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Jewish and Muslim Women in Habsburg Lands: Historiographical Essay and Research Directions

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Abstract

Women-centered approaches to Habsburg history are traversing new landscapes and developing fresh approaches and understandings of how women have contributed to the development and diversity of the monarchy. As part of this trend, many recent works have explored the lives of Jewish women in Habsburg lands, while fewer studies have focused on the lives of Muslim women. In light of this proliferation of research and new approaches, it is important to synthesize current trends and findings. This paper aims to summarize and assess the current historiography on Jewish women and Muslim women in Habsburg lands and suggest areas and directions for future research, specifically what we might learn through a comparative study of Jewish and Muslim women in Habsburg lands. As women of marginalized groups, how are their lives similar and/or different? How are their experiences shaped by the multi-ethnic contexts in which they lived? What interactions might they have had with one another? Works considered in this paper include

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Rachel Manekin's Jewish Runaways in Habsburg Galicia *(2020) and Constanze Volksmann's* Muslim Women in Austria and Germany Doing and Undoing Gender: Making Gender Differences and Hierarchies Relevant or Irrelevant *(2019)*.

Keywords: Jewish women, Muslim women, Habsburg, religion and gender, matriculture

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Résumé

Les approches de l'histoire des Habsbourg centrées sur les femmes ouvrent de nouvelles perspectives et permettent de développer des méthodes et des compréhensions inédites quant à la contribution des femmes au développement et à la diversité de la monarchie. S'inscrivant dans cette tendance, de nombreux ouvrages récents ont exploré la vie des femmes juives dans les territoires des Habsbourg, tandis que peu d'études se sont penchées sur celle des femmes musulmanes. Face à cette multiplication des recherches et des approches, il convient de dresser un bilan des tendances et des résultats actuels. Cet article propose une synthèse et une évaluation de l'historiographie existante sur les femmes juives et musulmanes dans les territoires des Habsbourg, tout en suggérant des pistes pour de futures recherches — en particulier ce que nous pourrions apprendre grâce à une étude comparative des femmes juives et musulmanes dans ces territoires. En tant que femmes appartenant à des minorités, en quoi leurs vies se rejoignent-elles ou, au contraire, se distinguent-elles ? Comment leurs expériences ont-elles été façonnées par les contextes multiethniques dans lesquels elles ont vécu ? Quelles interactions ont pu exister entre elles ? Les ouvrages examinés dans cet article incluent Jewish Runaways in Habsburg Galicia *(« Jeunes juifs en fugue dans la Galicie des Habsbourg », 2020) de Rachel Manekin et* Muslim Women in Austria and Germany Doing and Undoing Gender: Making Gender Differences and Hierarchies Relevant or Irrelevant *(« Les femmes musulmanes en Autriche et en Allemagne : construire et déconstruire le genre — rendre les différences et les hiérarchies de genre pertinentes ou non pertinentes », 2019) de Constanze Volksmann.*

Mots-clés : femmes juives, femmes musulmanes, Habsbourg, religion et genre, matriculture

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Introduction

Women-centered approaches to Habsburg history are traversing new landscapes and developing fresh approaches and understandings of how women have contributed to and navigated through the development and diversity of the monarchy. As part of this trend, several recent works have explored the lives of Jewish women in Habsburg lands; while fewer studies have focused on the lives of Muslim women as a smaller number of Muslims lived in Habsburg lands, some works have begun to look at their lives as well. However, the parallels in the lives of Jewish and Muslim women under Habsburg rule have not yet been explored. As women of marginalized groups, how were their lives similar and/or different? How were their experiences shaped by the multiethnic and religiously diverse contexts in which they lived? How were they impacted by the gender roles and expectations within their respective religions and cultures? To what extent did those contexts, cultures, and religious communities sustain, express, and welcome women's participation? How did Jewish and Muslim women create, shape, and pass down their cultures and traditions within their communities?

This article uses the concept of matriculture as a framework for addressing these questions, aiming to compare Jewish and Muslim experiences in Habsburg lands through the lens of cultural aspects that inform women's lives and as lived by women. It will begin by defining the concept of matriculture and follow with an overview of the history and historiography of Jews and Muslims in Habsburg lands. It will then review the literature on Jewish and Muslim women in Habsburg lands looking for similarities and differences in their lived experiences, roles, and relationships. While the article focuses on the period from the formation of the Dual Monarchy in 1867 to its fall in 1918, it will also consider the historical background of the Habsburg Jewish and Muslim communities and how they were impacted by later events such as the collapse of the monarchy, the Anschluss, and the Holocaust.

What is matriculture?

Marie-Françoise Guédon introduced the term 'matriculture' based on Clifford Geertz's cultural systems theory in response to assumptions that women are part of an "essentially masculine whole on which they depend for their existence, or from which they derive their identity and definition." Matriculture is defined as "that part of those components of culture that sustain, express, and welcome women's participation in the socio-cultural fabric." It refers to the system of symbols in a society which pertains to women, the maternal, and the feminine. It places the lived experience of women and their roles at the center of analysis. Any society can be studied through the lens of matriculture. It may be minimal or essential. Matriculture leads to questioning received ideas such as notions of

domesticity, public/private realms, men as default leaders, power being everywhere defined in the same way, menstruation always marked as impure, and that nuclear families are more moral than extended families. Matriculture embraces and celebrates diversity.[1]

The concept of matriculture relates to the cultural construction of gender. Both men and women shape, create, and maintain a society's matriculture. "Men in human societies play crucial roles in the creation, performance, and maintenance of matricultures" and "women have played – and continue to play – essential roles in the preservation, revitalization, and decolonization of colonized Indigenous societies."[2] As a research tool for examining and comparing the body of symbols, meanings, and social relationships pertaining to women from a range of societies, matriculture can provide a useful framework for comparing Jewish and Muslim women's lives and experiences in Habsburg lands. It invites us to ask questions such as: What did each community's matriculture look like? What roles did Jewish and Muslim men play in creating matricultures? How did matricultures affect Jewish and Muslim women's roles and perceptions of them? Can the concept account for similarities and differences in their experiences? What roles did Jewish and Muslim women play in preserving their cultures? What religious roles did they play, and how has their status changed over time? What were their lived experiences? And how did women pass down traditions, cultural knowledge, identity, and heritage?

The framework of matriculture focuses attention on certain shared characteristics of Jewish and Muslim women's lives in Habsburg lands. Both lived in multiethnic contexts within cultures and religions that defined, limited, and regulated their roles and opportunities. They were stereotyped by the dominant culture and affected by modernization and reform. They navigated between two worlds, asserted their agency, passed down and sometimes resisted cultural knowledge, preserved their heritage, maintained their identities, and enriched Habsburg culture and society by contributing to its diversity.

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[1] Marie-Françoise Guédon, 'Introduction,' *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 1(1), May 2020, 3-7. URL: https://www.networkonculture.ca/assets/matrix/Volume%201,%20Issue%20I%20(May%202020)/2%20Introduction%20Guedon/2%20%20Introduction%20(en)%20%20Guedon.pdf; accessed 30 October 2026.

[2] Patrick J. Jung, 'Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives: An Introduction,' *Matrix*: *A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 4(2) Autumn 2025, 4. URL: https://journal.networkonculture.ca/index.php/matrix/index; accessed 30 October 2026.

History and Historiography of Jews in Habsburg Lands: A Common Experience?

Jews had a long history in Habsburg lands, were distributed throughout the monarchy, and were highly diversified in their histories, cultural backgrounds, and experiences. Due to the disunity of the empire, the geographic dispersion of the Jews, and the multiple legal jurisdictions under which they lived, it is debated whether one can speak of a common, coherent Jewish experience in Habsburg lands. Hillel Kieval has argued convincingly for a common Habsburg Jewish experience based on the Habsburg quest for imperial expansion, administrative and legal reform, and social control as well as on the consolidation of Ashkenazi rabbinic leadership and the intricate network of cross-regional family and communal ties.[3]

Jewish presence in Habsburg lands grew as a result of the monarchy's expansion from Lower Austria and the Bohemian Crown Lands to incorporation of the Kingdom of Hungary in 1526, Galicia from Poland-Lithuania in 1772 and 1795, Bukovina from the Ottoman Empire in 1774-75, Tuscany in 1737-1859, and the occupation and annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 and 1908. Familiants Laws in the 1720s capping the number of Jewish households in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia led to internal migration as Jewish younger sons moved into the countryside and Hungarian and Polish territories.[4] Jews in these regions were divided by language, religious leadership, social aspirations, and historical experiences as well as by geography. They lived under local and regional jurisdictions until Joseph II's Edicts of Toleration in the 1780s. With the *Ausgleich* (compromise) of 1867, the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary was created with two legislatively and bureaucratically distinct halves and separate political and legal spheres for Habsburg Jewry.[5]

Despite these divisions, "a shared sense of dynastic loyalty; then patriotic sentiments about the land and its inhabitants; and eventually, even adumbrations of modern nationalism" drew the diverse parts together.[6] Habsburg Jewish identity was built on the

[3] Hillel J. Kieval, 'Was There a Habsburg Jewish Experience?' *Austrian History Yearbook* 56 (2025): 1-10. Annual Robert A. Kann Memorial Lecture.
[4] For more on the impact of the Familiants Laws, see Martina Niedhammer, 'Gender and Family in Jewish Historiography on the Bohemian Lands: A Critical Survey,' *Studia Judaica* 19 (2016), nr 1 (37), 115-116; and Michael L. Miller, 'Absolutism and Control: Jews in the Bohemian Lands in the Eighteenth Century,' in Kateřina Čapková and Hillel J. Kieval, eds., *Prague and Beyond: Jews in the Bohemian Lands* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 72.
[5] Kieval, 'Was There a Habsburg Jewish Experience?' 2-3.
[6] Michael K. Silber, 'The Making of Habsburg Jewry in the Long Eighteenth Century,' in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Volume 7, The Early Modern World, 1500-1815, eds. Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe, 763-797 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 763.

consolidation of rabbinic culture and expanded family networks. “Finally, in addition to elite rabbinic culture and long stretches of internal migration, it was the Josephinian enlightened absolutist reforms of the late eighteenth century and the democratic movements of 1848-49 that contributed most to the creation of a Habsburg Jewish experience.”[7] These reforms imposed a more or less uniform set of regulations on Jewish education, courts, communal structure, occupational choices, naming practices, and military service. Jewish schools throughout the monarchy taught an approved curriculum in the German language integrating the monarchy’s various Jewries. The decision to have German as the language of instruction in Jewish schools and communal records throughout most of the empire meant that Jews in the monarchy “would speak, read, and write the same language.”[8]

The last barriers to occupational and economic activity, movement, and property ownership were removed in 1860. The Jews of Cisleithania were emancipated in 1867 and in Hungary in 1868. Internal migration continued, particularly from Galicia to Hungary and from both regions to Vienna.

> [*Habsburg Jews*] reassemble, move about, and regroup in ever new ways, often because they had little alternative. They confronted and traversed political and cultural borders, acculturated to new linguistic and social settings, and through all this movement, dislocation, and relocation, Jews maintained connection and cultural coherence… Jews of the Habsburg Empire did share a common, overarching, boundary crossing, historical experience that emerged from centuries of familial, cultural, and ethnic ties across the empire.[9]

The state’s desire to foster the Jews’ loyalty affected their policies. Jews indeed were loyal to Austria and have been referred to as the only true Austrians.[10] By the turn of the twentieth century, there were over two million Jews in Austria-Hungary making up over four percent of the population, a fifth of the world’s Jewish population.

Despite these commonalities, there were significant regional differences in the compositions, histories, and religious orientations of Jewish populations that came under Habsburg rule. Vienna, the capital of the Habsburg monarchy, was home to almost two hundred thousand Jews by World War I, making it the largest Jewish community of Western or Central Europe. The community was composed of immigrants from the

[7] Kieval, ‘Was There a Habsburg Jewish Experience?’ 5.
[8] Kieval, ‘Was There a Habsburg Jewish Experience?’ 5-6.
[9] Kieval, ‘Was There a Habsburg Jewish Experience?’ 10.
[10] Tim Corbett, ‘Once ‘the Only True Austrians’: Mobilizing Jewish Memory of the First World War for Belonging in the New Austrian Nation, 1929-1938,’ *The Jewish Experience of the First World War*, eds. E. Madigan and G. Reuveni, (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 255-276.

Austrian provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, Galicia, and Hungary. Unlike non-Jewish immigrants, Jews came with their entire families and therefore women came from the same parts of the monarchy as men.[11] "The Jewish population of Hungary reached its peak with over 900,000 Jews in 1910 and was deeply divided by schisms due to the geographic origin of waves of immigration from different parts of the monarchy."[12] According to the census of 1910, the number of Jews in Bohemian lands stood at about 140,426, constituting 1.4 percent of the population with 42.7 percent living in cities, compared to only 26.2 percent who lived in cities in 1880.[13]

Acquired by the Habsburgs from the Ottoman Empire in 1775, Bukovina consisted of Ruthenians (Ukrainians), Romanians, Germans, Poles, and Jews, although German was its official language.[14] Bukovinan Jews embraced German language and culture; they continued to practice Judaism while becoming politically, economically, and culturally integrated. By 1900, Jews comprised thirty percent of the residents in Czernowitz (30,000 out of 80,000) and 40,000 by the start of the First World War, constituting the highest proportion of Jewish population of any large Austrian city, while Bukovina had the highest Jewish proportion of Jewish population of any Austrian crown land – almost thirteen percent, numbering a little over 100,000 just prior to the First World War.[15]

Galicia was incorporated into Austria from Poland in 1772. Until 1867, its official language was German.[16] After 1867, Galicia was granted limited regional autonomy. The capital city

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[11] Erika Weinzierl, *The Jewish Middle Class in Vienna in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Working Paper 01-1. October 2003. Center for Austrian Studies. 3, citing Marsha Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

[12] Katalin Fenyves, 'Jewish Women in Poland and Hungary.' *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*. Liverpool University Press, Volume 31, 2019, 143-144.

[13] Michal Frankl, Martina Niedhammer, and Ines Koeltzsch, 'Contested Equality: Jews in the Bohemian Lands, 1861-1917,' in Kateřina Čapková and Hillel J. Kieval, eds., *Prague and Beyond: Jews in the Bohemian Lands* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 124.

[14] Albert Lichtblau and Michael John, 'Jewries in Galicia and Bukovina, in Lemberg and Czernowitz: Two Divergent Examples of Jewish Communities in the Far East of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy,' in Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, eds., *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict.* 29-66 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 41, citing Hermann Sternberg, 'Zur Geschichte der Juden in Czernowitz,' in Hugo Gold, *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina*, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv: Olamenu, 1962), 2:27-47; and Joseph Karniel, *Die Toleranzpolitik Kaiser Josephs II* (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1985), 437-8.

[15] David Rechter, 'A Jewish El Dorado? Myth and Politics in Habsburg Czernowitz,' in Richard I. Cohen, Jonathan Frankel, and Stefani Hoffman, eds., *Insiders and Outsiders: Dilemmas of East European Jewry*, 207-220 (Oxford and Portland, OR: Littman Library, 2010), 212; Lichtblau and John, 'Jewries in Galicia and Bukovina, in Lemberg and Czernowitz,' 45.

[16] Markian Prokopovych, *Habsburg Lemberg: Architecture, Public Space, and Politics in the Galician Capital, 1772-1914* (Purdue University Press, 2009), 3, 7.

of Lemberg (Lviv) grew from 29,500 to 212,000 on the eve of World War I.[17] Eleven percent of the population of Galicia was Jewish, and the Jewish community of Lemberg became the largest one in Galicia and the second largest in the Austrian Empire apart from Vienna. The Jews of Lemberg divided into four main political orientations: pro-German integrationists, Orthodox, pro-Polish integrationists, and Zionists.[18] Over time, the pro-German integrationists lost ground to the pro-Polish integrationists.[19] With the rise of nationalism and antisemitism, Lemberg Jewry shifted its orientation towards Orthodoxy and Zionism. Lemberg's Jews straddled all religious orientations; traditional Orthodox, Hasidic, Reform, and Enlightened Jews (Maskilim) could be found there.[20]

The Jews in Bosnia and Herzegovina date back to the first century. Romaniote Jews were joined by Sephardic Jews after the expulsions from Spain and Portugal. Many settled in Sarajevo alongside Muslims, Orthodox Serbs, and Catholic Croats, where they built a synagogue and established an organized community. Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of the few places where Jews were not subjected to pogroms or forced conversions. Until the Holocaust, they were an integral part of the socioeconomic, cultural, and political milieu. At the end of the nineteenth century, Ashkenazim who descended from refugees expelled from England, France, Hungary, and German states entered Bosnia in large numbers and created an Ashkenazic religious community in Sarajevo. Eventually, Bosnian Sephardim and Ashkenazim would be joined together under the Habsburgs.[21]

The Bosnian Jews partially succeeded in attaining a nationality status, but they were not totally recognized in Austria and not recognized at all in Hungary.[22] In 1906, they were granted religious autonomy and included in the government. In 1910, the Habsburgs

[17] Michael Stalislawski, *A Murder in Lemberg: Politics, Religion, and Violence in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 19.
[18] Rachel Manekin, 'The Debate over Assimilation in Late Nineteenth Century Lwów,' in Richard I. Cohen, Jonathan Frankel, and Stefani Hoffman, eds., *Insiders and Outsiders: Dilemmas of East European Jewry*, 120-130 (Oxford and Portland OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 120, citing Ezra Mendelsohn, 'From Assimilation to Zionism in Lvov: The Case of Alfred Nossig,' *Slavonic and East European Review*, 49 (1971), 521-34; and 'Jewish Assimilation in Lvov: The Case of Wilhelm Feldman,' in Andrei S. Markovits and Frank E. Sysen, eds., *Nationbuilding and the Politics of Nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 94-110, and *Painting a People: Maurycy Gottlieb and Jewish Art* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 577-590
[19] Manekin, 'The Debate,' 121. According to Lichtblau and John, 'Jewries in Galicia and Bukovina, in Lemberg and Czernowitz,' 1867 was a turning point in the orientation of Lemberg's Jews away from German towards Polish integration. Polish socialists advocated equal rights for Jews, and Zionists tended to assimilate to Polish culture. 34-5.
[20] Michael Stanislawski, *A Murder in Lemberg: Politics, Religion, and Violence in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 28-30.
[21] Francine Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread: The Jews of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 194-195.
[22] Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 195.

granted Bosnia and Herzegovina its own constitution and gave the major religious communities self-rule over religious and cultural matters. The three major religions, Islam, Orthodox Christianity, and Catholicism, received large state subsidies, but the Jews were under-subsidized. After the Jewish representative complained, some adjustment was made.[23] The Bosnian Jewish population grew by 246 percent between 1879 and 1910, from 3426 to 11,868 people. By 1911, Bosnian Jews supported thirty-one religious communities in twenty-seven locations.[24] Over half of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Jews lived in Sarajevo (more than six thousand by 1910), and there were also substantial numbers in smaller towns.[25] They were scattered throughout the land and economically successful. The meeting with Ashkenazim caused the Sephardim to redefine their cultural identity. The Ashkenazim brought Austro-Hungarian culture into Bosnia and Herzegovina.[26]

History and Historiography of Muslims in Habsburg Lands: A Bosnian Islamic Tradition

In contrast to the widespread presence of Jews in Habsburg lands, Muslims lived primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina; they were present when the Habsburgs occupied the region in 1878 and then attempted to annex it from the Ottoman Empire in 1908. The Habsburgs' colonial policies and efforts to integrate them shaped the lives of the nearly half a million Muslims that came under Austro-Hungarian control and led to a new and distinct religious and cultural identity, a Bosnian Islamic tradition.[27] Farid Hafez writes, "as the only 'real' colony of the Dual Monarchy, Bosnia and Hercegovina, with its large Muslim population, represents an ideal case study to investigate the power relations between a colonizing empire that was embedded in Christian normativity and an 'othered' Muslim population."[28]

Muslims and some Christian Orthodox Serbs put up fierce opposition and resistance to the Habsburg occupation, while the then-small Jewish community remained neutral.[29] It took 170,000 Habsburg troops three months to establish control; a large number of Muslims,

[23] Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 204-207.
[24] Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 209.
[25] Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 212.
[26] Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 232, 235.
[27] Farid Hafez, *Governing Islam in Austria and Germany: From Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2026), 70-71.
[28] Hafez, *Governing Islam*, 20.
[29] Martin Gabriel, 'Ambivalent Perceptions: Austria-Hungary, Bosnian Muslims and the Occupation Campaign in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878),' in *Imagining Bosnian Muslims in Central Europe: Representations, Transfers and Exchanges*, ed. František Šísteck, 63-75, (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2021), 66.

including women and children, were killed.[30] The battle for Sarajevo was brutal and many Muslims fled.[31] "This exodus was particularly alarming for the Habsburg authorities; should the Muslim population be whittled away, the Orthodox population could be lent an absolute majority, thus reinforcing Belgrade's claims over Bosnia."[32] In order to prevent this from happening, the Habsburg authorities provided full citizenship rights and religious freedom for the entire Bosnian population.[33] Bosnian Muslims had identified by their religion when living under Muslim rule, but during the period of Habsburg control (1878-1918), they underwent a political awakening.

> Bosnian Muslims castigated the Roman Catholic Church for proselytizing, with governmental concurrence…. The Austro-Hungarian presence eventually won grudging acquiescence from Muslim leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina by ensuring that those leaders maintained their existing socioeconomic position and way of life.[34]

The Habsburgs prioritized Bosnian identities as religious in an attempt to curb nationalism, and public imperial celebrations showcased the integration of religious structures. The emperor, a Catholic, engaged in Catholic rituals and attended celebrations of the Eastern Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim religious societies where he was blessed by priests, ministers, and rabbis.[35] Aspiring to separate Bosnian Muslims from the influence of the Ottoman Empire and its highest Islamic office, the *sheikh ul-Islam*, the Austro-Hungarian authorities appointed the first *Reis-ul-Ulema* – chief spiritual leader of the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They also formed a council of four members, which became the first Bosnian Muslim Islamic institution independent of Istanbul. Sharia provisions were limited to matters of family and inheritance and the administration of the *waqf*s (endowments). Bosnian Muslims welcomed many of the reforms, but conflicts emerged over the management of *waqf*s and certain aspects of education.[36]

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[30] Hafez, *Governing Islam*, 40-41.
[31] Gabriel, 'Ambivalent Perceptions,' 69.
[32] Fabio Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European: Voluntary Associations, Gender, and Islam in Post-Ottoman Bosnia and Yugoslavia (1878-1941)* (Central European University Press, 2021), 31.
[33] Fabio Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European,* 31-32; Robin Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism: The Habsburg 'Civilizing Mission' in Bosnia, 1878-1914.* (Oxford U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8.
[34] Francine Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims: Denial of a Nation* (Boulder Co: Westview Press, 1996), 57-88, 63-64.
[35] Hafez, *Governing Islam,* 51.
[36] Dino Abazović, 'Religion and State in Bosnia Herzegovina,' in Sevgi Adak, Thomas Schmidinger, eds. *The Enduring Legacy of the Habsburg Islam Policy: Muslim Communities in Central and Southeast Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2025), 124-125; URL: http://www.jstor.org.proxy177.nclive.org/stable/10.3366/jj.25700644, accessed 25 March 2026.

Benjámin von Kállay, the administrator of the occupied territories appointed in 1882, said that Austria was "charged with the mission of carrying civilization to Oriental peoples."[37] In pursuing their "civilizing mission," the Habsburgs established multi-confessional schools open to boys and girls.[38] The government founded 535 Muslim schools, 54 Catholic, and 56 Christian Orthodox primary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also opened 239 state primary schools by 1904-1905. Certificates from secondary schools, which emerged more slowly, were recognized across the monarchy.[39] The initial Croatian textbooks were replaced by a new set of textbooks between 1883 and 1893 which added characters with Muslim names and encouraged religious tolerance and coexistence.[40]

The absence of a university in Bosnia and Herzegovina meant that high school students who wanted to continue their education had to do so in different parts of the monarchy – in Zagreb, Vienna, and Graz, where they depended on scholarships. Muslim students were funded by the Provincial Government in Sarajevo to attend the University of Vienna. The first generation of Muslim students had a hybrid identity between their Islamic faith and their Western belief in the enlightenment. Many of the students developed a resistance to Austro-Hungarian rule. The initiatives to foster loyalty through education "largely failed because domestic Muslim politicians and intellectuals saw Austro-Hungarian rule as foreign, believing that the adoption of European ways of life would jeopardize Muslim identity."[41]

Subjects of Bosnia and Herzegovina were never given Austrian or Hungarian citizenship due to the perception of their 'backwardness.' In 1909, Muslims petitioned to establish a mosque in Vienna. Even though more than 600,000 Muslims were living in the monarchy, and hundreds were in military service in Vienna, their application was rejected. After 1911, they sought protection from the Dual Empire rather than opposing the government's intervention into their religious affairs. They felt that the Dual Monarchy was preferable to a Yugoslavian state.[42] The Islam Act of 1912 provided "a certain legal security and formal

[37] Clemens Ruthner, 'Sleeping Beauty's Awakening: Habsburg Colonialism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1878-1918,' in *Imagining Bosnian Muslims in Central Europe: Representations, Transfers and Exchanges*, ed. František Šísteck, 76-91 (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2021), 82.
[38] Fabio Giomi, 'Daughters of Two Empires: Muslim Women and Public Writing in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878-1918),' *Aspasia*, Volume 9, Issue 1, 2015, 1-18.
[39] Amila Kasumović and Tomasz Jacek Lis, 'Fostering Loyalty to the Habsburg Cause: Muslim Students from Bosnia and Herzegovina at the University of Vienna, 1899-1911,' *Social History* 50:3, 2025, 311-333. DOI: 10.1080/03071022.2025.2506884 312-314
[40] Oliver Pejić, 'The Portrayal of Muslims in Austro-Hungarian State Primary School Textbooks for Bosnia and Herzegovina,' in *Imagining Bosnian Muslims in Central Europe: Representations, Transfers and Exchanges*, edited by František Šísteck. 92-103 (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2021), 93-95.
[41] Kasumović and Lis, 'Fostering Loyalty to the Habsburg Cause,' 313, 324, 330.
[42] Hafez, *Governing Islam*, 67.

structures to Muslim communities in Austria, recognition of the Hanafi rite [a school of Sunni Islam with which most Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina were affiliated] as a religious community, and guarantees religious freedom."[43] Although it was meant to integrate the Muslim population into Austria-Hungary, only a few Bosnian Muslims migrated to Cisleithania, and just 889 Muslims were living in Vienna in 1909.[44]

After World War I, the few Muslims who remained in Austria assembled in private associations, such as the Oriental Association and the Islamic Cultural Association. After the *Anschluss* to Germany in 1938, the Islamic Cultural Association was dissolved. From the 1960s on, the labour migration of workers led to a growth in the Muslim population in Austria and in Europe in general, though it was not until the late 1990s that their religious affiliation became "relevant in the public discourse."[45]

Jewish and Muslim Women in Habsburg Lands: Historiography and Themes

Jewish and Muslim women's lives in Habsburg lands varied and were shaped by several factors including government restrictions, gender conventions and limitations, multiethnic contexts, and new opportunities that became available to them. While women's lives differed depending on where they lived, social class, and religious observance, they shared the experience of being discriminated against and navigating their lives and identities in multiethnic and complex historical and social contexts. In these situations, Jewish and Muslim women shaped their communities' matricultures by accumulating and passing down knowledge, caring for others, sharing responsibilities, and creating female networks.

Studies of Muslim women in Habsburg lands have focused almost entirely on Bosnia and Herzegovina, the only Habsburg territory with a large Muslim population, while most studies of Habsburg Jewish women have concentrated on Vienna, even though three quarters of Jewish women lived in Galicia, Bukovina, and Hungary.[46] Several recent works

[43] Constanze Volkmann, *Muslim Women in Austria and Germany Doing and Undoing Gender: Making Gender Differences and Hierarchies Relevant or Irrelevant* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2019), 15.
[44] Jan Kreisky, 'Austro-Hungarian Confessional Politics in Bosnia Herzegovina: International Law, Muslim Autonomy Movements and the Islam Act of 1912.' 21-37, in Sevgi Adak, Thomas Schmidinger, eds. *The Enduring Legacy of the Habsburg Islam Policy: Muslim Communities in Central and Southeast Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2025), 34; URL: http://www.jstor.org.proxy177.nclive.org/stable/10.3366/jj.25700644. Accessed 25 March 2026.
[45] Volkmann, 14-15.
[46] On Jewish women in Vienna, see Alison Rose, *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008); Elisabeth Malleier, *Jüdische Frauen in Wien, 1816-1938: Wohlfahrt –*

have focused on Jewish women in Galicia, such as Rachel Manekin's work on Jewish runaways and Keely Stauter-Halsted's studies of Jewish prostitution.[47] There has been less research on Jewish women in Bohemia, Moravia, Bukovina, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and rural areas of Austria.[48] With regard to Bohemia, Martina Niedhammer points out shortcomings in the historiography in areas such as Jewish women's contributions to liturgical reform, points of intersection in men's and women's duties, and the specific experiences of Jewish men in the Bohemian Lands. It is also "hard to find serious works that look more closely at regions of the Bohemian lands other than the capital, Prague."[49]

Mädchenbildung – Frauenarbeit (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2003); Michaela Raggam-Blesch, *Zwischen Ost und West: Identitätskonstruktionen jüdischer Frauen in Wien* (Studien Verlag, 2008); Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *Female, Jewish, and Educated: The Lives of Central European University Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002)*;* Elisabeth Malleier, 'Making the World a Better Place. Welfare and Politics, Welfare as Politics? Activities of Jewish Women in Vienna before 1938.' *Aschkenas* 16.1 (2007): 261–268*;* Susanne Korbel, 'Spaces of Gendered Jewish and Non-Jewish Encounters: Bed Lodgers, Domestic Workers, and Sex Workers in Vienna, 1900–1930,' *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 65 (2020); Tim Corbett, 'A 'Capable Wife' or a 'Woman of Valor'? Reading Gendered Discourses and the Commemoration of Women in Vienna's Jewish Cemeteries,' in *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, 32: (2008): 77-101; Waltraud Heindl, 'Zur Entwickelung des Frauenstudiums in Österreich' in *Durch Erkenntis zu Freihiet und Glück… Frauen an der Universität Wien ab 1897*, eds. Waltraud Heindl and Martina Tichy (Vienna: Westdeutscher Univerisitätsverlag, 1993), 17-26.

[47] Rachel Manekin, 'The Lost Generation: Education and Female Conversion in Fin-de-Siècle Kraków,' *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, 18 (2005): 189-219, *The Rebellion of the Daughters: Jewish Runaways in Habsburg Galicia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), and 'From Anna Kluger to Sarah Schenirer: Women's Education in Kraków and Its Discontents,' in Elissa Bemporad and Glenn Dynner, eds., *Jewish Women in Modern Eastern and East Central Europe.* 29-59 (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2022); Nancy Wingfield, *The World of Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria* (Oxford University Press, 2017) and 'Gendered Moral Panics in the Late Habsburg Monarchy: Prostitution, Sex Trafficking, and Venereal Disease,' in *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, 2022, Vol. 1, 292-300; Keely Stauter-Halsted, ''A Generation of Monsters': Jews, Prostitution, and Racial Purity in the 1892 L'viv White Slavery Trial,' *Austrian History Yearbook* 39 (2007): 25-35, *The Devil's Chain: Prostitution and Social Control in Partitioned Poland* (New York, 2015), and 'Moral Panic and the Prostitute in Partitioned Poland: Middle-Class Respectability in Defense of the Modern Nation.' *Slavic Review* 68, no 3 (Fall 2009), 572-3.

[48] For Hungary, see Fenyves, 'Jewish Women in Poland and Hungary.' For Bukovina, see Amy Colin, 'Writings from the Margins: German-Jewish Women Poets from the Bukovina,' *Studies in 20th Century Literature*: Vol. 21: (1997) Iss. 1, Article 3. https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1407, accessed 30 October 2026; on Bohemia and Moravia, see Martina Niedhammer, 'Gender and Family in Jewish Historiography on the Bohemian Lands: A Critical Survey,' *Studia Judaica* 19 (2016), nr 1 (37), s. 111-128. doi: 10.4467/24500100STJ.16.005.5351; Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023); and Kateřina Čapkova and Hillel J. Kieval, eds., *Prague and Beyond: Jews in the Bohemian Lands* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021). For the Austrian provinces, see Alison Rose, *Antisemitism, Gender Bias, and the "Hervay Affair" of 1904: Bigotry in the Austrian Alps* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2016).

[49] Niedheimer, 'Gender and Family in Jewish Historiography on the Bohemian Lands,' 123.

Works about the lives of Muslim women in Habsburg lands are few and far between, though they touch on some similar themes. Fabio Giomi's work looks at Muslim women's education and participation in voluntary associations in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Ninja Bumann focuses on Islamic divorce and mixed marriages in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina. M. Šerić has written about the Muslim 'woman question' in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Constanze Volkmann's looks at Muslim women in Austria and Germany. These works shed light on the lives of Muslim women and how they were viewed, and challenge assertions of their passivity.[50] Several parallels and convergences with Jewish women's experiences come to light when comparing studies of Muslim and Jewish women, particularly in areas such as integration and identity, religious life, education, authorship and writing, conversions, marriage and divorce, sexuality, prostitution, and the 'woman question.' The following historiographical review will explore these common themes through the lens of matriculture, that is, by placing women at the centre of analysis when comparing the experiences of Jewish and Muslim women in Habsburg lands and the ways that historians have treated them.

Integration and identity

In Vienna and other large urban centers, Jewish women found themselves integrating into the middle class by embracing educational opportunities, liberal values, philanthropy, focusing on the family, and upholding religion and culture in the home.[51] Viennese Jewish women participated in charity, women's organizations, culture, and politics despite facing gender bias, limitations, stereotypes, and the rise of political and confessional antisemitism. They took advantage of new opportunities for education, professional careers, cultural pursuits, and political activities, using their involvement to negotiate their identities as Jews and as women in a changing world. Jewish women's salons served as gathering places for Viennese writers, artists, and intellectuals. Still, many Jewish women remained in the workforce and lived in cramped apartments in the Leopoldstadt district.[52]

Muslim women in Bosnia and Herzegovina also began to integrate into middle class culture by participating in organizations and pursuing educational opportunities, though somewhat later. For example, Muslim women's involvement in theatre began during the interwar period; this was delayed comparing to Jewish and Orthodox women, who were

[50] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European* and 'Daughters of Two Empires'; M. Šerić, *The Muslim Woman Question in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Between Islamic Tradition and Global Modernity* (September 24, 2025), Universiteit Leiden, The Netherlands; URL: https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4261977, accessed 24 October 2026.
[51] Weinzierl, 'The Jewish Middle Class in Vienna in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries.' 14.
[52] Korbel, 'Spaces of Gendered Jewish and Non-Jewish Encounters.'

involved by 1900. Though traditionally considered to lie on the threshold between art and prostitution, being an amateur actress became increasingly accepted in Muslim society.[53]

Religious life

Both Jewish and Muslim women participated in religious organizations and were expected to uphold and pass down religious traditions. Women's religious lives and how they were impacted by modernity were of central concern in both communities. The Viennese Jewish community adopted moderate changes to public worship, such as confirmation ceremonies for girls, and rabbis and other Jewish thinkers dedicated much discussion to women's duty to uphold Judaism in the home.[54] Viennese Jewish women participated in prayer and philanthropy. A Jewish prayerbook for women, *Beruria: Gebet- und Andachtsbuch für jüdische Frauen und Mädchen* (Beruria: Prayer and Devotional book for Jewish Women and Girls) compiled by Max Grunwald in Vienna in 1907 included works by women and went through multiple editions.[55] Viennese Jewish women's organizations proliferated around the turn of the century, providing Jewish women with opportunities to enter into public life while fulfilling the religious obligation of *Tzedakah* (charity).[56]

Jewish women in Hungary also engaged in religious life, women's organizations, and educational opportunities despite facing gender restrictions and limitations. The first Hungarian translation of the *Tse'enah ure'enah* (Yiddish language bible for women) was published in 1905 and of *Die fromme Zionstochter* (a prayerbook for women and girls) in 1848. *Mirjam*, an original Hungarian prayerbook aimed at women published in 1898, became hugely popular. "The changing quality of female worship is also reflected in sermons given in the vernacular rather than in Hebrew as well as the growing number of seats in the women's sections of the newly built synagogues."[57] Hungarian Jewish women participated in women's religious organizations, such as the Pest Israelite Women's Association which created the first Jewish girls' orphanage in 1867, a kosher soup kitchen which served as a model for municipal soup kitchens established in the 1870s, and modern educational programs for Jewish girls. A short-lived magazine for Hungarian Jewish women written primarily by men, the *Magyar Zsidó Nö*, like its Polish counterpart, *Di yidishe froyenvelt*, "agreed that the Jewish identity of the future generations was entirely dependent on the Jewish mother." But they were not given any assistance in this. "They still could not obtain more Jewish learning than that provided by the religious classes of their schools" and "they had no say in the running of Jewish communal affairs, while they

[53] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 293-294.
[54] Rose, *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna*, 27-36, 57-84.
[55] Rose, *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna*, 44-45.
[56] Rose, *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna*, 46-57.
[57] Fenyves, 'Jewish Women in Poland and Hungary,' 145.

had more and more to take care of themselves: many of them had to become breadwinners."[58]

In Bohemia, Jewish women navigated through residence restrictions, changing gender roles, and educational opportunities in an effort to "combine the increasingly secular way of life of the Jewish middle-class with religious traditions."[59] After the rise of the middle class and the promotion of separate female and male spheres, attitudes towards Jewish women's education shifted to focus on women as guardians or keepers of Jewish traditions.[60] *Tsedakah* (charity) played an important role for Bohemian Jewish women navigating through a male-dominated religious sphere and non-Jewish discrimination.[61] Fanny Neuda's women's prayer book, *Stunden der Andacht* (Hours of devotion, 1855), and her collection of stories, *Jugend-Erzählungen aus dem jüdischen Familienleben* (Tales of Jewish family life for youngsters, 1876) illustrate the expectations on Jewish women to both foster acculturation and uphold Jewish identity by attending to the Jewish education of their daughters.[62] Jewish cookbooks in Bohemia also demonstrate how women found ways to uphold a Jewish identity and way of life amidst growing secularization and modernization.[63]

The religious lives of Jewish women in Bosnia and Herzegovina differed due their Sephardic background and the presence of a large Muslim population. Sephardic women remained centred on home and religion, and spoke Ladino (Judeo-Spanish). They wore traditional dress – the *anterija* (long embroidered dress) and *Tokado* (small hat adorned with ducats) and were active in their own communities. [64] Muslim women in Bosnia and Herzegovina also interacted with state and religious institutions, though not as directly. Fabio Giomi's work focusing on the impact of Vienna's educational policies on Muslim women and the role of Muslim women in voluntary associations challenges the assumption that Bosnian Muslim women under Habsburg rule remained removed from social transformation.[65]

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[58] Fenyves, 'Jewish Women in Poland and Hungary,' 146-147.
[59] Niedhammer, 'Gender and Family in Jewish Historiography on the Bohemian Lands,' 113.
[60] Louise Hecht, 'Teaching Haskalah – Haskalah and Teaching: Jewish Education in the Czech Lands (a Power Play),' *Jewish Culture and History* 13 (2012), 2–3: 93–107; Niedhammer, 'Gender and Family in Jewish Historiography on the Bohemian Lands,' 118.
[61] Niedhammer, 'Gender and Family in Jewish Historiography on the Bohemian Lands,' 119.
[62] Frankl *et al*, 'Contested Equality,' 134-135.
[63] Frankl *et al*, 'Contested Equality,' 136. On Neuda's prayerbook, see Hillel J. Kieval, 'Unequal Mobility: Jews, State, and Society in an Era of Contradictions, 1790-1860,' in Kateřina Čapková and Hillel J. Kieval, eds., *Prague and Beyond: Jews in the Bohemian Lands* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 102-105.
[64] Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread: The Jews of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 194-195.
[65] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 62.

Bosnian women played important roles in Bosnian associational culture at the turn of the century. They established their own associations, including the Dobrotvorna Zadruga Srpkinja (Serbian women's charitable society) in Banja Luka. Catholic and Jewish women volunteered in community-based associations. Jewish women participated in Jewish associations without establishing specific female chapters. Catholic women started their own chapters after 1909. While Muslim women were not as directly involved in these activities, they supported cultural and philanthropic initiatives financially.[66] Muslim women in Bosnia and Herzegovina also interacted with state and religious institutions, though not as directly. Fabio Giomi's work focusing on the impact of Vienna's educational policies on Muslim women and the role of Muslim women in voluntary associations challenges the assumption that Bosnian Muslim women under Habsburg rule remained removed from social transformation.[67]

Religion played a central role in debates about Muslim girls' education. Muslim reformers who argued for education embraced the ideology of separate spheres and saw girls' schooling as preparation for a return to the domestic realm. Opponents argued that the education provided in schools was modern and anti-religious.[68] Some Muslim progressives saw women as a hindrance to Muslim nationalization and argued that allowing them to study and socialize with non-Muslim peers would help them to develop a national collective identity. Others argued that Muslim women played a key role in preserving Bosnian ethnic integrity during Ottoman rule, and that they remained loyal to their nation despite their conversion to Islam. The credit for keeping a sense of national identity alive among the Muslims of Bosnia "could be attributed to none other than their mothers, Serbian women of Muslim faith; in the privacy of their own homes, these women had kept Serbian customs alive through songs and poetry."[69] In response to the belief that sending Muslim girls to school would destroy their faith and morality, associations stressed that it was ignorance and economic inactivity that were responsible for women's immorality. "If Muslim girls were to complete at least four years of elementary school, there would be fewer prostitutes, fewer alcoholic women and fewer venereal diseases."[70]

The Muslim 'woman question' emerged as a topic of discussion and debate in Habsburg Bosnia. Milan Nedeljković, a Serbian scholar, argued that Muslim women were isolated by veiling, segregation, and lack of education, and that Muslim men were violent, oppressive religious fanatics who enslaved submissive Muslim women. Bosnian Muslim intellectuals who were influenced by the Enlightenment view that a society's level of civilization was

[66] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 61-62.
[67] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 62.
[68] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 73.
[69] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 178.
[70] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 234.

related to the status of women published articles advocating for the reform of Islamic customs related to women.

> Muslim women were an important component of the Austro-Hungarian modernization projects. The Austro-Hungarian civilizational discourse considered the Muslim woman of key importance for the socio-cultural modernization of Bosnia and Herzegovina.[71]

Education

The Habsburg policy requiring attendance at mandatory state schools impacted both Jewish and Muslim women. Jewish families in Western Galicia were willing to send their girls to public state sponsored schools because unlike boys, there was no religious obligation for them to study Jewish texts.[72]

> In Galicia, where elementary education was compulsory, Jewish parents, regardless of their political, ideological, or religious views, did not have much choice and had to send their daughters to public schools, where they were taught Polish language and culture and where they met non-Jewish classmates… The specific character of Jewish girls' education in the Polish lands influences analyses of discourses on the body, because it complicates the linguistic choice, and more importantly, it shows the entanglement of Jewish and non-Jewish ideas about the female body that Jewish women encountered.[73]

> While Orthodox Jews in Eastern Europe often frowned upon or forbade teaching secular subjects to their sons, they had no such strictures with respect to their daughters. On the contrary, girls with knowledge of European languages, or who could help their fathers with their business accounts, were highly esteemed, even in the most Hasidic households."[74]

After the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Habsburgs set up eleven new schools providing education for boys and girls. Muslims there put up a lot of resistance to sending their children, especially girls, to these schools, fearing that they were a cover for converting them, although laws prohibited this. Special schools for Muslim girls were

[71] Šerić, *The Muslim Woman Question in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 21-22.
[72] Manekin, *The Rebellion of the Daughters*, 23.
[73] Zuzanna Kołodziejska-Smagała, 'The Female Body in Polish Jewish Women's Writing, 1880-1918,' *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, Volume 38, (2026, Liverpool University Press): 116-117; URL: https://muse.jhu.edu/article/979787, accessed 24 October 2026.
[74] Manekin, *The Rebellion of the Daughters*, 236.

opened to accommodate them, but some wealthy girls attended the new mixed confessional schools; in many cases, the mothers or female relatives sent them. The schools led to "a first small cadre of Muslim girls … studying and learning to write in the Serbo-Croatian language."[75] Religion was central in the curriculum. Despite the shortage of space in Sarajevo's Muslim Girls' school, a classroom was reserved for religious studies and prayer.[76] In 1897, an elementary state school for Muslim girls was established in Sarajevo. In 1901, a three-year advanced course was added for them, and in 1913 a separate three-year course was added to train Muslim female teachers.[77]

In Western Galicia, Jewish girls' education in mandatory state schools led some daughters to rebel against their parents. The Polish schooling system immersed Jewish girls in Polish language and culture, creating a gap between Jewish parents and daughters and a divide between Jewish girls and boys.

> Regardless of the economic status of their families, Galician Jewish girls experienced a growing gulf between their dreams and aspirations as educated young women and their parents' traditional norms and expectations. When parents arranged a match for their educated daughters with a Hasid who lacked a modern education, a family crisis often ensued. Strong-willed daughters rebelled, and some ran away to a place that would offer them shelter for a few months, such as the Felician Sisters' convent in Kraków, which acquired a reputation for harboring female Jewish runaways.[78]

There were over 300 known cases of Jewish runaway girls who left home to escape from arranged marriages or to pursue higher education, and Manekin tells three of their stories. Michalina Araten, the daughter of a wealthy Hasidic family who was sent to a private primary school in Kraków, ran away in 1899 to the Felician Sisters' convent in Kraków because of a pending arranged marriage. She disappeared from the convent after some months and was eventually smuggled out of the country and given a new name. The case was used variously to accuse the church of kidnapping, the state of failing to protect Jews, or the Jews of using the state to attack the church. Debora Lewkowicz, daughter of a village tavern keeper who went to a school in the city of Wieliczka, on the eve of her wedding ran away to the Felician Sisters' Convent where she was baptized and prepared for a job as a governess. Anna Kluger lived in a suburb of Kraków where her parents sent her to one of the best private schools in the city. When she was 15, her parents arranged a marriage; she acquiesced but continued her studies in secret after the marriage which

[75] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European,* 35.
[76] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 50.
[77] Giomi, 'Daughters of Two Empires,' 5.
[78] Manekin, *The Rebellion of the Daughters,* 3.

remained unconsummated. Despite her mother's efforts to prevent her education, she received her matriculation certificate in 1908 and registered at the Jagiellonian University, In 1909, she ran away with her younger sister and hid in a convent abroad and fought to be released from her father's custody. She lost in a local court and took her case to the supreme court in Vienna, where she won. She continued her studies at the University of Vienna, earned a PhD in history, returned to Kraków, and became a teacher in a Hebrew high school.[79]

Habsburg Jewish women pursued higher education when it became available. The first girls' high school was opened in Budapest in 1896, and a disproportionate number of Jewish women entered the University of Vienna when it opened to women in 1897. Many of the first women graduating in Hungary were Jewish, and the ratio of Jewish girls graduating from high school was higher than the ratio of boys in 1910-11 (38 percent compared to 21.2 percent). "During the first ten years when women were admitted to Budapest University, nearly half of the total number was Jewish, while Jewish male students made up only a third of the male student body."[80]

Daughters of wealthier Bosnian Jewish families began to attend the middle school in Sarajevo, and in 1912, the first Bosnian woman to graduate from Mostar's high school, Berta Bergman (1892-1945), was Jewish. In 1904, 67 of the 187 girls enrolled in the State High School for girls were Jewish. The wealthy also sent their daughters abroad to boarding schools to increase their marriageability.[81]

> Christian and Jewish Women of the Yugoslav region—whether they lived in the Ottoman or Habsburg Empire, or in the Serbian and Montenegrin states—experienced new forms of education, learned to write and speak in public, joined the paid work-force, transformed their consumption practices and everyday life, and took part in the political struggle amidst the ranks of nationalist, socialist and feminist movements.[82]

Jews founded the Jewish Cultural-Educational and Humanitarian Society Benevolence (*La Benevolencija*) in Sarajevo in 1892 to support apprentices and the poor. The organization later expanded into a major hub of Jewish life.[83]

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[79] Manekin, *The Rebellion of the Daughters*, and 'From Anna Kluger to Sarah Schenirer.' 5.
[80] Fenyves, 'Jewish Women in Poland and Hungary,' 148.
[81] Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 242.
[82] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 4.
[83] Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 244.

Jewish and Muslim women writers

Increased educational opportunities resulted the emergence of Jewish and Muslim women writers who expressed their identities and asserted their agency through their texts. Zuzanna Kołodziejska-Smagała shows how Polish Jewish women voiced their views on the 'woman question' and pursued integration through their writing. There were about fifteen female Jewish writers between 1880 and 1914 and about ten who wrote ego-documents; this was a higher number than male Jewish numbers for the same period. They wrote about political participation, the national question, and how girls' education might secure women more equality. They did not necessarily advocate a change in gender roles or the abandonment of the patriarchal discourse. They wrote critically of traditional, arranged marriages which they saw as exploitative of young people and introduced the theme of sex education into their works. They presented a simplified picture of Jewish culture, did not mention issues that might provoke antisemitism, and highlighted similarities between Polish and Jewish cultures. They avoided topics that might give credence to Christian stereotypes about Jewish attitudes to the body. Jewish women writers discussed sexuality and hygiene but made almost no mention of the *mikveh* (ritual bath).[84]

In literature, the focus was on the 'woman question,' the path to education, involvement in community affairs, and becoming a useful citizen.[85] Sexual pleasure was described with restraint, but there are references to sexual abuse. Heroines who pursued independent sex lives had tragic ends, showing that society was not ready for independent, modern women. Jewish women writers stressed the common features of women's problems and did not specify the ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds of their characters. They did not include descriptions of their bodies in ego documents. Their literary texts are more explicit about premarital and extramarital sex by male characters.[86]

In Bukovina, Jewish girls from acculturated families sought education and expressed themselves through writing. Beginning in the 1880s, when nationalism and racist antisemitism began to rise, Jews turned away from the German language and promoted Hebrew or Yiddish. Both the Hebraist movement, associated with Zionism, and the Yiddishist movement had established themselves in Czernowitz.[87] For Yiddishists, Czernowitz served as an important centre; indeed, the first international Yiddish language

[84] Kołodziejska-Smagała, 'The Female Body in Polish Jewish Women's Writing, 1880-1918,' 117-188, 121.
[85] Kołodziejska-Smagała, 'The Female Body in Polish Jewish Women's Writing, 1880-1918,' 122.
[86] Kołodziejska-Smagała, 'The Female Body in Polish Jewish Women's Writing, 1880-1918,' 129.
[87] German nationalist and/or exclusively Christian fraternities were founded at the University of Czernowitz in the 1880s. Jews founded the Jewish Nationalist fraternity Hasmonäa in 1891. Lichtblau and John, 'Jewries in Galicia and Bukovina, in Lemberg and Czernowitz,' 46-7, 53.

conference took place there in 1908.[88] In this context, Jewish women writers struggled for recognition. Their poems are inscribed with marginalization and deterritorialization and stand up for the marginalized Other. “Like the three dimensions of these authors’ identity as women, Jews, and poets, the three main strands of their work – the multicultural, the Jewish, and gender theme – are so intertwined that they cannot be separated.”[89]

Attendance at Bosnian schools led to the emergence Muslim women writers who wrote in Serbo-Croatian and published in male-controlled Bosnian journals. They wrote poetry, prose, novels, short stories, and social commentary, and supported women’s education in state schools without contesting domesticity, segregation, or veiling. Public writing provided them with a way to express themselves, to reflect on their living conditions, and to argue for more education and sociability outside the home. Their writing careers ended with marriage and motherhood.[90]

Giomi’s portraits of 108 of the first generation of Muslim women writers show that most supported the new gender regime proposed by Muslim Western-trained notables and did not challenge the ideology of separate spheres. He finds that the few women who imagined a different future and different forms of sisterhood through their writings became the first to establish and participate in voluntary associations after 1918.[91]

> According to the available sources, Muslim women seemed to be largely convinced of the non-adequateness of the gender regime inherited from the late Ottoman period. (…) Nevertheless, a few women used public writing to imagine something at least partially different with respect to the aforementioned gender regimes (…) several and different forms of sisterhood – among Muslim women, sometimes among women beyond confessional differences.[92]

Marriage and divorce, conversions, and intermarriage

Marriage, divorce, and conversion were major issues that concerned and affected both the Jewish and Muslim communities in Habsburg lands. While works on Jewish women examine these topics from a variety of angles including marriage as a migration strategy,

[88] Lichtblau and John, ‘Jewries in Galicia and Bukovina, in Lemberg and Czernowitz,’ 56-7. Nathan Birnbaum, a former Zionist turned diaspora nationalist, ultra-orthodox, and Yiddish culture advocate, selected it because of its multi-national character mirroring the Habsburg monarchy, its pro-Jewish stance, its location near Russia and Romania, and because he viewed it as an oasis in the ‘East.’
[89] Colin, ‘Writings from the Margins,’ 37.
[90] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 95-98.
[91] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 108-109.
[92] Giomi, ‘Daughters of Two Empires,’ 13-14.

works on Muslim women focus on the impact of Sharia law and its interaction with the Habsburg state. Fears of girls and women's vulnerability to religious conversion plagued both communities, as cases of women being kidnapped into convents and forced to convert attracted a great deal of attention.

Eva Grisová's study of the migration and marriage strategies of Jewish women from southwest Moravia who got married in Vienna in the second half of the nineteenth century shows migration as a response to economic stagnation and opportunities in Vienna. Her reconstruction of the life trajectories of 172 Jewish women and their families demonstrates that women were active participants in the migration process, and that marriage strategies were a key tool for individual and family mobility.[93]

> Beyond individual preferences, marriages were embedded in complex strategies that were influenced by socio-economic status, and also by the expectations of the wider family. Financial considerations were thus pivotal, not just in migration decisions but also in selecting the right partner.[94]

Aleksandra Jakubczak shows that Jewish women used prostitution and Jewish marital practices to navigate and improve their economic and legal situations. Later marriage exerted financial pressure on working-class women who sometimes earned a living as prostitutes: some Jewish girls migrated to engage in prostitution to raise money for their dowries and this was implicitly condoned by the Jewish community. In the interwar period, migration restrictions pushed more women into marriages of convenience. Jewish observers understood this as a migratory strategy – using marriage to leave Poland. Marriage provided women with a way to get around the quotas which discriminated against single Jewish women immigrants. Some of them ended up in prostitution, but they may not have been mere victims who were tricked into it.[95] "Contrary to contemporary accounts, Jewish women were not always victims of harmful marital practices but actually had some agency and could use various means to improve their situation by, for instance, raising funds for a dowry or consciously contracting marriages that would give them geographical mobility at a time of increasing restrictions."[96]

In her overview of the historiography on Jews in Bohemian lands pertaining to gender and family, Martina Niedhammer points out the impact of the infamous Familiants Laws (1726-27), which set limits on Jewish residence, settlement patterns, and migration. The state

[93] Eva Grisová, 'Viennese Brides: An Example of Female Migration from Jewish Communities in Southwest Moravia in the Second Half of the 19th Century,' *Judaica Bohemiae* 60 (2025): 45-75.
[94] Grisová, 'Viennese Brides,' 68.
[95] Aleksandra Jakubczak, 'Marriage as *Froyen-handl*: Jewish Marital Practices in the Early Twentieth Century,' *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry,* Volume 38, 2026, pp. 192-212.
[96] Jakubczak, 'Marriage as *Froyen-handl*,' 207.

authorities' interpretation of these Laws changed over time to become a tool for the 'moral improvement' of Jews by introducing a mandatory examination for young couples wishing to marry. The examination posed another obstacle to marriage.[97] Nevertheless, transnational networks of Jewish families were established by business, matchmaking, and marriage. Mirjam Zadoff has shown that matchmaking and becoming acquainted often took place at Bohemian summer resorts.[98] The legal emancipation of Jews in 1867 further affected the lives of Jewish women and gender roles in Bohemian lands by introducing civil marriage leading to a growing number of intermarriages and conversions.[99] In Bosnia, Jewish women interacted with Muslim men and women on some occasions, and conversion to Islam was a convenient way for a Jewish woman to divorce, since Muslim women could not be married to non-Muslim men.[100]

Studies by Ninja Bumann demonstrate the economic and legal hardships in matters of marriage and divorce for Muslim women in Bosnia. Under the Habsburgs, Muslim personal status matters continued to be held at Sharia courts which followed the Hanafi school and had disadvantages for women when collecting *nafaka* (arrears of maintenance) or attempting to escape a marriage in the wake of abandonment or abuse.[101] Only repudiated wives were entitled to the *mehr* (dowry). In mutual divorces or those initiated by the wife, women forfeited claims to *mehr* and *nafaka* (maintenance). Unilateral divorces by a wife were possible only in cases such as apostasy from Islam, alcoholism, or male infertility.[102] Wider marital issues such as absent husbands and 'disobedient' wives resulted creating problems which led to calls for legal reform.[103]

Aware of their rights under Islamic law, some Muslim women advocated for themselves in the courts. For example, Mućelefa Zaimović, a remarried widow, asked the local kadi to separate her from her new husband when he forced her to sell the house she had inherited from her deceased husband. The kadi did not respond so she filed an appeal with the Supreme Sharia court, an appeals body installed by the Habsburg administration

[97] Niedhammer, 'Gender and Family in Jewish Historiography on the Bohemian Lands,' 115-116. For more on the impact of the Familiants Laws, see Miller, 'Absolutism and Control,' 72.
[98] Mirjam Zadoff, *Next Year in Marienbad: The Lost Worlds of Jewish Spa Culture*, trans. William Templer (Philadelphia, 2012).
[99] Frankl *et al*, 'Contested Equality,' 136-137.
[100] Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 138-139.
[101] Ninja Bumann, 'The Economy of Islamic Divorce in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina,' in *Gender and Divorce in Europe: 1600-1900*, volume 2 (2023), 195-212, 198.
[102] Bumann, 'The Economy of Islamic Divorce in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina,' 198.
[103] Bumann, 'The Economy of Islamic Divorce in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina,' 195; Ninja Bumann, 'Contesting Juridical Authority: Sharia, Marriage, and Morality in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina,' 17 March 2022, *Austrian History Yearbook*, Volume 53, May 2022, 150-168. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237822000054

in 1879, which ordered the local kadi to hold a hearing. She was able to get a divorce but had to renounce any financial claims and did not get her house back.[104]

Abandoned women, who could not remarry and could be declared widows only after their husbands were declared dead or after the passing of 90-120 years, frequently appeared before Sharia courts to claim what they were owed, but most of the time, the authorities failed to compel husbands to appear before the courts.[105] Hatuna Mandra was abandoned by her husband and turned to the court. Stressing that she was poor and had been abandoned without maintenance, the local kadi inquired if she could be divorced according to the more lenient Maliqi *mezheb*, which allowed a marriage to be dissolved after four years of the husband's abandonment when his whereabouts were unknown. Financial restitution after divorce and entitlements during marriage were critically important for women. As a result of the case, the Supreme Sharia court issued a legal reform in 1895 which allowed for divorces after four years of desertion, and Hatuna Madra was granted a divorce. In 1917, a new reform allowed abandoned wives to file for divorce even if they knew the whereabouts of their husbands. [106]

Still, Muslim women in Habsburg Bosnia had few options for initiating a divorce. Although they could live separate from their husbands, a woman who left her husband without his approval was considered a 'disobedient wife' and as a result, she forfeited her *nafaka* and was forbidden to remarry.[107] Calls for using coercion, such as fines and prison sentences, against 'disobedient' women issued in the context of demands for greater autonomy were rejected by Austro-Hungarian authorities. Reforms had provided abandoned women with more options which led to calls to enlarge Sharia courts enforcement powers to return disobedient wives to their husbands.[108] Overall, Muslim women were caught in the middle of a power struggle between Austro-Hungarian authorities and Sharia courts. Despite these limitations and complications, they asserted themselves to attain the financial support they deserved and needed to survive.

The regulation and negotiation of mixed marriages at Sharia courts also affected Muslim women.[109] The 1883 *Regulation on the Order and the Scope of the Sharia Courts* restricted the competence of Sharia courts to regulating personal status matters solely among the Muslim population. This hindered mixed couples from getting legally married because marriages between a Muslim and a non-Muslim did not fall under the jurisdiction of Sharia

[104] Bumann, 'The Economy of Islamic Divorce in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina,' 199-203.
[105] Bumann, 'The Economy of Islamic Divorce in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina,' 203-204.
[106] Bumann, 'The Economy of Islamic Divorce in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina,' 205-207.
[107] Bumann, 'The Economy of Islamic Divorce in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina,' 207.
[108] Bumann, 'The Economy of Islamic Divorce in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina,' 208.
[109] Ninja Bumann, 'Marriage Across Boundaries: Mixed Marriages at the Supreme Sharia Court in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina,' *Historical Searches* 19/2020, 151-182.

courts.[110] As a result, mixed couples resorted to strategic conversions or concubinage. Mixed couples living in concubinage often faced legal problems around the religious affiliation and legal custody of their children born out of wedlock. In 1912, a regulation by the provincial government allowed for the solemnization of mixed marriages by a kadi. This did not lead to greater acceptance of mixed marriages by society.[111]

The Supreme Sharia court archives provide insight into the Habsburg officials, kadis, and the local population's dealings with mixed marriages. In total there were forty-three cases about mixed couples between 1879 and 1918 which dealt with four issues: the unclear definition of competences brought on by the new Sharia court regulation of 1883 on mixed marriages, the role of conversions as a strategy for legalizing a mixed marriage, the question of the status of children from a mixed relationship, and the process of legalizing mixed marriages based on a new regulation of 1912. The cases demonstrate that mixed marriages not only crossed religious boundaries but faced institutional, legal, and social obstacles.[112]

Conversions were a possible remedy but conversions of Muslim girls to Catholicism caused public protest. The total number of conversions was low, but the case of 16-year old Uzeifa Delahmetović in 1890, who left home to convert to Catholicism and was hidden from her family at the residence of the Archbishop in Sarajevo, led the Habsburg administration to enact a Conversion Ordinance that put conversions under the strict control of the authorities. After this event, a new law mandated a two-month-long waiting period and an inspection by a government commission.[113] Restrictions on conversions made it more difficult for mixed couples to marry.

> This was the case when Muharem Biberić from Banja Luka sent, in early spring of 1895, a telegram to the Provisional Government in Sarajevo complaining that the local kadi from Banja Luka refused to marry him and his Jewish fiancée, although there would be no interdictions. The Provisional Government and the Supreme Sharia court started to investigate the case, whereby the local district Sharia court revealed that the Jewish fiancée had already earlier requested a conversion at the responsible authority.[114]

With no orders issued, Biberić got married privately and lived together with his fiancée. "Apparently, the hurdles for a strategic conversion in order to obtain a marriage license

[110] Bumann, 'Marriage Across Boundaries,' 157.
[111] Bumann, 'Marriage Across Boundaries,' 154-155.
[112] Bumann, 'Marriage Across Boundaries,' 155-156.
[113] Bumann, 'Marriage Across Boundaries,' 161, notes 30 and 31.
[114] Bumann, 'Marriage Across Boundaries,' 162.

seemed too big and the couple preferred to live in concubinage."[115] Decisions about their legal status and religious affiliation were highly inconsistent and decided on a case-by-case basis.

In August 1912, a new regulation allowed kadis to register mixed marriages in some instances.[116] "Although with this new regulation, Sharia courts could marry a mixed couple or issue a marriage license for them, such marriages were still not entirely accepted by society and kadis."[117] These cases show that Muslim women's lives were caught between the Sharia courts and state regulations. Additionally, they demonstrate a certain amount of social mixing among religious groups in Habsburg Bosnia. More research is needed on the circumstances that led to these relationships and how they were experienced and viewed.

Like Jewish women, Muslim women were vulnerable to exploitation and oppression from their cultures and larger society but nevertheless found ways to assert their agency. Conversions of young Muslim women to Catholicism, like those of the Galician Jewish runaways described above, were seen as abductions even though they might have provided an escape from family control and social isolation. For example, the alleged abduction of Saja Džukić led to protests in Mostar. Saja was 17 years old when she fled her father's home in February 1881 to convert to Catholicism and then marry her Catholic boyfriend Andrija Kordić. The local Sharia court in Mostar sentenced her to imprisonment, and she was briefly arrested but soon released. The Provisional Government informed the Sharia court in Mostar that conversions were not in their competence.[118] The Fata Omaniović affair of 1899, in which a Bosnian Muslim woman from the village of Bijelo Polje near Mostar was allegedly abducted to Dalmatia and converted to Catholicism at age 16, enraged the Bosnian Muslim elite although she likely went on her own accord to escape an arranged marriage. Local protests spread to other parts of the province and led Muslims to agitate for religious and educational autonomy. The fight divided Bosniaks into two camps, those who fought against the occupation and those who sided with the authorities.[119]

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[115] Bumann, 'Marriage Across Boundaries,' 162.
[116] Bumann, 'Marriage Across Boundaries,' 174.
[117] Bumann, 'Marriage Across Boundaries,' 178.
[118] Fedja Buric, 'Becoming Mixed. Mixed marriages of Bosnia-Herzegovina during the life and death of Yugoslavia,' Dissertation, University of Illinois 2012, 153, notes; URL: http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.957.6472&rep=rep1&type=pdf. Accessed October 24, 2026.
[119] Hivzija Hasandedić, 'Four Conversions,' URL https://akos.ba/zasto-su-bosnjaci-zaboravili-fatu-omanovic-115-godina-od-njenog-pokrstavanja/. Accessed October 24, 2026.

Prostitution

While they have been often portrayed as passive victims, recent work on Jewish prostitution has taken centre stage in research on Galician Jewish women's lives and discussions of them.[120] Contemporaries debated the causes of prostitution and how women became victims. Some procurers presented religious families with a Jewish marriage contract.[121] Other girls left home of their own volition, and some poor families encouraged their daughters to go out of financial desperation. Myths of female passivity and helplessness informed the narratives of women as victims tricked into prostitution, overlooking that some women knowingly entered prostitution. "In this and other cases, the preoccupation with the traffickers' trickery and coercion averted attention from the dire poverty of the countryside, from which most of the 'captives' escaped…family pressures and poverty were the leading contributors to the decision to take up public sex, not trickery or coercion by male agents."[122]

Women resorted to prostitution because of "a long-standing convention in Polish society or out of a calculated effort to earn money in times of need, or both."[123] Many women engaged in paid sex because they couldn't earn enough in their day jobs. Domestic servants, who were poorly paid, comprised the largest group of registered prostitutes (two-thirds in Lemberg in 1903). "The turn to part-time commercial sex provided these recent arrivals to the city with much needed cash and a steady flow of male companions."[124] They found in prostitution an alternative to financial desperation, a way to flee from abusive families or unhappy marriages, or incarceration in convents.[125] Blaming Jewish procurers for sex trafficking diverted attention away from other contributing factors and from women's own agency.[126] The fight against prostitution ultimately became reshaped into an urgent matter of Polish national regeneration.[127] According to Nancy Wingfield,

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[120] Stauter-Halsted, 'Moral Panic and the Prostitute in Partitioned Poland,' 566.
[121] Edward J. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight Against White Slavery* (New York: Schocken, 1983), 105.
[122] Stauter-Halsted, ''A Generation of Monsters,' 30.
[123] Stauter-Halsted, ''A Generation of Monsters,' 31.
[124] Stauter-Halsted, 'Moral Panic and the Prostitute in Partitioned Poland,' 575.
[125] Stauter-Halsted, 'Moral Panic and the Prostitute in Partitioned Poland,' 577.
[126] Stauter-Halsted, ''A Generation of Monsters,' 32. In fact, Stauter-Halsted reports that while the proportion of Jewish prostitutes in eastern Europe reflected the rough percentage of Jewish urban residents, the number of Jewish traffickers appears to have been disproportionate to their fraction in the wider population – yet contemporaries focused almost entirely on the Jewish role in sex trafficking. 'Moral Panic and the Prostitute in Partitioned Poland,' 568.
[127] Stauter-Halsted, ''A Generation of Monsters,' 34.

> [F]ew forms of socially deviant behavior received so much attention in the sexually saturated Austrian fin de siècle as *Mädchenhandel*, or trafficking in girls… Certainly, *Mädchenhandel* was in many ways a modern crime, a crime associated particularly with Jews, who were popularly believed to supply white, unwilling girls to serve as prostitutes world-wide.[128]

The issue was widely covered and debated in the Austrian press. The discourse focused on Bukovina and Galicia and portrayed it as the corruption and kidnapping of innocent girls by eastern European Jewish procurers, although a closer look reveals a more complicated picture of young women voluntarily marrying men and going abroad hoping for a better life often with the support of their families.[129] As well, not all traffickers were men. "Examination of white slaving in late imperial Austria reveals that women were involved in exploiting other women. They participated not only in feminist, philanthropic, and abolitionist organizations but also in trading and selling women." Industrialization, modernization, urbanization, mobility, and anonymity were factors leading to the movement of women with or without their consent.[130]

Prostitution also became a concern for Muslims. After World War I, reformer Dževad Sulejmanpašić wrote that Muslim women had turned to sex work to support themselves during the war. Non-Muslim prostitutes began to wear veils and pretend to be Muslims "insofar as for foreigners and non-Muslims, the Muslim woman is quite an exotic delicacy." As well, the veil was commonly used by prostitutes regardless of their religion to maintain their freedom of movement and prevent tracking by the police. Sulejmanpašić argued that free access to education and work was necessary to improve women's position in Muslim society.[131] He acknowledged that these changes conflicted with Islamic law, but "we must unwaveringly choose to conform to the pressing needs of our times." He justified Muslim women's participation in voluntary associations as a way to prevent them from falling into decadence.[132]

Parallel Experiences and Divergences

There are not many comparative studies of Jews and Muslims in Habsburg lands and none that focus specifically on women and/or gender. Omar T. Nasr and Tim Corbett have

[128] Nancy M. Wingfield, Nancy M. 'Destination Alexandria, Bueno Aires, Constantinople: "White Slavers" in Late Imperial Austria.' *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. Vol. 20. No. 2 (May 2011): 291.
[129] Wingfield, 'Destination Alexandria, Bueno Aires, Constantinople,' 292.
[130] Wingfield, 'Destination Alexandria, Bueno Aires, Constantinople,' 311.
[131] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 118-120.
[132] Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 121-128.

addressed divergent and convergent historical experiences amongst Jews and Muslims living in modern Austria, pointing out that both groups are diverse and have been perceived or viewed themselves in national or ethnic terms. With respect to population and migration, the Jewish population of the Habsburg monarchy was larger than the Muslim population around the turn of the century, though that has reversed since the Holocaust. While Jews came to Austria from the Holy Roman Empire, Hungary, and Poland, Muslims arrived from the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire. The Muslim population rose to over half a million following the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878.

> Consequently, by the interwar period, when a vibrant Jewish culture was flourishing in Austria, a small yet energetic Muslim community had also emerged, like the Jewish population predominantly located in Vienna but also in university cities like Graz and Innsbruck. Muslims in interwar Vienna formed various intellectual, political, and religious organizations and endeavored to partake in Viennese cultural life. Despite its ultimate failure due to the rise of Nazism and the outbreak of World War II, a mosque construction project in Vienna serves as an emblematic reminder of the determination to make Vienna a spiritual abode for the interwar Muslim community.[133]

Another parallel exists in Jews' and Muslims' exclusion from the construction of a white and Christian identity, although the 'Jewish Oriental' was imagined to be the 'enemy within,' while the 'Muslim Oriental' was located outside the borders of Europe.[134] Jews within Austria suffered a long history of persecution going back to the Middle Ages; from the fifteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was seen as an external menace and the terms 'Turks' and 'Turkish danger' have been applied to several perceived enemy ethnicities, including Greeks, Armenians, Sephardic Jews, democrats, liberal politicians, and socialists.

> The intertwining of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim ideologies in modern Austrian culture is succinctly demonstrated in the 1933 edition of Franz Karl Ginzkey's (1871-1963) children's book *Hatschi Bratschis Luftballon*, a story originally published in 1904 about an evil "Turk" called Hatschi Bratschi who kidnaps Christian children from Central Europe. The 1933 edition included new illustrations by Ernst Dobrowski (1896-1985) that incorporated explicitly antisemitic motifs, blending them with barbaric stereotypes of the "Oriental Muslim."[135]

[133] Omar T. Nasr, and Tim Corbett, 'Diversifying Modern Austrian History: Exploring Parallels and Intersections between Jewish and Muslim Histories in Austria,' In *PaRDeS: Journal for the Association for Jewish Studies in Germany* 29 (2024): 137-147, 141.
[134] Nasr and Corbett, 142. Citing Farid Hafez, 'From 'Jewification' to 'Islamization': Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Austrian Politics Then and Now,' *ReOrient* 4, no. 2 (2019): 199-202.
[135] Nasr and Corbett, 'Diversifying Modern Austrian History,' 143.

Nasr and Corbett conclude that Jews and Muslims in Austria share a long history as the quintessential Other. "While Austria's Jewish history, from the cultural heyday of the fin-de-siècle to the annihilation of the Holocaust, has been thoroughly explored in historiography, the historic Muslim populations of the country, their entanglements in Austrian culture and society, and their experiences of war and persecution, evidently remain a research desideratum, as does the entanglement of Jewish and Muslim histories in modern Austria and Europe."[136]

Expanding on this, Farid Hafez compares the role played by antisemitism and Islamophobia in Austrian party politics in the past and present by focusing on conspiracy theories that draw on the idea of a Jewish or Muslim takeover which threatens European or national identity. Jews have been equated with Muslims and both groups have been portrayed as opposing European values. From 1894 to 1938, The *Reichspost*, a Viennese Christian Social newspaper, claimed to be fighting against the Jewish press and Jewish influence in politics which "sought to overthrow the empire, as well as traditional family values and the Christian religion."[137] The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), established in 1956, continues to agitate against Jews. Since 1992, the party has campaigned for a constitutional clause stating that Austria is 'not a country of immigration.' In 2010, it framed the Social Democratic Party as Islamist, arguing that they would 'Islamize' the country and contribute to the oppression of women. Karl Lueger was Vienna's antisemitic mayor at the turn of the twentieth century; his slogan 'Vienna should not become Jerusalem,' was transformed by the FPÖ in their 2004 election campaign into 'Vienna should not become Istanbul.' Further, the FPÖ brands Muslims as antisemites and unironically portrays itself as a 'pure' party despite its frequent antisemitic statements.[138] Hafez concludes that the discourse of Jewification/Islamization was and is used against the Social Democrats for the purpose of political competition and that "both Jewry and Islam are represented as conspiratorial forces that endanger the life of the (Christian) nation by altering its culture and society at large with the help of its other enemies."[139]

Jewish and Muslim women, *as women*, also experience further levels of discrimination and prejudice. Volkmann points out Muslim women are viewed as oppressed victims of their culture and that gender inequality is used to demonize Muslims and prove their backwardness. Her work challenges this perspective by looking at how Muslim women living in predominantly non-Muslim countries do and undo gender. She concludes that

[136] Nasr and Corbett, 'Diversifying Modern Austrian History,' 146.
[137] *Reichspost*, 1897: 1, cited in Hafez, 'From 'Jewification' to 'Islamization.' 207.
[138] Hafez, 'From 'Jewification' to 'Islamization.' 213.
[139] Hafez, 'From 'Jewification' to 'Islamization.' 215.

"religiosity is not in contrast to, but compatible with feminist concerns" for Muslim women as well as for Jewish women.[140]

Entangled Experiences and Encounters

Encounters between Jews and Muslims in Habsburg lands took place primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there was a significant Muslim population. Muslim-Jewish relations in Bosnia date back to the Ottoman period, as illustrated by the story of the Sarajevo Megillah. In 1820, a corrupt Ottoman pasha kidnapped eleven prominent Jews, including the chief rabbi (a kabbalist named Moshe Danon), and accused them of murdering a dervish who had converted from Judaism to Islam. The pasha's demand of 50,000 groschen of silver from the Jewish community offended the local multiethnic population of Sarajevo who considered the Jews (one-fifth of population) part of their own community. Local Jews, Muslims, and Christians joined forces to storm the pasha's palace and free the Jews, and the Muslim community raised ransom money. Ever since, Bosnian Jews have celebrated this event by visiting the grave of the Jewish historian who documented it, Zeki-efendi Attias, and taking part in a pilgrimage to the grave of Rabbi Danon in the south of Bosnia who died on his way to Palestine.[141]

There are few known cases of entanglements of Jewish and Muslim women during the Habsburg period, though it seems likely that they occurred given that there were cordial relations between Sarajevo's Jews and Muslims during the Ottoman period and that just a few decades later, Bosnian Muslims, including women, protected their Jewish neighbors during the Nazi occupation. Eli Tauber is a Jewish historian, publicist, advisor for culture and religion at the Union of Jewish communities, the director of the Archives of the Jewish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the founder and president of Association Haggadah, an organization dedicated to preserving and promoting Jewish culture and tradition in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Sarajevo Haggadah originated in Catalonia Spain around 1350, making it one of the oldest surviving Sephardic Haggadahs in the world. It came into possession of the Cohen family in Bosnia, who sold it to the Bosnian National Museum. It was protected during World War II by Derviš Korkut, the Muslim museum librarian who hid it from the Nazis. Korkut also hid a Jewish girl (Mira Papo) in his home; she survived the war and emigrated to Israel, where she petitioned for the Korkuts to be recognized as Righteous Gentiles. During the Bosnian war, the Korkuts' daughter Lamija Jaha and her husband Vllaznim fled across the border into Macedonia with some of their family mementos. One was a photocopy of her parents' Righteous Among the Nations certificate from Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust museum and memorial. They made their

[140] Volkmann, 245.
[141] Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 122-127.

way to Skopje and presented it to the president of the Jewish community who contacted Jerusalem. Lamija and her family were flown to Israel where they were extended asylum.

Another story of inter-religious and inter-generational friendship from Bosnia, also included in Tauber's book *When Neighbors Were Real Human Beings*, is that of Zeyneba Hardaga, the first Muslim woman in the world to be recognized by Yad Vashem for rescuing Jews.[142] The story of the Hardaga family and how they saved Jews and then were saved by them is featured in a short film by Sabina Vajrača, *Sevap Mitzvah* ('A Good Deed'). Hardaga and her family hid the Jewish Kabiljo family in their home and helped them escape from Nazi-occupied Sarajevo. Fifty years later, during the 1992-1995 siege of Sarajevo, the Jewish community helped the Hardagas leave Sarajevo using fake Jewish identity cards and the Kabiljo family secured them a refuge in Israel.[143] The impression is that, in Bosnia at least, the human connection has been more important than religious differences between Muslims and Jews.

Conclusion

This article has shown that Jewish and Muslim women in Habsburg lands were shaped by the distinctly local matricultures in which they lived, even while they shared common experiences of living within the gender norms and restrictions of their religious communities. These norms and restrictions were used in arguments for and against religious reform and for navigating through Habsburg policies towards religious and ethnic minorities. Strong parallels between the religious communities can be found in areas such as education, conversion, marriage, and divorce, and the impact of the Habsburg state's efforts to foster loyalty and prevent the rise of nationalism and rebellion. Notable differences can be seen in the positions taken by the Jewish and Muslim communities on the secular education and social segregation of girls, intermarriage, and divorce, which would have a significant impact on women's lives.

Jewish and Muslim women also took active parts in shaping and preserving matricultures. They advocated for and took advantage of new opportunities for education, used conversion a way to escape from arranged marriages and free themselves from the control of their families, and entered into marriages and engaged in sex work to attain economic

[142] 'Jews And Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina: 'an Example for Europe',' *Sarajevo Times*, 18 February 2026; URL: https://sarajevotimes.com/jews-and-muslims-in-bih-an-example-for-europe-2/. Accessed 24 October 2026.
[143] *Sevap Mitzvah (a good deed)* – short film by Sabina Vajrača; URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAPaGjprKpg&t=16s. Accessed 24 October 2026.

stability and prospects for migration. Jewish and Muslim women both advocated for themselves by demanding education and greater freedom, expressed their views and identities through their writings, and navigated economic and legal situations through marriage, divorce, and the courts. The review of works on Habsburg Jews and Muslims that centre women's lives provides a greater understanding of women's contributions to upholding and shaping traditions, building community, and expressing their identities, effectively shaping their matricultures.

While Jews had a longer and deeper history in and were dispersed more widely throughout Habsburg lands, Muslims mainly lived under Habsburg occupation from 1878-1918 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Women of both communities were affected by state educational initiatives aimed at integrating them, which affected their matricultures, and in both cases, their experiences became focal points for debates on modernization and reform as progressive and regressive views of Jewish and Muslim matriculture contested over women's lives.

Jewish and Muslim women lived separate daily lives for the most part but had parallel and shared experiences: they shared a marginalized status as the Other, underwent the transition to Habsburg rule, played important roles in preserving their autonomy and upholding traditions, cooperated with and adapted to the Austro-Hungarian legal frameworks, and contributed to building voluntary associations.

The application of the framework of matricultures also raises several questions and suggests directions for future research. Both Muslims and Jews, including Jewish women, attended universities. Did Jewish and Muslim students interact with each other? Were there any Muslim women students? How might their experiences and interactions in Bosnia, Vienna, and other university towns have been affected by their matriculture? Regarding intermarriages, more research might be done on how these mixed relationships came about in the first place as well as the impact this had on their matricultures. The experiences of women from other marginalized groups in Habsburg lands might be brought into the conversation. Finally, looking at how religion and cultural norms shaped different women's lives by excluding and restricting them, but also provided them with identity, comfort, and connection, can offer a way to learn from shared experiences, rather than focusing on competing memories, and ultimately bring people together across faiths.

Biography

Alison Rose specializes in Austrian Jewish women's history and is the author of three books, *Jewish Women in Turn of the Century Vienna* (2008) and *Antisemitism, Gender Bias*,

and the "Hervay Affair" of 1904: Bigotry in the Austrian Alps (2016), and *Women, Gender, and Sexuality in the Holocaust* (2026).

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