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Zilka Spahić-Šiljak (ed.), *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*. Sarajevo: CIP – Katalogizacija u publikacija Nacionalna i Univerzitetska Biblioteka Bosne i Hercegovina, 2012. Pp. 277. ISBN 978–9958–704–29–1.

There has been an acute lack of literature by Bosnians or Albanians about the mainstream developments of feminist thought and ideas in the Muslim world. This book, edited by Bosnian academics addresses these issues through a unique project involving fora held in Sarajevo and Mostar (Bosnia i Hercegovina = BiH), and in Pristina, Prizren and Gjilan (Kosovo), as well as individual interviews with women in Sarajevo and Pristina. Data from fourteen focus groups and twelve life story interviews reveals how the participants had become feminists and by what strategies they identified themselves as Muslim and feminists or prominent activists in the women's movement.

In her Foreword to the book, Margot Badran notes that the demonizing and discrediting of feminism in Bosnia is sometimes based on the claim that it is a form of Western cultural invasion, critics 'branding it a foreign enemy insidiously working from within' (p. 14). She points out that the return of religion to the region has brought with it ideas and practices of veiling, which are discussed at length throughout the book. Following the Socialist period of muted religion, there is little cohesion concerning an acceptable form of Muslim practice. Through oral histories of women of two age groups (those over/under 30 or 35), in the two countries, BiH and Kosovo, the book seeks to gain insights into how gender transformations within an egalitarian model of religion and culture can be achieved and sustained, and how Islam, re-considered, contributes to part of this process.

There has been very little research on the experiences of indigenous Muslim women in the Balkans since 1992. This book is also unique in that its research, on feminism and Islam is carried out by Bosnian women themselves, looking at the key identities: female, feminist and religious, contrasting the situation in two specific eras—under Communism and post-Communism. The book is divided into two parts: theoretical and empirical. Difficulties of categorization are discussed: Islamic and Muslim feminism; secular and atheist; older and younger women; rural and urban; moderate and extreme, etc. For almost all of the women within this research project

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there was concern for women's survival strategies in their patriarchal societies. Only three participants as observant Muslim women felt able to state their feminist identity clearly (p.227). It is easier to declare to be a women's human rights activist. A common finding to both BiH and Kosovo is that although feminism is rejected as incompatible with Islam and also seen as anti-Islamic, at the same time, gender equality is formally accepted by state institutions in both countries. It is the mindset of ordinary citizens that opposes it. Those enrolled in the recently founded Gender Studies Programme at Sarajevo University (2006) find great public antagonism.

In the chapter on Women and Politics (by Lamija Kosović and the Editor, Spahić-Šiljak), the huge disparity between different countries worldwide as to the extent of women's legal involvement in politics, is pointed out and in turn the disparity of the kind of needs for women to move ahead in that field. Some countries are still at the stage of demanding a woman's right to vote (a first wave of feminism), just as, for example at that stage in France, women were highly involved in the French Revolution of 1789–99—the same period that Mary Wollstonecraft wrote the notable *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, whereas it was more than a century later that the suffragist movements in the UK and US became really effective, preceded by a few years by women's movements in New Zealand, Australia and the Scandinavian countries. The authors outline two more waves of feminism, one of Marxist feminists and radical feminists, both, in different ways, contesting patriarchal institutions; the third wave 'is closely related to the effects of globalization and the complex redistribution of power that challenge feminist theory and politics' (p. 49).

A typology is given of identities of four types of feminism of Muslim countries: atheist, secular, Muslim and Islamic. Using these terms to classify the women interviewed brings out the complexity of categorizing individuals' self-identification. Interviewees and those who attended the fora were from community, or human rights activist, backgrounds. Each one had a different interpretation of their Muslim identity and the presentation of that as feminists, in a society which is very antagonistic to feminism. Some found emancipation in not wearing a veil; others felt it so much a core of their identity that they were prepared to forgo prestigious positions if they were not permitted to wear it. All share humanistic outlooks which may be considered universal values in all religious and non-religious traditions. Many feel that praying should be in their mother tongue; some like segregation within the

mosque, while others find it an attack on their freedom. In Kosovo, government decree forbids the wearing of the veil, while in Bosnia there is no such ruling. In Iran a law of 1929 forced women to wear Western clothing; this state-mandated unveiling ended in 1979. Spahić-Šiljak notes that all types of political order in Turkey (Ottoman, Kemalist, Marxist and Islamist) ‘take a woman and her sexuality as the battleground issue in gaining recognition, relevance and power’ (p. 78). (Women in Turkey comprise 14% of Parliament). Bosnian women put their religious identity before their Bosnian one, while Kosovar women consider their national identity the more important. Many consider that the Qur’an gives rights to women that male Islamic scholars have taken away. Political parties in both countries, formally open to women, are essentially patriarchal, delegating women politicians to women’s fora for women’s issues.

The chapter ‘The Contexts of BiH and Kosovo’, written by five regional feminists and incorporating a wide range material by both local and foreign experts, some as recent as 2012, is a particularly useful one, giving a clear and concise historical overview of both Communist and post-Communist periods. Setting out the socio-political conditions of the two countries and their constitutional and political position within the Yugoslav Federation, Gorana Mlinarević clarifies how the 1963 Constitution moved towards decentralization and awarded the right of the autonomous provinces (Kosovo is one of the two), to adopt their own constitutions. She also details the political system of Socialist Yugoslavia and the ‘National Question’ and the provisions during the 1960s and 1970s intended to prevent hegemonic power of either Serbia or Croatia. Kosovo, as the least socio-economically developed region of Yugoslavia, was always seen as a destabilizing factor, especially as its inequality continually deepened. Demonstrations of 1968 and 1981 in Kosovo demanded that it should be given the status of republic. The mostly Albanian population also wanted to distance themselves from the name Shqiptare (Šiptar in Serbo-Croatian) which had gained pejorative implications; from the time of the constitutional adjustments of 1974 they became ‘Albanians’ (Albanci). The tragic break-up of Yugoslavia started with Slovenia gaining independence. BiH had specially valued its multiculturalism. Although BiH received international recognition as an independent state in 1992, it led to brutal armed conflict led by ethno-nationalist élites in power from the three groups: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs (who prior to 1992 had long been praised for their

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remarkable accommodation to one another, most especially in Sarajevo). Mlinarević also gives a very succinct evaluation of the results of both UNMIK and the UN Security Council's unsuccessful deliberations over the status of Kosovo, especially in the years 2005–2007.

She also discusses Women's Liberation under Socialism, pointing out that although there were attempt to free women to work by providing public daycare, in fact the strong patriarchal tradition and culture of women's role was left unchallenged. She describes the AFW, a significant political organization in BiH, as a unique example of a women-only organization, which set up schools and health counseling centres. The AFW was not effective in Kosovo but the opening of Pristina University (in 1957) gave opportunities for women's organizing; by 1981 almost half the participants in the massive student demonstrations were women. There is discussion also of Women's Liberation and activism under Post-Socialism, with the conclusion that state institutions 'which constitute the male power structure do not consider women's organizations as serious partners to be consulted and respected in legislation and policy formulation' (p.110).

Sead S. Fahagić's contribution on Islam under Socialism and Post-Socialism has a particularly extensive bibliography. She outlines the relaxation of restrictions (1953–65): by 1966 there were more than 3,000 mosques in Yugoslavia. Religion was not suppressed; it was available, but not given endorsement, (for example. mosques were not heated). The liberalization period (1965-67) allowed identification of Muslims as an ethnic/national group to prevail. Selective restrictions were re-imposed (1971-82) whereby Muslim (written with a capital M) indicated membership of an ethnic/national group (but not connected to Islam), whereas with a lower case 'm', muslim referred to a religious believer. Fahagić explains that 'Islam represented, for the population living in poor conditions, more an expression of a passive fatalistic following of family tradition than an active spiritual relation between man and deity'. She examines the intricate and different changes in both BiH and Kosovo, following the break-up of Yugoslavia. After 1989, tensions between non-observant and observant Muslims intensified, often leading to the breaking of earlier relationships.

The chapter on 'Being a Woman' explores women's understanding about Muslim identity both about the compatibility of Islam and feminism and to what extent these feminists' political viewpoint are defined in relationship to their activism.

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In these areas the researchers found that most are secularized believers, seeing religion as a private matter; they feel anxiety about religious identity in public life. Most consider the wearing of *hijab* as an intrusion and also an indication of illiteracy, docility, passivity, isolation and separation. There were of course exceptions to this in both BiH and Kosovo. In these patriarchal societies, many women see themselves as educators of their children and their role as one of caring. Many of the women interviewed perceived the wars of the 1990s as a force through which women took on new responsibilities and burdens. It was a time for some, when religion drove them to become active, for some it was compassion and care for the needs of women that led to increased confidence in, and sharing of, their ability to resolve difficult situations. This was also a time when they sought understanding of and solace through their Muslim heritage. War was especially problematic for women from mixed marriages.

The argument is presented that international impositions have contributed to the transformation of a communist/socialist system to a capitalist/liberal system and re-traditionalizing of gender roles which ultimately prove disadvantageous for women, and that inequality increased.

In BiH, women's participation in the Socialist Youth Movement gave them useful experience for leadership in the post-Communist period, whereas in Kosovo such an asset was barely mentioned. Another contrast in the women's stories concerns the focus on motherhood: seen as important in BiH, this was barely mentioned by Kosovar women. By contrast it was the Kosovar women who asserted that the role of their father was extremely important in their own accessibility to further education, that they are dependent on men's support and willingness to stand against prevailing cultural norms (p. 213). This was seen sometimes to work in reverse, where fathers in rural religious communities restricted access to education for their adolescent daughters. All interviewees allocated greater importance to their primary families, than to their newly formed ones.

Although it is explained that all interviews took place within the space of a few months, it is not clear in which year these were. There is a glossary of useful Muslim terms.

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This is an important book for understanding the situation of women in the Balkans through detailed analysis of data provided through intensive work in the region by regional specialists.