europe, most academic research neglects the experiences of the well-established indigenous European Muslim women, thereby maintaining the image of the foreign 'other'. This research forges a more inclusive approach by considering the views of such women.

Both the UK and Bosnia are geographically situated in Europe. This in itself raises the question: is there such a thing as a European Muslim identity and, if so, how does it influence Muslim women? Is there a shared notion of a uniquely European Muslim women's identity across a variety of European milieu? Although women who took part in this study come from two very different European countries and may have different cultural backgrounds, they all live in predominantly non-Muslim, non-religious environments. This poses many challenges but also provides avenues of negotiation where women can have more religious autonomy than, perhaps, they would in the Muslim majority countries the British women's parents came from. Therefore, whilst there is no singular, homogenous European Muslim identity, there are certain common aspects of being a Muslim woman in Europe and one of the common aspects is the availably and variety of religious choices. The parental references for religious knowledge and authority lessen in relevance and importance as these women develop their own sense of religious identity. At the same time, other points of religious and cultural references, closer to home, become more attractive. For example, throughout numerous conversations with Muslim women from the UK, they expressed a real interest to visit Bosnia for its cultural heritage and religious reasons in rather than '*Going back home'*. This was mentioned in the context of positive affirmation of their Muslim identity in Europe itself. Göle claims that Muslims in Europe have 'double cultural capital' and because of this capital, they can define themselves by their religiosity and by 'learned techniques of self-representation in public spaces' which are gained from their secular environments; in this way, they can 'circulate between different activities and spaces such as home, class, youth associations, and urban leisure

space' (2007:5). The mixed methods and digital ethnography may be applied to similar future projects to further examine whether a distinct European Muslim identity exists.

Internet communication and recent developments of mobile technology have a huge impact on the ways Muslims share religious information and knowledge. The internet has been readily embraced as a way in which to connect with other Muslims locally and globally (Piela, 2013). This is particularly important in empowering Muslim women to seek knowledge and make informed religious choices which transcend their parents' traditional ways of understanding Islam. Moreover, women are able to enter debates which concern their religious identity in a way that was not possible 20 years ago. Since I am 'connected' to my research participants over the social networking sites, I was able to observe some of their online activities during the course of this research. The majority of shared content is of religious nature. Both in Bosnia and the UK, women share videos of prominent Muslim scholars, quotations from the Qur'an, prophetic narrations etc. In this way, certain Muslim scholars and their views can gain a quick popularity (and authority) or they can be discredited. The availability and variety of religious knowledge is vast but so is the scrutiny of and debate about it. This in turn has both strengthened and weakened religious authorities. On the one hand it has allowed Muslims to break free of the yolk of having to follow one's family, community and culture but also, with the ease of communication and range of methods in seeking knowledge, certain religious authorities have had their position strengthened through a strong 'campaign' and various 'supporters' or 'followers'.

Finally, the findings from the study add to a growing body of literature which relies on Muslim women's own perspectives and voices to counteract widespread misrepresentations. As I listened to the women's stories, seeking to explore their religious identity, I also reflected on my own stories such as the one about aunt Cherima. I always wanted this research to be a collaboration between myself and the women who took part in it. However, there were (numerous) days when I felt desperate - worrying that I could never do justice to their words, their feelings and the trust they put in me. They eagerly talked to me in the hope that someone would hear and, perhaps, remove at least some of the negative and damaging stereotypes associated with their

religion and themselves. Muslim women in Europe are faced with many barriers and prejudices but, like the women who took part in this research, they choose to focus on the positive aspects of their lives using Islam as their main resource in this process. They are active agents whose voices need to be heard.

> '…Muslims or followers of other religions live out their religions. Theologians, philosophers, historians, psychologist and other scholars may categorise. In doing so, they distort the whole. Nevertheless, by dividing things up, they might give us what we need in order to put things back together again and come to a fuller understanding.' (Murata and Chittick, 2008)

Appendix I

Brief biographies of the women who took part in my research

In the UK

Asiya lives with her parents and was in her early 30s when she took part in this research. Her parents came to the UK from Egypt in the 1970s and she was their first (of five) child. She studied economics at university but later specialised in accountancy. She runs a successful chartered accountancy business from home. She did not wear hijab at the time of her interview.

Farah is of Bengali heritage. Her parents came from Bangladesh in the 1970s. She was in her final year of an undergraduate degree at the time of the interview (early 20s) and very involved with the student life. She has always lived in East End of London with her family, except to attend university. She started to wear hijab just before starting the university.

Fatima is a British Muslim woman born in Yorkshire to parents of Pakistani origin. She was 21 at the time of the interview having completed honours degree. She is very sociable and was very involved in her university's student life and politics. She is single and lives with her parents and extended family. She was 12 years old when she started wearing hijab.

Mona lives in London and works for a well-known Muslim organisation which specialises in organising cultural events in England. She has a wide network of friends and lives in her family home on the outskirts of London. Both of her parents were educated at university in Pakistan prior to arriving to the UK. She holds a post graduate award. She was in her late 20s at the time of the interview. She started to wear hijab during her A-levels, when she was 17 years old.

Nat's parents came from a rural Pakistani village in the 1970s and settled in Lancashire with other members of their extended family. Later, prior to her secondary education, they relocated to London. Nat was 23 at the time of the interview and lived with her

parents. She has a degree in accountancy but does not work in the field; she works on charity projects. She decided to wear hijab after the first year of her undergraduate degree.

Rana was 26 years old when I interviewed her. She has a Masters degree in Business and works in an investment banks in London. She decided to start wearing hijab after working there for 2 years. Her parents came from Morocco before she was born; they had been settled in west London for over 3 decades. She shares her flat in London with two other Muslim professional women.

Raz was in her early 30s at the time of the interview. She holds a postgraduate degree and resides in London with her husband and two children. She works as a teacher in London. Her parents came from the Punjab region of Pakistan before she was born. She started to wear hijab after completing her undergraduate degree but took it off after a year of wearing it. She re-stated again two years later and was wearing hijab at the time of the interview.

Sam is a trainee doctor in her 20s. She grew up in a London suburb where she still lives with her family. Her parents came from Pakistan in the 1970s, before she was born. She decided to start wearing hijab while at university, during her second year of studying medicine.

Tan was in her mid 20s at the time of the interview. She decided to wear hijab soon after starting her undergraduate degree. She graduated with the highest marks in her year and received numerous awards for her academic achievements. Since completing her degree, she has been writing and building her career as a journalist. She lives with her parents and younger siblings in London.

Zar's parents came from Bangladesh to East London where she and her siblings were born. Zar was 25 at the time of our interview. She studied English and literature and obtained an MA. She lives with her parents, younger sister and brother who is married. She decided to wear hijab just before starting her third year at university.

In Bosnia

All of the Bosnian participants were permanent residents of Sarajevo at the time of the interviews.

Almasa was in her early 20s and completing her final exams of her undergraduate degree when I interviewed her. She leads a very busy and active social life, working on cultural and artistic projects in Sarajevo. She decided to start wearing hijab during her holidays, just before starting university. She grew up in a non-religious family environment.

Amira was in her final year of a university degree and in her early 20s. She was living with her family. She described her close family as not religious at all. She decided to wear the hijab a year before our interview.

Asa was in her early 30s and in the final stages of a postgraduate degree in theology (focus in Islam) when the interview took place. She lived with her two children and was divorced at the time. Her parents were not religious at all and she grew up celebrating secular (state) holidays only. She started wearing hijab when she was an undergraduate.

Elma studied architecture and was working at the time of the interview. She shares her flat with a friend. She was in her 20s at the time of the interview. She started wearing hijab during her time at university. She described her family as practicing Islam only occasionally and with strong cultural influences.

Hana was in her late 20s at the time of her interview. She is the only Bosnian research participant who grew up in a religious environment, with both parents practising. Hana holds a degree in theology (focusing on Islam) and works for an NGO. She started to wear hijab in her teens. She lives with her husband.

Jenna did not wear hijab at the time of the interview but expressed a strong intention to do so in the future. She obtained a law degree with very high grades. When I interviewed her, she was working for a law firm and living with her parents. Her parents

were not religious but regarded themselves as ethnically Muslim (as was the case with the majority of Bosnian participants' parents).

Muba completed a postgraduate degree in engineering and was working on independent projects. She was in her late 20s at the time of the interview, living with her aunt. She started wearing hijab at university. Her family did not practice Islam.

Nela does not wear hijab. After studying law she started to work for an international human rights organisation. She was in her 20s and lived with her parents at the time of the interview. Both of her parents had a strong religious heritage however, only mother was occasionally practicing.

Nur was living with her parents at the time of the interview. Her parents were opposed to her religious developments and they were not religious. She did not wear hijab but expressed a strong intention to wear it after completing her degree (she was completing her final exams) and/or moving out of parental home. She was in her 20s.

Senida holds a degree in English and was doing a post graduate degree at the time of the interview. She was in her 20s and living with her parents. She started to wear hijab during the second year of her undergraduate study. She comes from non-religious background.

Bosnian women in organisations

Providing even the brief biographies of women working for the organisations would compromise their confidentiality, therefore, they are omitted. However, real identities are used for the directors of two organisations as they gave a full authority:

Sadika (Aličković) Avdić founded Kewser in 1994. She was born in 1965 in town of Zavidovici. She travelled widely; she writes and is a qualified homeopathic practitioner. She is a prominent public figure and often appears in Bosnian media. More information about Sadika is available at:
http://www.zehra.ba/zehra/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=223:divno -je-probuditi-se&catid=70:knjievnost&Itemid=156

Sehija Dedović is in her late 30s. She founded Nahla in 2001, in Sarajevo with a group of women friends. She has a degree in Islamic Theology. More information about Sehija is available at http://mosaicofmuslimwomen.wordpress.com/2012/03/13/now-sehija-dedovic-ceo-nahla/

Bibliographical References

Abu-Lughod, L. (ed.). (1998). *Remaking women: feminism and modernity in the Middle East*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Afshar, H. (1989). Education: hopes, expectations and achievements of Muslim women in West Yorkshire. *Gender and education*, 1(3), 261-272.

Afshar, H. (1994). *Muslim women in West Yorkshire*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Afshar, H. (1998). *Islam and feminisms: an Iranian case-study*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Afshar, H., Aitken, R., & Franks, M. (2005). Feminisms, islamophobia and identities. *Political Studies*, 53(2), 262-283.

Afshar, H. (2008). Can I see your hair? Choice, agency and attitudes: the dilemma of faith and feminism for Muslim women who cover. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31(2), 411-427.

Ahmad, F. (2001). Modern traditions? British Muslim women and academic achievement. *Gender and Education*, 13(2), 137-152.

Ahmad, L. (1992). *Women and gender in Islam: historical roots of a modern debate.* Yale: Yale University.

Akbar S. A. (1997). *Jinnah, Pakistan, and Islamic Identity: the search for Saladin*. London: Routledge.

Ahmed, L. (2011). Veil of ignorance: have we gotten the headscarf all wrong? *Foreign Policy*. [Online] 25 April 2011 At: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/25/veil_of_ignorance Accessed on 11/05/2013

Ai, A. L., Peterson, C., & Huang, B. (2003). The effect of religious-spiritual coping on positive attitudes of adult Muslim refugees from Kosovo and Bosnia. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 13(1), 29-47.

Akhtar, S. (1999). *Immigration and identity: turmoil, treatment, and transformation*. Jason Aronson.

Ali, A. Y. (1990). *The meanings of the Holy Qur'an*. Brentwood, MD: Amana.

Al-Ali, N., Black, R., & Koser, K. (2001). Research: refugees and transnationalism: the experience of Bosnians and Eritreans in Europe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration studies*, 27(4), 615-634.

Al-Bukhaari, M. (1994). *Holy Hadith (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Arabic)*. Chicago: Kazi Publications.

Alcoff, L. M., & Caputo, J. D. (Eds.). (2011). *Feminism, sexuality, and the return of religion*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Alexander, J. C., & Smith, P. (Eds.). (2005). *The Cambridge companion to Durkheim*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ali, K. (2006). *Sexual ethics and Islam: feminist reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and jurisprudence*. Oxford: Oneworld.

Ali, K. (1999). The journey from the secular to the sacred: experiences of native British converts to Islam. *Social Compass*, 46(3), 301-312.

Ali, Y. (1998). *Muslim women and the politics of ethnicity and culture in Northern England*. Women Living Under Muslim Laws. [Online] At: http://www.wluml.org/zh-hant/node/312 Accessed on 12/08/2013.

Allen, C. (2010). *Islamophobia*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Allen, C. (2013). Why the 'Daily Telegraph' and 'Daily Mail' are wrong about islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime. *The Huffington Post UK*. [Online] At: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-chris-allen/islamophobia-uk-media_b_3377525.html Accessed on 12/09/2013

Allen, C., & Nielsen, J. S. (2002). *Summary report on Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001*. European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. [Online]. At: http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/199-Synthesis-report_en.pdf Accessed on 10/09/2013

Allievi, S. (1999). I nuovi musulmani: i convertiti all'islam. *Oriente Moderno,* 18 (79), 140-143.

Allievi, S., & Nielsen, J. S. (Eds.). (2003). *Muslim networks and transnational communities in and across Europe*. Leiden: Brill.

Almond, P. C. (1989). *Heretic and hero: Muhammad and the Victorians*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag.

Al-Qur'an (2001). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Altorki, S., & El-Solh, C. F. (Eds.). (1988). *Arab women in the field: studying your own society*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Ameli, S. R., & Merali, A. (2006). *Hijab, meaning, identity, otherization and politics: British Muslim women*. London: Islamic Human Rights Commission.

Ammerman, N. T. (2003). Religious identities and religious institutions. In Dillon, M. (ed.). (2003). *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 207-24.

Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.

Ansari, H. (2002). Attitudes to Islam and Muslims in Britain: 1875-1924. *Indo-British Review*, 58-74. Madras: Indo-British Historical Society.

Ansari, H. (2004). *'The infidel within', Muslims in Britain since 1800*. London: C. Hurst Publishers.

Ansari, K. H. (2011). The Muslim world in British historical imaginations: 're-thinking Orientalism'?. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 38(1), 73-93.

Ansary, T. (2009). *Destiny disrupted: a history of the world through Islamic eyes*. New York: PublicAffairs.

Anwar, M., & Bakhsh, Q. (2003). *British Muslims and state policies*. Warwick: Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick.

Archer, T. (2009). Welcome to the Umma: The British state and its Muslim citizens since 9/11. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 44(3), 329-347.

Arnold, T. W. (1913). *The preaching of Islam: a history of the propagation of the Muslim faith*. Westminster: Constable & Company.

Aslan, R. (2006). *No god but God: the origins, evolution, and future of Islam*. New York: Random House LLC.

Atkinson, J. M., & Heritage, J. (Eds.). (1984). *Structures of social action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Attanassoff, C. V. (2005). Bosnia and Herzegovina—Islamic revival, international advocacy networks and Islamic terrorism. *Strategic Insights*, 4 (5). [Online] At: http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/32383/ichaptersection_singledocument/5da86749-19a7-4d03-a3d1-942e8e0c0f81/en/attanassoffMay05.pdf Accessed on 10/02/2013

Awde, N., & Smith, K. (2004). *Arabic dictionary: Arabic-English, English-Arabic*. London: Bennett & Bloom.

Aziz, S. (2012). *The Muslim'veil'Post-9/11: rethinking women's rights and leadership*. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding Policy. [Online] 27th Nov 2012. At: http://www.ispu.org/Getpolicy/34/2590/Publications.aspx Accessed: 05/09/2013.

Bagic, A. (2006). Women's Organizing in Post-Yugoslav Countries. In Tripp, A. (2006) *Global feminism: transnational women's activism, organizing, and human rights*. New York: NYU Press. p143.

Bakar, O. (2009). *Exclusive and inclusive Islam in the Qur'an: implications for Muslim-Jewish relations*. Centre for Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions Doshisha University.[Online] At:
http://www.cismor.jp/en/publication/jismor/documents/JISMOR5en_Bakar.pdf
Accessed on 12/08/2013.

Bakić-Hayden, M. (1995). Nesting orientalisms: the case of former Yugoslavia. *Slavic Review*, 54(4), 917-931.

Balić, S. (1992). *Das unbekannte Bosnien*. Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau.

Bano, M., & Kalmbach, H. (Eds.). (2011). *Women, leadership, and mosques: changes in contemporary Islamic authority*. Leiden: Brill.

Barazangi, N. H. (2008). *Woman's identity and the Qur'an: a new reading*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida

Barlas, A. (2002). *Believing women in Islam: unreading patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barth, F. (1969). *Ethnic groups and boundaries: the social organization of cultural difference*. Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press Inc.

Barth, F. (2000). Boundaries and connections. In Cohen, A. (ed.). *Signifying identities: anthropological perspectives on boundaries and contested identities*. London: Routledge. p.17-36.

Bartkowski, J. (2008). Connections and contradictions: exploring the complex linkages between faith and family. In Ammerman T. (ed) *Everyday religion: observing modern religious lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.153-168

Beckford, J. A., & Demerath, J. (Eds.). (2007). *The SAGE handbook of the sociology of religion*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Begum, H. (2008). Geographies of inclusion/exclusion: British Muslim women in the East End of London. *Sociological Research Online*, 13(5), 10. At: http://socresonline.org.uk/13/5/10.html Accessed on 21/06/2013

Beljaskić-Hadžidedić, Lj. (1987). *Gradska muslimanska tradicijska nosnja u Sarajevu*. Zagreb: Kulturno prosvetni sabor Hrvatske.

Bieber, F. (2006). *Post-war Bosnia: ethnicity, inequality and public sector governance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bilge, S. (2010). Beyond subordination vs. resistance: an intersectional approach to the agency of veiled Muslim women. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31(1), 9-28.

Bonfiglioli, C. (2012). *Becoming Citizens: the politics of women's emancipation in Socialist Yugoslavia*. [Online] Citizenship in South East Europe. Last Updated on: 24 October 2012 At: http://www.citsee.eu/citsee-story/becoming-citizens-politics-women%E2%80%99s-emancipation-socialist-yugoslavia Accessed on 08/06/2013

Bougarel, X. (2007). Bosnian Islam as European Islam: limits and shifts of a concept. In Al-Azmeh, A., & Fokas, E. (Eds.). *Islam in Europe: diversity, identity and influence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.96-123.

Bougarel, X., Helms, E., & Duijzings, G. (2012). *The new Bosnian mosaic: identities memories and moral claims in a Post-War Society*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.

Bourque, N. (2006). How Deborah Became Aisha. In van Nieuwkerk, K. (ed.) *Women embracing Islam: gender and conversion in the West*. Austin: University of Texas Press. p.233-249.

Bovone, L. (2012). Fashion, identity and social actors. In González, A. M., & Bovone, L. (Eds.) *Identities through fashion: a multidisciplinary approach*. London: Berg.

Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of diaspora: contesting identities*. London: Routledge.

Braidotti, R. (2008). In spite of the times: the postsecular turn in feminism. *Theory, culture & society*, 25(6), 1-24.

Brayboy, B. M., & Deyhle, D. (2000). Insider-outsider: researchers in American Indian communities. *Theory into practice*, 39(3), 163-169.

Bridges, D. (2001). The ethics of outsider research. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 35(3), 371-386.

Bringa, T. (1995). *Being Muslim the Bosnian way*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Brown, H. (1992).*Women organising*. London: Routledge.

Brown, K. (2006). Realising Muslim women's rights: the role of Islamic identity among British Muslim women. *Women's studies international forum,* 29(4), 417-430

Buckle, J. L., Dwyer, S. C., & Jackson, M. (2010). Qualitative bereavement research: incongruity between the perspectives of participants and research ethics boards. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 13(2), 111-125.

Bullock, K. (2007) 2nd ed. *Rethinking Muslim women and the veil: challenging historical & modern stereotypes*. London: International Institute of Islamic Thought

Byng, M. D. (2010). Symbolically Muslim: media, hijab, and the West. *Critical sociology*, 36(1), 109-129.

Calis, H. (2012). *Faith, worship, and social responsibility: the ideal person in the Qur'an.* The Fountain Magazine [Online] At: http://www.fountainmagazine.com/Issue/detail/faith-worship-and-social-may-june-2012 Accessed on 10/08/2013

Çarkoğlu, A. (2008). Social vs spritual capital in explaining philanthropic giving in a muslim setting: The case of Turkey. In Day, A. (ed.). *Religion and the individual: belief, practice, identity*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. p.111-123.

Cesari, J., & McLoughlin, S. (Eds.). (2005). *European Muslims and the secular state*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Chatzifotiou, S. (2000). Conducting qualitative research on wife abuse: dealing with the issue of anxiety. *Sociological Research Online*, 5(2) At: http://www.socresonline.org.uk/5/2/chatzifotiou Accessed on 12/06/2013

Clarke, P. (1985). Islam in Britain. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 2(3), 3-5.

Coffey, A. (1999). *The ethnographic self: fieldwork and the representation of identity*. London: Sage Publication Ltd.

Cohen, A. (ed.). (2002). *Signifying identities: anthropological perspectives on boundaries and contested identities*. London: Routledge.

Colic-Peisker, V., & Walker, I. (2003). Human capital, acculturation and social identity: Bosnian refugees in Australia. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 13(5), 337-360.

Collins, P. H. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: the sociological significance of Black feminist thought. *Social Problems*, 33(6), 14-32

Collins, R. (1986). *Max Weber: a skeleton key*. Beverley Hills, CA: Sage.

Contractor, S. (2012). *Muslim Women in Britain: de-mystifying the Muslimah*. London: Routledge.

Cotterill, P., & Letherby, G. (1993). Weaving stories: personal auto/biographies in feminist research. *Sociology*, 27(1), 67-79.

Cragg, K. (1994). *The event of the Quran: Islam in its scripture*. Oxford: Oneworld.

Davie, G., Woodhead, L., & Heelas, P. L. (Eds.). (2003). *Predicting religion: Christian, secular, and alternative futures*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Davis, F. (1992). *Fashion, culture, and identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Day, A. (ed.). (2008). *Religion and the individual: belief, practice, identity*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Dengler, I. C. (1978). Turkish women in the Ottoman Empire: the Classical Age. In Keddie, N. R., & Beck, L. (Eds.). *Women in the Muslim world*. Cambridge , *Massachusetts* and London, England: Harvard University Press. p.229-244.

Denscombe, M. (2010). *The good research guide: for small-scale social research projects*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2008). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. London: Sage Publications Limited.

DeVault, M. L. (1999). *Liberating method: feminism and social research*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Dickson-Swift, V., James, E. L., Kippen, S., & Liamputtong, P. (2007). Doing sensitive research: what challenges do qualitative researchers face?. *Qualitative Research*, 7(3), 327-353.

Dobos, M. (1983). The women's movement in Yugoslavia: the case of the conference for the social activity of women in Croatia, 1965-1974. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 7(2), 47-55.

Dwyer, C. (1999). Veiled meanings: young British Muslim women and the negotiation of differences. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 6(1), 5-26.

Dwyer, C. (2000). Negotiating diasporic identities: young British south Asian Muslim women. *Women's Studies International Forum* 23(4), 475-486.

Dwyer, C., & Shah, B. (2009). Rethinking the identities of young British Muslim Women. In Hopkins, P and Gale, R, (Eds.) *Muslims in Britain: race, place and identities.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p.55-73.

Eastmond, M. (1998). Nationalist discourses and the construction of difference: Bosnian Muslim refugees in Sweden. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 11(2), 161-181.

Edmunds, J. (2011). The Limits of Post-National Citizenship: European Muslims, Human Rights and the Hijab. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, 35(7), 1181-1199.

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2011). *Religious discrimination in Britain: a review of research evidence, 2000-10*. Equality and Human Rights Commission. [Online] At:
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/research_report_73_religious_discrimination.pdf Accessed on 25/03/2013

El Fadl, K. A. (2001). *Speaking in God's name: Islamic law, authority and women*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

El Guindi, F. (1999). *Veil: modesty, privacy and resistance*. Oxford: Berg.

Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2011). Connection strategies: social capital implications of Facebook-enabled communication practices. *New Media & Society*, 13(6), 873-892.

El-Solh, C. F., & Mabro, J. (Eds.). (1994). *Muslim women's choices: religious belief and social reality*. Oxford: Berg Publishers Ltd.

Esposito, J. L. (1998). *Islam and politics*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Esposito, J. L. and Yazbeck Haddad (Ed.). (1998). *Islam, gender, and social change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Evenson, S. L. & Trayte, D. (1999). Dress and interaction in contending cultures: eastern Dakota and Euroamericans in nineteenth-century Minnesota. In Arthur, L. B. (Ed.). (1999). *Religion, dress and the body*. Oxford: Berg.

Fadil, N. (2005). Individualizing faith, individualizing identity: Islam and young Muslim women in Belgium. In Cesari, J., & McLoughlin, S. (Eds.) *European Muslims and the secular state*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. p.143-154.

Falconer Al-Hindi, Karen and Hope Kawabata 2002. Toward a more fully reflexive feminist geography. In Moss, P.J. (ed.). F*eminist geography in practice: research and methods.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. p.103-115.

Fazlic, H. (2011). *Islam in the successor states of former Yugoslavia – religious changes in the post-communist Balkans from 1989 – 2009*. Unpublished: University of Birmingham. PhD. At: http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/3997/1/Fazlic12PhD.pdf Accessed on 02/09/2013

Fine, J. V. A. (1975). *The Bosnian Church, a new interpretation: a study of the Bosnian Church and Its place in state and society from the 13th to the 15th century*. East European Quarterly. New York and London: Columbia University Press.

Fleischmann, E. L. (1999). The other 'awakening': the emergence of women's movements in the modern Middle East, 1900-1940. In Meriwether, M. L., & Tucker, J. E. (Eds.). *A social history of women and gender in the modern Middle East*. Colorado: Westview Press. p.89-139.

Foss, K. A., & Foss, S. K. (1994). Personal experience as evidence in feminist scholarship. *Western Journal of Communication (includes Communication Reports)*, 58(1), 39-43.

Francois-Cerrah, M. (2012). Muslim women face an uphill battle against prejudice to find work. *The Guardian*. [Online]. 10/12/2012 At: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/10/muslim-women-prejudice-getting-job?INTCMP=SRCH Accessed on 10/12/2012

Franks, M. (2000). Crossing the borders of whiteness? White Muslim women who wear the hijab in Britain today. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23(5), 917-929.

Franks, M. (2001). *Women and revivalism in the West: choosing 'fundamentalism' in a Liberal Democracy.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Franz, B. (2003). Bosnian refugee women in (re) settlement: gender relations and social mobility. *Feminist Review*, 73(1), 86-103.

Fukuyama, F. (2001). Social capital, civil society and development. *Third World Quarterly*, 22(1), 7-20.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Gelb, J. (1990). *Feminism and politics: a comparative perspective*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Gilham, J (2013). Britain's first Muslim peer of the realm: Henry, Lord Stanley of Alderley and Islam in Victorian Britain. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs,* 33(1), p.93-110.

Gilliat-Ray, S. (2010). *Muslims in Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gluck, S. B. & Patai, D. (Eds.). (1991). *Women's words: the feminist practice of oral history*. London: Routledge.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Goffman, E. (1969). *Strategic interaction*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

Gohir, S. (2006). *Understanding the other perspective: Muslim and non-Muslim relations.* Birmingham, UK: Muslim Voice UK.

Gökariksel, B., & Secor, A. (2010). Between fashion and tesettür: Marketing and consuming women's Islamic dress. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 6(3), 118-148.

Göle, N. (2000). Snapshots of Islamic modernities. *Daedalus*, 129 (1), 91-117.

Göle, N. (2007). *Islam, European public space, and civility.* Eurozine [Online] At: http://www.eurozine.com/pdf/2007-05-03-gole-en.pdf Accessed 07/08/2013

González, A. M., & Bovone, L. (Eds.). (2012). *Identities through fashion: a multidisciplinary approach*. London: Berg.

Haddad, Y. Y., & Golson, T. (2007). Overhauling Islam: representation, construction, and cooption of 'moderate Islam' in Western Europe. *Journal of Church and State*, 49(3), 487-515

Hadzis   , M. & Risaluddin, S. & Butler, T. J. (2003). *A Muslim woman in Tito's Yugoslavia*. College station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press.

Halford, S., & Leonard, P. (2001). *Gender, power and organisations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Hall, S. (1996). Minimal selves. In Bhabha, H. K., & Appignanesi, L. *Identity: the real me*. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts.p44-46. At: http://www.ic.ucsc.edu/~dej/2012%20Porter%20Core%20READER/2012%20PORTER%20CORE%202012%20READER/Persepolis/Hall.Minimal%20Selves.pdf Accessed on 12/12/2013

Hall, S. (2002). Political belonging in a world of multiple identities. In Vertovec, S., & Cohen, R. (Eds.). *Conceiving cosmopolitanism: theory, context and practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.25-31.

Halliday, F. (1996). *Religious fundamentalism in contemporary politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Handžić, Mehmed (1940). *Islamizacija Bosne i Hercegovine i porijeklo bosanskohercegovackih Muslimana.* Sarajevo: Islamska dionička štamparija.

Hangi, A. (2009). *Život i običaji muslimana u BiH (Life and Practices of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina).* Re-published from 1906. Sarajevo: Dobra Knjiga.

Hansen, L. (2000). Gender, nation, rape: Bosnia and the construction of security. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 3(1), 55-75.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist studies*, 14(3), 575-599.

Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs and women*. New York: Routledge.

Harding, S. G. (1991). *Whose science? whose knowledge?: thinking from women's lives*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Harrington, E. B. (2003). The social psychology of access in ethnographic research. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 32(5), 592-625.

Harris, S. (2010). Young. British. Female. Muslim. *The Times*. 29/05/2010 [Online] At: http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article2522634.ece Accessed on 06/06/2010

Hartsock, N. C. (1997). Comment on Hekman's" truth and method: feminist standpoint theory revisited": truth or justice?. *Signs*, 22(2), 367-374.

Haw, K. (2009). From hijab to jilbab and the 'myth'of British identity: being Muslim in contemporary Britain a half-generation on. *Race ethnicity and education*, 12(3), 363-378.

Haw, K. (2010). Being, becoming and belonging: young Muslim women in contemporary Britain. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31(4), 345-361.

Helms, E. (2003a). Women as agents of ethnic reconciliation? women's ngos and international intervention in postwar Bosnia–Herzegovina. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 26 (1), 15-33.

Helms, E. (2003b). *Gendered visions of the Bosnian future: women's activism and representation in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh. PhD. [Online] At: http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/9217/ Accessed 11/03/2012

Helms, E. (2007). 'Politics is a whore': women, morality and victimhood in post-war Bosnia & Herzegovina. In Bougarel, X., Bougarel, X., Helms, E., & Duijzings, G. *The new Bosnian mosaic: identities memories and moral claims in a post-war society*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Helms, E. (2010). The gender of coffee: Women and reconciliation initiatives in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Focaal*, (57), 17-32.

Helms, E. (2012). 'Bosnian Girl': nationalism and innocence through images of women. In Šuber, D., & Karamanic, S. (Eds.). *Retracing images: visual culture after Yugoslavia*. Leiden: Brill.p.195-222.

Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Leavy, P. 2nd ed (2011). *The practice of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Hodgson, M. G. (1974). *The venture of Islam (vol1)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Holliday, A. (2007). *Doing and writing qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Hoodfar, H. (1993). The veil in their minds and on our heads: the persistence of colonial images of Muslim women. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 22(3/4), 5-18.

Hopkins, P. (2007). Young Muslim men's experiences of local landscapes after 11 September 2001. In Aitchison, C., Hopkins, P. E., & Kwan, M. P. (Eds.). *Geographies of Muslim identities: diaspora, gender and belonging*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd. p.189-200.

Huisman, K., & Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (2005). Dress matters change and continuity in the dress practices of Bosnian Muslim refugee women. *Gender & Society*, 19(1), 44-65.

Hukić, A. (1977). *Islam i muslimani u Bosni i Hercegovini*. Sarajevo: Starješinstvo Islamske Zajednice.

Hunt, S. (2004). Muslim women in the Bosnian crucible. *Sex roles*, 51(5-6), 301-317.

Huntington, S. P. (1993). The clash of civilizations?. *Foreign affairs*, 72 (3), 22-49. At: http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/Huntington_Clash.pdf Accessed 17/04/2013

Ibrahimpasic, E. (2008). *Muslim women's identities in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina in individual advanced research opportunities (IARO) program research report.* IREX and US Department of State. [Online]At: http://www.irex.org/system/files/Ibrahimpasic.pdf Accessed: 23/06/2013.

Jackson, S. (2008). Families, domesticity and intimacy: changing relationships in changing times. In Richardson, D., & Robinson, V. *Introducing gender and women's studies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p.125-142.

Jackson, S. (ed) (1993). *Women's studies: essential readings*. New York: New York University Press.

Jacobson, J. (1997). Religion and ethnicity: dual and alternative sources of identity among young British Pakistanis. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 20(2), 238-256.

Jacobson, J. (1998). *Islam in transition: religion and identity among British Pakistani youth*, London: LSE/Routledge.

Jeffery, P. (1979). *Frogs in a well: Indian women in purdah*. London: Zed Press.

Jeldtoft, N. (2009). On defining Muslims. In Nielsen J.S. et. al*., Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, *vol1*. Leiden: Brill. p.9-14.

Jenkins, R. (1996). *Social identity*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Joly, D. (1987). *Making a place for Islam in British society: Muslims in Birmingham.* Warwick: Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, Arts Building, University of Warwick.

Jones, S. R., & McEwen, M. K. (2000). A conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41(4), 405-414.

Joppke, C. (2009).*Veil*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Jorgensen, D. L. (ed.). (1989). *Participant observation: a methodology for human studies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Jusová, I. (2011). European immigration and continental feminism: theories of Rosi Braidotti. *Feminist Theory*, 12(1), 55-73.

Kamali, M. H. (2003). *Principles of Islamic jurisprudence*. Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society.

Kamberelis, G., & Dimitriadis, G. (2005). Focus groups: strategic articulations of pedagogy, politics, and inquiry. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln Y. (Eds.). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.p.887-907.

Kamberović, H. (2009). Razlozi za održavanje skupa "Nacionalni identitet Bošnjaka 1945-2008". In Kamberović (ed) *Rasprave o nacionalnom identitetu Bošnjaka*. Sarajevo: Institut za Istoriju u Sarajevu At: http://www.iis.unsa.ba/pdf/rasprave_o_nacionalnom_identitetu_bosnjaka.pdf Accessed on 24/06/2013

Kandiyoti D. (1991) Identity and its discontents: women and the nation. *Journal of International Studies*, 20(3), 429-43.

Karčić, H. (2010). Islamic revival in post-socialist Bosnia and Herzegovina: international actors and activities. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 30(4), 519-534.

Kelly, L., Burton, S., & Regan, L. (1994). Researching women's lives or studying women's oppression? Reflections on what constitutes feminist research. In Maynard, M., & Purvis, J. *Researching women's lives from a feminist perspective*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group. p.27-48.

Kesic, V. (2002). Muslim women, Croatian women, Serbian women, Albanian women. In Bjelić, D. I., & Savić, O. (Eds.). *Balkan as metaphor: between globalization and fragmentation*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. p.311-22.

Khan, S. (2000). *Muslim women: crafting a North American identity*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Khan, V. S. (1976). Pakistani women in Britain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 5(1-2), 99-108.

Kirby, S., & McKenna, K. (1989). *Experience, research, social change: methods from the margins*. Toronto: Garamond Press.

Kittilson, M. C., & Dalton, R. J. (2011). Virtual civil society: the new frontier of social capital?. *Political Behavior*, 33(4), 625-644.

Kloss, H. (1967). 'Abstand languages' and'ausbau languages'. *Anthropological linguistics*, 9(7), 29-41.

Knott, K., & Khokher, S. (1993). Religious and ethnic identity among young Muslim women in Bradford. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 19(4), 593-610.

Kobayashi, A. (1994). Coloring the field: gender, race, and the politics of fieldwork. *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), 73-80.

Kolind, M. (2008). *Post-war identification: everyday Muslim counterdiscourse in Bosnia Herzegovina*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press and Torsten Kolind.

Korac, M. (1999). Refugee women in Serbia: their experiences with war, nationalism and state building. In Werbner, P., & Yuval-Davis, N. *Women, citizenship and difference*. London: Zed Books Ltd. p.192-200.

Kozaric-Kovacic, D., Folnegovic-Smalc, V., Skrinjaric, J., Szajnberg, N. M., & Marusic, A. (1995). Rape, torture, and traumatization of Bosnian and Croatian women. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 65(3), 428-433.

Lawler, S. (2008). *Identity: sociological perspectives*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Lazreg, M. (2009). *Questioning the veil: open letters to Muslim women*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Letherby, G. (2003). *Feminist research in theory and practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lewis, P. (1994). *Islamic Britain: religion, politics and identity among British Muslims*, London: I.B. Tauris &Co. Ltd.

Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R., & Zilber, T. (Eds.). (1998). *Narrative research: reading, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Lips-Wiersma, M. (2002). The influence of spiritual "meaning-making" on career behavior. *Journal of Management Development*, 21(7), 497-520.

Lockwood, W. G. (1975). *European Moslems: economy and ethnicity in western Bosnia*. New York: Academic Press.

Lóránd, Z. (2007). *Feminism as counterdiscourse in Yugoslavia in two different contexts* (Doctoral dissertation, Central European University). At: www.etd.ceu.hu/2007/lorand_zsofia.pdf

Lovrenovic, I. (1996). *The deconstruction of Bosnia*. The Bosnia Institute.[Online] At: http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/report_format.cfm?articleid=1764&reportid=114 Accessed 21/04/2013

Lutz, H. (1997). The limits of European-ness: immigrant women in fortress Europe. *Feminist review*, No.57, 93-111. At: http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1395803?uid=3739256&uid=2134&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21103437134501 Accessed on 26/07/2013

Maddock, S. (1999). *Challenging women: gender, culture and organization*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: the Islamic revival and the feminist subject*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Malcolm, N. (1996). *Bosnia: a short history*. New York: New York University Press.

Maqsood, R. (1994). *Examining religions: Islam*. Harlow, Essex: Heinemann.

Martín Muñoz, G., & Lopez-Sala, A. (2005). Migration and the religiosity of Muslim women in Spain. In Cesari, J., & McLoughlin, S. (Eds.). *European Muslims and the secular state*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.p.129-142.

Matar, N. (1998). *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McDonald, L. (2005). *Islamic feminisms: ideas and experiences of convert women in Britain*. Unpublished: University of York. PhD.

McGoldrick, D. (2006). *Human rights and religion-the Islamic headscarf debate in Europe*. Portland: Hart Publishing.

Meer, N., Dwyer, C., & Modood, T. (2010). Embodying nationhood? Conceptions of British national identity, citizenship, and gender in the 'Veil Affair'. *The Sociological Review*, 58(1), 84-111.

Meznaric, S. (1994). Gender as an ethno-marker: rape, war, and identity politics in the former Yugoslavia. In Moghadam, V. M. (Ed.). *Identity politics and women: Cultural reassertions and feminisms in international perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press. p.76-97.

Migdal, J. S. (ed.) (2004). *Boundaries and belonging*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Milišić, S. (1999). O emancipaciji muslimanske žene u Bosni i Hercegovini. *Prilozi Instituta za Istoriju Sarajeva,* 28:225–41. Sarajevo: Institut za Istoriju u Sarajevu.

Minces, J., & Pallis, M. (1982). *The house of obedience: Women in Arab society*. London: Zed Press.

Mishler, E. G. (1986). The analysis of interview-narratives. In Sarbin, (ed) T. R. *Narrative psychology: the storied nature of human conduct*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers. p. 233-255.

Modood, T. (2005). *Multicultural politics: racism, ethnicity, and Muslims in Britain*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Modood, T., & Ahmad, F. (2007). British Muslim perspectives on multiculturalism. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24(2), 187-213.

Moghadam, V. M. (ed.). (1994). *Gender and national identity: women and politics in Muslim societies*. London: Zed Books.

Mohammad, R. (2005). Negotiating spaces of the home, the education system, and the labor market. In Falah, G. W., & Nagel, C. R. (Eds.). *Geographies of Muslim women: gender, religion, and space*. New York: Guilford Press. p.178-200.

Mohanraj, P. (2010). *Understanding girls' absence from school in Madhya Pradesh, India: an investigation*. Unpublished: University of York. PhD.

Mohanty, C. T. (1988). Under Western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Feminist review*, No.30, 61-88. At: http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1395054?uid=3739256&uid=2&uid=4&sid=211 03437300551 Accessed on 08/04/2013

Mol, H. (1977). *Identity and the sacred: a sketch for a new social-scientific theory of religion*. New York: Free Press.

Moors, A., & Salih, R. (2009). Muslim women in Europe: secular normativities, bodily performances and multiple publics. *Social Anthropology*, 17(4), 375-378.

Morgan, D. (2011). *Rethinking family practices.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Moss, P. J. (ed.). (2002). *Feminist geography in practice: research and methods*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Mughal, F. (2013). Baroness Warsi was right - anti-Muslim prejudice seems to be increasingly acceptable. *The Huffington Post UK*.[Online] 23/01/2013 At: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/fiyaz-mughal/baroness-warsi-was-right-anti-muslim-prejudice_b_2541363.html Accessed on 23/09/2013

Mullings, B. (1999). Insider or outsider, both or neither: some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting. *Geoforum*, 30(4), 337-350.

Murata, S., & Chittick, W. C. (1994). *The vision of Islam*. New York: Paragon House.

Muslim Women's Network (2006). *She who disputes: Muslim women shape the debate.* London: Women's National Commission. At: http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/go_files/downloads/992754-shewhodisputesnov06.pdf Accessed on 21/07/2013

Nandi, A., & Platt, L. (2013). *Britishness and identity assimilation among the UK's minority and majority ethnic groups*. Understanding Society at the Institute for Social and Economic Research. [Online] At: https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/research/publications/working-paper/understanding-society/2013-08.pdf Accessed on 10/01/2014

Narayan, K. (1993). How native is a "native" anthropologist?. *American anthropologist*, 95(3), 671-686.

Navarro, L. (2010). Islamophobia and sexism: Muslim women in the Western mass media. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 8(2), 10.

Nielsen, J. R. (1987). Muslims in Britain: searching for an identity?. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 13(3), 384-394.

Nielsen, J. S. (1988). Muslims in Britain and local authority responses. In Gerholm, T., & Lithman, Y. G. (Eds.). *The new Islamic presence in Western Europe.* London: Mansell.p.53-77.

Nielsen, J. S. (2003). Transnational Islam and the integration of Islam in Europe. In Allievi, S., & Nielsen, J. S. (Eds.). *Muslim networks and transnational communities in and across Europe*. Leiden: Brill.p.28-51.

Nielsen, J. S. (2004). *Muslims in western Europe*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Nielsen, J. S., Nielsen, J., Akgönül, S., Alibašić, A., & Racius, E. (Eds.). (2012). *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* (Vol. 4). Leiden: Brill.

Nielsen, J., Akgönül, S., Alibašić, A., Maréchal, B., & Moe, C. (2009). *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* (Vol. 1). Leiden: Brill.

Nye, C (2011). *Converting to Islam - the white Britons becoming Muslims*. BBC Asian Network. [Online] At: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12075931 Accessed on 30/11/2013

Oakley, A. (1981). Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms. In Roberts, H. (Ed). *Doing feminist research*. London: Routledge. p.30-61

Øksenvåg, E. F. (2008). *Muslims between East and West: a study of identity and the use of hijab among Bosnian Muslim women in Sarajevo*. Oslo: University of Oslo. Master Thesis. [Online] At: https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/24075 Accessed on 26/05/2013

Olujic, M. B. (1998). Embodiment of terror: gendered violence in peacetime and wartime in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Medical anthropology quarterly*, 12(1), 31-50.

Osler, A. & Hussain, Z. (2005) Educating Muslim girls: do mothers have faith in the state system?. In Abbas, T. (Ed.). *Muslim Britain: communities under pressure*. London: Zed Books. p.127-143.

Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. New York: Free Press

Pauly Jr, R. J. (2004). *Islam in Europe: integration or marginalization?*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Perišić, N. (2012). *Mješoviti brak u BiH : od poželjnog do prezrenog, mješoviti brak kao kulturna i politička kategorija u savremenoj BiH*.Sarajevo: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Piela, A. (2010). Muslim women's online discussions of gender relations in Islam. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 30(3), 425-435.

Piela, A. (2013). *Muslim women online: faith and identity in virtual space*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Pillow, W. S., & Mayo, C. (2007). Toward understandings of feminist ethnography. In Hesse-Biber, S. N. *Handbook of feminist research: theory and praxis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc. p.155-172.

Poole, E. (2002). *Reporting Islam: media representations and British Muslims*. London: I.B. Tauris &Co. Ltd.

Poole, E., & Richardson, J. E. (Eds.). (2006). *Muslims and the news media*. London: I.B. Tauris &Co. Ltd.

Poole, R. (1999). *Nation and identity*. London: Routledge.

Poston, L. (1992). *Islamic da'wah in the West: Muslim missionary activity and the dynamics of conversion to Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rahman, M., & Jackson, S. (2010). *Gender and sexuality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Ramadan, T. (1999). *To be a European Muslim: a study of Islamic sources in the European context*. Markfield: Islamic Foundation UK.

Ramazanoglu, C., & Holland, J. (2002). *Feminist methodology: challenges and choices*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Razack, S. (2007). *Casting out: the eviction of Muslims from western law & politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Razavi, S. (1992). Fieldwork in a familiar setting: the role of politics at a national, community and household levels. In Devereux, S. & Hoddinott, J. (Eds). *Fieldwork in Developing Countries*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers. p.152–63.

Reinharz, S., & Davidman, L. (1992). *Feminist methods in social research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Reynolds, D. (2003). "Kavaliere, Kostüme, Kunstgewerbe: Die Vorstellung Bosniens in Wien 1878-1900". In Feichtinger, J., Prutsch U., & Csáky M. (Eds). *Habsburg postcolonial: Machtstrukturen und kollektives Gedächtnis*. Innsbruck: Studien Verlag.

Richardson, R (2012). *Islamophobia or anti Muslim racism – or what? – concepts and terms revisited.* [Online] At: http://www.insted.co.uk/anti-muslim-racism.pdf Accessed on 12/08/2013

Ridd, R. (1994). Separate but more than equal: Muslim women at the Cape. In El-Solh, C. F., & Mabro, J. (Eds.). *Muslim women's choices: religious belief and social reality*. Providence: Berg Publishers Ltd. p.85-107.

Riesman, P. (1992). *First find your child a good mother: the construction of self in two African communities*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Riley-Smith, J. (1987). *The Crusades: a short history*. London: Athlone Press.

Riley-Smith, J. (2011). *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Rizvić, M. (1994). Poetika bošnjačke književnosti. In Rizvić, M. *Panorama bošnjačke književnosti.* Sarajevo: Ljiljan. p.7-42.

Roald A. S. (2003). *Women in Islam: the Western Experience*. London: Routledge.

Roald, A. S. (2004). *New Muslims in the European context: the experience of Scandinavian converts*. Leiden: Brill.

Robinson, B. (2004). Putting Bosnia in its place: critical geopolitics and the representation of Bosnia in the British print media. *Geopolitics*, 9(2), 378-401.

Robinson-Dunn, D. (2003). *Lascar sailors and English converts: the Imperial Port and Islam in late 19th-Century England*. History Cooperative. [Online] At: http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/ebook/p/2005/history_cooperative/www.historycooperative. org/proceedings/seascapes/dunn.html Accessed on 23/08/2013

Robinson-Dunn, D. (2006). *The harem, slavery and British imperial culture: Anglo-Muslim relations in the late nineteenth century*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Rodinson, M. (2002). *Europe and the mystique of Islam*. London: I.B. Tauris &Co. Ltd.

Ruby, T. (2005). Listening to the voices of hijab. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29(1), 54–66.

Runnymede Trust (1997). *Islamophobia a challenge for us all*. London: Runnymede Trust.

Ryan, L. (2011). Muslim women negotiating collective stigmatization: 'We're just normal people'. *Sociology*, 45(6), 1045-1060.

Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books Edition.

Scharf, M., Milošević, S., & Schabas, W. A. (2002). *Slobodan Milosevic on trial: a companion*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Scott, J. (2007). *The politics of the veil.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. [Online] At: http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/i8497.pdf Accessed on 20/07/2013

Sells, M. A. (1998). *The bridge betrayed: religion and genocide in Bosnia*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Šeta Đ. (2011). *Zasto marama? Bosanskohercegovacke muslimanke o zivotu i radu pod maramom.* Sarajevo: Centar za interdisciplinarne postdiplomske studije.

Sheridan, L. P. (2006). Islamophobia pre–and post–September 11th, 2001. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 21(3), 317-336.

Siddiqui, A. (1997). Ethics in Islam: key concepts and contemporary challenges. *Journal of Moral Education*, 26(4), 423-431.

Silvestri S. (2011) Faith intersections and Muslim women in the European microcosm: notes towards the study of non-organized Islam. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34(7), 1230-1247.

Silvestri, S. (2008). *Europe's Muslim Women: Potential, Aspirations and Challenges: Research Report*. Brussels: King Baudouin Foundation. At: http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedfiles/kbs-frb/3%29_publications/pub_1846_muslimwomen_03.pdf Accessed on 20/11/2012

Slack, J. A., & Doyon, R. R. (2001). Population dynamics and susceptibility for ethnic conflict: The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Journal of Peace Research*, 38(2), 139-161.

Smajić, A. (2012). Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Nielsen, J. S., Akgönül, S., Alibašic, A., & Racius, E. *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, vol. 4*. Leiden: Brill. p.95-114.

Sorabji, C. (1988). Islamic revival and marriage in Bosnia. *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 9(2), 331-337.

Sorabji, C. (1989). *Muslim identity and Islamic faith in Sarajevo.* Cambridge: University of Cambridge. PhD. [Online] At: https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/240753 Accessed on 04/02/2011

Sorabji, C. (1994). Mixed motives: Islam, nationalism and mevluds in an unstable Yugoslavia. In El-Solh, C. F., & Mabro, J. (Eds.). *Muslim women's choices: religious belief and social reality*. Oxford: Berg Publishers Ltd. p.108-127.

Soysal, Y. N. (2000). Citizenship and identity: living in diasporas in post-war Europe?. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23(1), 1-15.

Spahić-Šiljak, Z. (ed.). (2012). *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*. Sarajevo: Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies, University of Sarajevo.

Spalek, B., & Lambert, R. (2008). Muslim communities, counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation: A critically reflective approach to engagement. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 36(4), 257-270.

Spender, D. (1998). *Man made language*. London: Pandora.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak?. In Nelson, C., & Grossberg, L. (Eds.). *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.p271-313.

Sprague, J. (2005). *Feminist methodologies for critical researchers: bridging differences*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1993). *Breaking out again: feminist ontology and epistemology*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Stanley, L & Wise, S. (2005). *Putting it into practice: using feminist fractured foundationalism in researching children in the concentration camps of the South African war*. [Online] At: http://www.socresonline.org.uk/11/1/stanley.html Accessed on 12/04/2013

Sultana, F. (2007). Reflexivity, positionality and participatory ethics: negotiating fieldwork dilemmas in international research. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 6(3), 374-385.

Tapper, N., & Tapper, R. (1987). The birth of the prophet: ritual and gender in Turkish Islam. *Man*, 22(1), 69-92.

Tarlo, E. (2010). *Visibly Muslim: fashion, politics, faith*. Oxford: Berg.

Tett, G. (1994). 'Guardians of the faith': gender and religion in an (ex) Soviet Tajik village. In El-Solh, C. F., & Mabro, J. (Eds.). *Muslim women's choices: religious belief and social reality*. Providence: Berg Publishers Ltd. p.128-51.

Tibawi, A. L. (1981). History of the London Central Mosque and the Islamic Cultural Centre 1910-1980. *Die Welt des Islams*, 21(1-4), 193-208.

Toal, G., & Dahlman, C. T. (2011). *Bosnia remade: ethnic cleansing and its reversal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tokhtakhodjaeva, M. (1995). *Between the slogans of communism and the laws of Islam*. Lahore, Pakistan: Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre.

Tolan, J. V. (2002). *Saracens: Islam in the medieval European imagination*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Tucker, J. E. (2008). *Women, family, and gender in Islamic law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Uzelac, G. (1998) Franjo Tudjman's nationalist ideology. *East European Quarterly*, 31(4), 449-472.

Valentine, G. (2002). People like us: negotiating sameness and difference in the research process. In Moss, P.J. (Ed.). F*eminist geography in practice: research and methods.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. p.116-26.

Van Nieuwkerk, K. (2004). Veils and wooden clogs don't go together. *Ethnos*, 69(2), 229-246.

Van Nieuwkerk, K. (Ed.). (2009). *Women embracing Islam: gender and conversion in the West*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Voas, D., & Crockett, A. (2005). Religion in Britain: neither believing nor belonging. *Sociology*, 39(1), 11-28.

Waardenburg, J., (2003). *Muslims and others: relations in context*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Wadud, A. (2006). *Inside the gender Jihad: women's reform in Islam*. Oxford: Oneworld.

Wagner, W., Sen, R., Permanadeli, R., & Howarth, C. S. (2012). The veil and Muslim women's identity: cultural pressures and resistance to stereotyping. *Culture & psychology*, 18(4), 521-541.

Ward Jouve, N. (1991). *White woman speaks with forked tongue: criticism as autobiography*. London: Routledge.

Waters, R. D., Burnett, E., Lamm, A., & Lucas, J. (2009). Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, 35(2), 102-106.

Werbner, P. (2000). Divided loyalties, empowered citizenship? Muslims in Britain. *Citizenship Studies*, 4(3), 307-324.

Werbner, P. (2002). *Imagined diasporas among Manchester Muslims: the public performance of Pakistani transnational identity politics.* Oxford: James Currey.

Werbner, P. (2007). Veiled interventions in pure space honour, shame and embodied struggles among Muslims in Britain and France. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24(2), 161-186.

Werbner, P., & Anwar, M. (Eds.). (1991). *Black and ethnic leaderships in Britain: the cultural dimensions of political action*. London: Routledge.

Wikan, U. (1992). Beyond the words: the power of resonance. *American Ethnologist*, 19(3), 460-482.

Williamson, M., & Khiabany, G. (2010). UK: the veil and the politics of racism. *Race & Class*, 52(2), 85-96.

Wilson, A. (1978). *Finding a voice: Asian women in Britain*. London: Virago.

Woodhead, L. (2007). Gender differences in religious practice and significance. In Beckford, J. A., & Demerath, J. (Eds.). *The SAGE handbook of the sociology of religion*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. p.566-586.

Woodward, S. (2007). *Why women wear what they wear*. Oxford: Berg.

Yuval-Daivis, N. (1998). Women, citizenship and difference. In Crowley, H., Lewis, G., Werbner, P., & Yuval-Davis, N. *Citizenship: pushing the boundaries: Feminist Review,* 57(1), 3-26.