

## **Islam in Kosovo And the impact of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad SAW in the lives of local Muslim Women**

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### **Abstract:**

Religion plays an important role in the lives of women of Western Balkan in general and of women in Kosovo in particular. Muslims in the Peninsula are native non-immigrant nations who have embraced Islam seven centuries ago or even earlier.

At the crossroads between Occident and Orient, women of Balkans have gone through difficult experiences. The religious lives have gone through various institutional transformations. And today's institutional landscape is the result of century long processes of historical and societal shifts.

This paper is an attempt to portray the Islamic institutional organization in general and how it has impacted women believers, the teachings of Islam and its tremendous spiritual impact in their lives.

Key words: Islam, Religion, Women, Seerah.

Official census results released in February 2013 show that Kosovo has a resident population of 1,815,606 inhabitants, and a vast majority of its population are ethnic Albanian (93%), with 96% identifying as Muslim.<sup>(1)</sup> Kosovo has been declared secular and neutral<sup>(2)</sup> in terms of religion. This neutrality in matters of religious belief is associated with significant protection and guarantees of religious rights and freedoms.<sup>(3)</sup> According to United Nations Development Programme studies (2013),<sup>(4)</sup> Kosovo is one of the poorest countries in Europe. The unemployment rate in Kosovo is over 40 per cent, and this rate is even higher among the youth and women.

The majority of Kosovo Muslims are Sunnis<sup>(5)</sup> but small communities of Sufi orders and one community of Bektashis are also present.

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1 - See official data from the Agency of Statistics of Kosovo  
<http://ask.rks-gov.net/>

2 - Article 2 of Kosovo Constitution, available at:  
[www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Constitution1Kosovo.pdf](http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Constitution1Kosovo.pdf)

3 - OSCE Mission in Kosovo, *Community Rights Assessment Report* at  
[www.osce.org/kosovo/74597](http://www.osce.org/kosovo/74597).

4 - See the UNDP report at:  
[www.undp.org/content/dam/kosovo/docs/Procurement/PPR6\\_Anglisht.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/kosovo/docs/Procurement/PPR6_Anglisht.pdf)

5- [www.bislame.net](http://www.bislame.net)

Kosovo is a secular parliamentary republic with no official religion. This neutrality in matters of religious belief is associated with significant protection and guarantees of religious rights and freedoms.<sup>(1)</sup> Legally, it represents an environment accommodating human rights, taking into account the fact that the Kosovo Constitution has incorporated explicitly international human rights norms which are directly applicable in Kosovo apart from its local legislation. This includes: Law on Religious Freedom, Law on Freedom of Expression and the Anti-Discrimination Law.<sup>(2)</sup> The Constitution of Kosovo recognises the Muslim, Catholic and the Orthodox communities as the traditional religious communities. Religious communities in Kosovo do not receive any funds from the state. Nevertheless, the Serbian Orthodox Church enjoys special rights granted by the Ahtisaari Plan.<sup>(3)</sup>

The Kosovo Government observes the following religious holidays:<sup>(4)</sup> 'Id al-Fitr, 'Id al-Adha, Easter, Orthodox Easter Monday, and Orthodox and Western Christmas. The International Missions also observe the first day of Ramadan.<sup>(5)</sup>

The main national Muslim organisation is the Islamic Community of the Republic of Kosovo (Bashkësia Islame e Republikës së Kosovës, ICK, Bajram Kelmendi St., No. 84, 10000 Prishtina, tel.: ++381 38224024, fax: ++381 38245700, [www.bislame.net](http://www.bislame.net)), which has been headed by the Grand Mufti Naim Tërnavë for a second period. The ICK has 27 branches around the country (called Regional Islamic Councils).<sup>(6)</sup> The ICK is the only independent religious community for all Kosovo Muslims (Albanians, Bosniaks, Turks and RAE<sup>(7)</sup> communities), whether living in Kosovo or living and working abroad.

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- 1 - OSCE Mission in Kosovo, *Community Rights Assessment Report* at [www.osce.org/kosovo/74597](http://www.osce.org/kosovo/74597).
  - 2 - More on the implementation of Anti-Discrimination Law in Kosovo is Available at: [http://ks.yihr.org/public/fck\\_files/ksfile/Executive%20Summary%20of%20the%20report%20-%20Anti%20Discrimination%20Law%20in%20Kosovo,%20Seven%20years%20on.pdf](http://ks.yihr.org/public/fck_files/ksfile/Executive%20Summary%20of%20the%20report%20-%20Anti%20Discrimination%20Law%20in%20Kosovo,%20Seven%20years%20on.pdf).
  - 3 - More on the Ahtisaari Plan see: [www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/182\\_kosovo\\_no\\_good\\_alternatives\\_to\\_the\\_ahtisaari\\_plan.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/europe/182_kosovo_no_good_alternatives_to_the_ahtisaari_plan.pdf)
  - 4 - State Holiday Days available at: [www.rks-gov.net](http://www.rks-gov.net)
  - 5 - EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo and OSCE Mission in Kosovo.
  - 6 - *Kushtetuta e Bashkësisë Islame të Kosovës* (Constitution of the Islamic Community of Kosovo) (Prishtina: ICK, 2003).
  - 7 - Collective term for Roma, Ashkalis a

The total number of mosques in Kosovo is around 800.<sup>(1)</sup> During the war of 1999 a total of 200 mosques had been burnt and destroyed by Serb Army and paramilitary forces. Some of those mosques are still in need of reconstruction. Most of the mosques date back from the Ottoman Empire times, hence bear a great historical and cultural value.

During the 1997-1999 conflict, Serbian paramilitary and military forces destroyed and burned 218 mosques<sup>(2)</sup> across Kosovo, most of which were historical monument.

The Islamic high school, the Alaud-din Madrasa, established in 1952 in the capital of Prishtina with its two branches, one in Prizren and other in Gjilan, continued its work in providing education for both boys and girls. The curriculum combines religious and secular courses and a total 2800 students completed their studies by the end of 2011<sup>(3)</sup>. As of 2008<sup>(4)</sup>, the Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) continues to pay the salaries of its teaching staff and this has been much appreciated by the ICK and the Muslim community because of the financial difficulties they have been facing. The Institute of Hifz (memorizing the Qur'an) established in Gjakova / Djakovica in 2005 with the support of the International Istanbul Humanitarian and Cultural Organization (IIARC) known as Istanbul Association, continues its functioning administered by Islamic Community of Kosovo. Throughout 2011 as well. On-going religious education programs and Qur'an courses are run at almost all Kosovo mosques.

Kosovo's first Faculty of Islamic Studies in Prishtina (FIS, [www.fsi-ks.org](http://www.fsi-ks.org)) awards the Bachelor Accredited Degree (equal to university level) earned in Islamic Theology and Studies, training students who have completed courses at a madrasa or similar institution. The Faculty for the second year runs a Master Program 'Islamic Theology in the European Context'.

'Id al-Fitr' and 'Id al-Adha' celebrations are organised every year. Both are recognised as official holidays by the state and all public institutions are

.nd 'Egyptians'.

- 1 - Interview with Fatmir Iljazi, deputy head of Kosovo Imams in ICK, 27/04/2014 at the Presidency of ICK, Pristina.
- 2 - *Barbaria Serbe ndaj monumenteve Islam in Kosovo* (Serbian Barbarities against Islamic Monuments in Kosova) factographs published by the Presidency of Islamic Community of Kosovo,
- 3 - [www.medreseja.org](http://www.medreseja.org)
- 4 - Ibid,

closed. Representatives of state authorities and international and diplomatic missions, and the heads of other religious communities attend the reception organised by the Grand Mufti on the day of 'Id. The visits are broadcast, along with other 'Id activities. During Ramadan, representatives of the government and the ICK visit each other for *iftar*, and the ICK organises a traditional Qur'an recitation competition, with an international guest.<sup>(1)</sup>

The Presidency of the Islamic Community continues with the publication of the monthly religious, cultural, and scientific review *Dituria Islame* (Islamic Knowledge) since 1986, the quarterly magazine *Edukata Islame* (Islamic Education) since 1971, and an annual Islamic calendar, called *Takvim*, since 1970.

Muslims practice some Sharia Civil Code aspects in local Muftiates such as marriage, divorce and share of property.

### **Islamic teachings and Women in Kosovo**

In two madrasahs for girls, Seerah An-nabawiyah is taught throughout four years of middle high education<sup>(2)</sup> as well as in two academic years in BA program at the Faculty of Islamic Studies<sup>(3)</sup>.

After 500 years of living in Shariah<sup>(4)</sup> and 50 years in Communism<sup>(5)</sup>, and after experiencing many wars, massacres, destruction of homes, loss of families, traumas of all kinds, Kosovo Muslim women have preserved their beliefs. For majority of them it is faith that has kept them strong and surviving.

For the modern times, building up the young state of Kosovo, filled with challenges and hopes, the teachings of Islam deriving from Seerah have proved to be empowering for women, especially with regard to renewed lessons of gender equality, social justice, education and financial independence<sup>(6)</sup>.

Kosovo society is a society in transition, struggling between patriarchy and globalization. Hence the believing women caught in between the two struggles, add here an aggressive wave of islamophobia<sup>(7)</sup>, and are fighting with many injustices, stereotypes and stigma.

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1 - [www.bislame.net](http://www.bislame.net)

2 - [www.medreseja.net](http://www.medreseja.net)

3 - [www.fsi92.net](http://www.fsi92.net)

4 - Vilayat of Kosovo was part of Ottoman Empire.

5 - Kosovo was constituent member of Yugoslav Federation from 1945 till 1990s.

6 - Interview with women in mosques in Pristina, during Ramadan 2015.

7 - Islamic Community of Kosovo has on many occasions reacted against discrimination of religious rights and hatred language in the media and by politicizations. Communiques available at [www.bislame.net](http://www.bislame.net)

A part of struggles is also in relation to the Muslim community itself, in terms of women representation in Muslim governing bodies, presence in mosques, access to funds and education and employment opportunities.

The presence of women in mosques that most of them were built centuries ago, have very limited physical and social space for the growing number of congregations, most of them are left to pray outside the walls of their respective mosques: in the yards, streets or even standing.

The situation has deteriorated with regards to women, whose presence in the mosque, contrary to what Islam teaches, became symbolic or even totally forbidden, impractical or uncommon.

For young Muslim women, attending lectures in mosques is essential. As it is essential to listen to lectures and participate in community activities. There is not a single authentic Hadith, which states that the Prophet SAW prevented or forbade women from going to mosques. During the time of the Prophet SAW, women not only went to the mosques for prayer but also for religious education and literary discussions, as the mosque was the center of community. Several Hadiths tell us that the Prophet SAW addressed people in the mosque, and the audience consisted of both Muslim men and women. Women many times stood and asked questions to the Prophet SAW in the mosque, and even corrected the Imam. These are the lessons that have helped women correct the wrongs of the past times that regarded mosques to be exclusively for men <sup>(1)</sup>.

Yet the women frequency attendance in mosques varies: the largest number of women presence in the mosque is during the Holy Month of Ramadan. Just few years ago, Kosovo women began to join the Friday Prayers and Sermons. Out of these activities many social activities arise. Women are now more vigilant towards many developments in their communities. They engage in educational activities, community management activities, children and orphan care and custody, women networks in various urban and rural zones, as well as activities against religious illiteracy, extremism and violence.

But most importantly, women in this part of the region are being able to detach from some practices that have deprived women of their basic rights: marriage and divorce matters, property and financial rights etc.

The lives of Mothers 'of Believers serve as role models to majority of the women in community<sup>(2)</sup>. Therefore the more they know, the more eager they

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1 - Muslim, Muslim bin hajjaj, Sahih Muslim: Book of Prayer, Chapter: Women coming out (from their houses) for going to the mosque,( كتاب الصلوة , باب خروج ) (النساء الي المساجد) Hadith: 442

2 - ` Mothers of Believers` is the most read book among believing women according

are to learn, so to preach them to others and encode them onto their lives by reeducating their families and upbringing their children. Building up a prosperous society, ruled by justice, knowledge is key.

Therefore, women in Kosovo, are committed to spreading knowledge about the life of Prophet Muhammad SAW his attitudes towards women, children, society, love and neighbors.

The lessons learned about the relations of Muslims and non-Muslims provide a level of understanding needed for Kosovo to enable to move forward<sup>(1)</sup>.

Religious dialogue is essential in creating a climate in which Kosovo is shaping its relationships across communities.

In this regard, Kosovo Muslim women are gathered alongside women of other religions under the umbrella of a non-formal organization known as Inter-Religious Women Network of Kosovo.<sup>(2)</sup> They have so far conducted joined activities in preservation of moral values, outreaching poor families and orphans, defending religious rights and freedoms, as well as fighting misconceptions about religion and religiosity.

In the light of the abovementioned, women in Kosovo continue to put in practice the embodiment of the teachings of Muhammad SWA.

Nowadays, a new wave of feminists<sup>(3)</sup> who regard religion important to women empowerment, regard the teaching and the practices of Prophet Muhammad SAW and the first generation of women to be the key platform to build on the voices of modern Muslimas.

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to the librarian at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Prishtina, interview with E.K October 2016.

- 1- Kosovo is well-known for its religious diversity and tolerance. See <http://interfaithkosovo.org/?lang=En> .
- 2- More info about the activities of women network is available at Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/koswomen.bik?fref=ts>
- 3- See <http://www.islamandfeminism.org/>