



Universiteit  
Leiden

The Netherlands

## **The Muslim woman question in Bosnia and Herzegovina: between Islamic tradition and global modernity**

Šerić, M.

### **Citation**

Šerić, M. (2025, September 24). *The Muslim woman question in Bosnia and Herzegovina: between Islamic tradition and global modernity*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4261977>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4261977>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# Summary in English

At the heart of this dissertation are public debates over rights, duties, and public visibility of Muslim women in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Bosnia and Herzegovina—commonly referred to as the “Muslim woman question.”

It examines how intellectuals and religious scholars in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Bosnia and Herzegovina used women related issues as a discursive space for negotiating broader religious and social tensions. Drawing on a range of published materials—including journals, books, and pamphlets—it shows that these debates were shaped by three major intellectual currents: reformism, conservatism, and revivalism. Despite their differences, each current mobilized the figure of the Muslim woman to express their competing visions of true Islam, religious authority, cultural identity, and progress. Rather than reflecting women’s lived experiences, these discourses contributed to the development the Muslim woman as a discursive construct—an imagined and symbolically charged figure through which broader anxieties were expressed.

The research employs an interdisciplinary approach that integrates global history, gender theory and discourse analysis to situate Bosnian Muslim debates on gender within broader global intellectual currents, while paying attention to the local specifics of the debates.

The dissertation is organized into two central parts, each addressing a distinct but interconnected set of themes.

The first part of the dissertation entitled *Locating Bosnian Islamic Discourse within Global Muslim Intellectual Development* comprises two chapters. Chapter *Reformist Discourses: Foundations for Rethinking Islamic Tradition in Modernity* positions early 20<sup>th</sup> century Bosnian Muslim thought within the broader global Muslim search for authenticity. It primarily focuses on reformist discourses that called for a return to foundational sources of Islam, a critical reassessment of tradition, and independent interpretation. These discourses not only initiated local articulations of this search but also played a central role in establishing the tone, direction, and conceptual boundaries of public debates across the Muslim world. Whether reformist ideas were adopted, rejected, or critically engaged with, they helped shape the intellectual landscape of the time and served as a key referential framework for both global and Bosnian intra-Muslim debates—particularly those concerning the rights, duties and public visibility of Muslim women. The first part of dissertation further also explores the local socio-intellectual environment of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In chapter *Between the Global and Local: Islamic Discourse in Bosnia and Herzegovina* it offers a detailed analysis of the factors that facilitated the pluralization of Islamic thought in Bosnia and Herzegovina from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as the

modernization in the field of education, the emergence of Muslim cultural associations, and the development of a distinct Bosnian Muslim public sphere. It also provides insight into the key intellectual trends and debates that shaped modern Islamic thought in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The second part of the work entitled *The Bosnian Muslim Woman Question within the Global Contestations over Islamic Tradition and Modernity* comprises three chapters that explore how Muslim women's roles, visibility, and rights become an integral part of both global, and Bosnian Muslim discourses. Chapter entitled *Exploring the Multifaceted Roles of the Muslim Woman Question in Global Modernity* examines the "Muslim woman question" as a deeply symbolic and charged issue in both European and Muslim discourses. It explores how the figure of Muslim woman was mobilized in colonial and orientalist narratives as marker of cultural backwardness of Muslims, and often rigid nature of Islam. At the same time, it demonstrates how within Muslim societies, the status of women became a key site of intra-Muslim polemic over the meaning and place of Islamic tradition in the modern world.

The chapter *Muslim Woman's Education, Authenticity, and Progress: Bosnian Muslim Perspectives* examines how the education of Muslim women became a prominent and contested issue among Bosnian Muslim intellectuals in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While the value of women's education as such was not widely disputed, it was the question of their participation in modern institutions of public learning that generated intense debate—particularly in relation to concerns about cultural integrity, moral boundaries, and the preservation of distinctive identity.

Chapter entitled *Debates on Face Veiling* focuses on one of the most contested issues in the global discussions on Islam and Muslims from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the Bosnian context, as elsewhere, face veiling emerged as an important issue through which questions of local cultural traditions, moral values surrounding (un)veiling, collective identity, and the relevance and (re)interpretation of inherited legal and theological traditions were actively negotiated. This chapter situates these debates within the broader global discourse on veiling, and shows how the veil was frequently associated with opposing ideas.

Together, these two parts of the dissertation provide a comprehensive account of the intersections between global Islamic thought and local Bosnian Muslim debates on the Muslim woman question.

The thematic focus, centered on the intense and often heated intra-Muslim debates, placed within the broader context of the global Muslim search for authenticity, has provided several significant insights. First and foremost, it highlighted the multivocal character of

Islamic intellectual thought in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, it demonstrated how Muslim intellectuals and religious authorities were not only shaped by global intellectual currents but also actively contributed to shaping them. At the same time, the analysis revealed that gender debates functioned as key arenas where questions of religious authenticity, authority, progress, identity, and the place of Muslims in a rapidly changing social and cultural landscape were articulated, negotiated and contested.