

Muslims in Slovenia: Between Tolerance and Discrimination

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The article examines the position of Muslims in Slovenia, with a particular focus on the articulation of the needs of an Islamic way of life as conveyed by the Muslims themselves. Using new empirical material, I draw on interviews with representatives of the Muslim community. The Slovenian Muslims find themselves in a peculiar situation of, on the one hand, being tolerated, particularly on account of sharing historical South Slavic bonds with the majority Catholic population; yet, they are at the same time faced with discrimination and prejudice. The research shows that – as Islam remains for the most part secluded from public discourse and thus prone to stereotypical representations pregnant with misconceptions and prejudice – the Muslims in Slovenia experience prejudice, and are exposed to particular discrimination in terms of practicing their religion.

Keywords: MUSLIMS; ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS PRACTICE; DISCRIMINATION; SLOVENIA

1. INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the proliferation of literature dealing with Islam and Muslims in the “West”, academic debate about Islam in Slovenia remains scarce.¹ The rare exceptions are efforts to introduce Islam and the Muslims (Kalčič, 2007a; 2007b; Pašič, 2005; Zalta, 2005), research of Islamophobia (Dragoš, 2004) and analyses of anti-Muslim attitudes (Dragoš, 2003; Kalčič, 2006; Kuhar, 2007; Vrečer, 2006). These studies show that academic interest in Islam developed primarily as a critical evaluation of perceptions of Muslims as *the Others*, as those different from the “core nation” – the Slovenians.² The Slovenian case thus mirrors the global trend of evolution of Muslim populations into a “Muslim minority” that is distinguished from the rest of the population; the “us” versus “them” phenomenon. The Muslims’ position is necessarily to be examined in the wider context of socio-economic exclusion of minority groups; in the present case limiting the analysis to the dimension of religion. Here, the case of Islamic religious practice is selected primarily because, as elsewhere, research in Slovenia has devoted almost no attention to the religious aspect of Muslim policy demands, despite the fact that “the presence of Muslims in Western Europe has exposed the lingering significance of Church-State practices throughout the region” (Soper and Fetzer, 2007:934).

¹ Maussen (2007b) notes that academic research in Western Europe began in the 1980s, focusing on “new Islamic presence” and the “institutionalisation of Islam”, followed by a rise in overview case-studies in the last decade.

² For more on the concept of “core nation”, which signifies ethno-culturally understood nationality that is distinguished from permanent residents and citizens of the state, see Brubaker (1996). For a discussion of the construction of Slovenia’s contemporary Other, see Bajt (2005).

Basing the analysis on studies of nationalism³ that provide the framework for tackling the phenomena of identity construction and production of difference in terms of defining who belongs and who is excluded, I here employ an interdisciplinary perspective in order to grasp the elusive practices of religious discrimination and processes of Othering.⁴ Whereas the perception of Muslims in the “West” is racialised, gendered and burdened by orientalist misconceptions, their position in Slovenia is also particularly intertwined with ethnic prejudice. The paper thus draws on the concepts of intersectionality and multiple discrimination (cf. Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Crenshaw, 1991) as useful theoretical tools that help explain the Muslims’ marginalisation. Research shows that many Muslims throughout Europe believe that they belong to a minority that is discriminated against; even if individuals may not experience personal discrimination, they agree that the ethnic and/or religious group with which they identify suffers from discrimination (Brüß, 2008).

The paper examines the position of Muslims in Slovenia, asking the question of how, if at all, they articulate their needs for an Islamic way of life, making a case for considering anti-Muslim attitudes as concomitant to exclusionary practices. By explicating the Muslims’ perception of intolerance, the analysis shows that they encounter discrimination in areas that connect to the very essence of practicing their religion: religious practice and place of worship, religious holidays, and access to *halal* food. In addition, they experience prejudice, which represents a wider problem of exclusion that ties with nationalistic, Islamophobic and racist classification of Muslims as the Other.⁵

New empirical material is here used in order to give voice to the subject of the analysis, the Muslims in Slovenia (Švab *et al.*, 2008). The qualitative method of semi-structured interview creates a unique platform for representatives of the Muslim community to reflect on their position. Between October 2007 and June 2008 I conducted seven interviews with informants; four representatives of the Muslim community in Slovenia, two university professors – experts on issues of religion, who were able to reflect on the position of Islam more widely, and one state official.⁶ Drawing on this new material, the paper moves from an overview of particularities of Islamophobia in Slovenia to examining the selected Islamic religious practices.

³ The field of nationalism research is as wide as it is transdisciplinary; for a comprehensive overview see for instance Smith (1998) or Hearn (2006).

⁴ See, for example, Triandafyllidou (1998).

⁵ Recent public opinion polls reveal that 23–29 % of respondents would not wish to have a Muslim neighbour (Toš, 2004).

⁶ The interviewees were dr. Drago Čepar, Director of the Office for Religious Communities; mufti Nedžad Grabus (Islamic Community); imam Osman Đogić (Slovenian Muslim Community); Faila Pašić Bišić (Philanthropic Humanitarian Society UP); Layla Malus (Centre for Intercivilisational Understanding, Muslim Humanitarian Association Merhamet); dr. Anja Zalta (University of Primorska) and dr. Aleš Črnič (University of Ljubljana). The interviews were conducted as part of the research project “Consequences of Discrimination on Social and Political Inclusion of Youth in Slovenia”, funded by Slovenian Research Agency, Governmental Office for Equal Opportunities and Governmental Office for Growth (2006–2008); based at the Centre for Social Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana and carried out in association with The Peace Institute, Ljubljana, and Science and Research Centre Koper, University of Primorska; project leader Alenka Švab.

2. WHO ARE THE SLOVENIAN MUSLIMS?

Islam is a highly diverse religion and it is important not to essentialise “Muslim”, particularly when taking into account many religion’s varieties, as well as numerous identities each individual has in addition to her or his religious affiliation. Moreover, ethnic, linguistic, political, economic and other differences among Muslims significantly contribute to the diversity within the Muslim population. The term “Muslim” inevitably means different things to different people, reflecting the heterogeneity of the community of the devotees of Islam. It comprises both theological and sociological dimension, since the (self)classification of somebody as a Muslim may be contested by other Muslims, and may be applied to social groups because of their supposed “cultural background”, rather than religiosity.⁷ In her ethnographic research among the Bosniaks of an industrial Slovenian town Jesenice, Kalčič (2007a) registered a divide between the so-called “real” and “unreal” Muslims. The former are also called “the new Muslims” by the other group, describing those who follow the scriptures and observe all facets of Islam. These “new Muslims”, in turn, deny the designation “Muslim” to the Bosniaks who tie their religion to their cultural traditions, not necessarily observing all the religious practices. Kalčič elaborates on tensions between these two communities, providing exhaustive evidence of the heterogeneity of what is usually subsumed under the identity of being a Muslim.

Contrary to Bloul’s (2008) argument about ethnicisation of Muslim identity resulting from cycles of assertion and discrimination that are linked to waves of Islamophobia, the Muslims in Slovenia have always been ethnicised; first as “Turks” (i.e. the Ottomans)⁸ and in more recent history as “Bosnians”. The Muslim populations began settling in Slovenia predominantly in the 1970s as economic migrants from other republics of Yugoslavia. Another significant influx of Muslims was in the 1990s, when refugees fled war-torn Yugoslavia – most from Bosnia-Herzegovina. The socio-historic position of Muslims in Slovenia is hence a peculiar mix of “different, yet the same” developments as witnessed in Western Europe. The Muslims in both cases largely comprise “immigrants”, who were deemed to “come and go” and hence Islam initially remained a religion secluded to the private sphere. Instead, many stayed, brought their families, and a “second generation” was born. This trajectory can also be traced in the case of the refugees, whose protracted status of temporary protection highlights the fact that Slovenia had not expected nor enabled their permanent settlement for a number of years.

According to official statistics, 47,488 people in Slovenia are of Islamic faith, representing 2.4 % of the respondents who chose a religious affiliation, thus making Islam the second largest religion in this majority Catholic country of two million

⁷ The term “Muslim” has a double meaning in Slovenian language: spelled *muslimani* it signifies a religious affiliation, while the spelling *Muslimani* designates Muslims in ethnic sense, not necessarily corresponding with Islamic religious practice. Introduced into the Yugoslav census in 1971, the term “Muslim” allowed people to choose an affiliation that demarcated them from other nationalities (e.g. Serbs or Croats), creating a secular Muslim identity. In 1994, the constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BIH) introduced an archaic ethnonym “Bosniak” (*Bošnjak*), which signifies the Muslim identity.

⁸ Compare the extensive body of literature about the “Turkish incursions” when “Slovenian ancestors” were continuously under threat from the “Turks”, who are vastly portrayed as vicious and blood-thirsty savages. For more, see Zalta (2005), Kalčič (2006; 2007a).

inhabitants. Most Muslims in Slovenia are urban dwellers (Kalčič, 2007b). Although there are no surveys on the diversity of Slovenia's Muslim population, there are evident linguistic and ethnic differences among them, since they are not only Bosniaks, but also Albanians, Roma, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Slovenians, etc. Also, several Muslims from African and Middle Eastern countries, most of whom came to study in times of Yugoslavia, settled in Slovenia, and in recent years asylum seekers from states with predominantly Muslim populations (e.g. Iraq, Iran, Turkey, some former Soviet republics), yet these represent a small minority. Compared to the majority population, the position of Muslims in terms of employment and educational achievement is worse. Their unemployment rates, also related to lower levels of education, are higher than average (EUMC, 2006), their access to the labour market, payment and possibilities of promotion are lower. Whether lower position on the labour market is related to one's religion or ethnicity is hard to establish, since prejudice against Muslims ties with pejorative association of "Non-Slovenians", "southerners" or "Balkanites".⁹ The prevalent negative stereotyping of members of other Yugoslav nations is tied with the fact that significant numbers of Muslims came to Slovenia as internal Yugoslav economic migrants who found work in low-skill sectors of industry.

Nevertheless, in opposition to Muslim populations of Turks in Germany, East Asians in Britain or Africans in France, whose linguistic and "cultural" differences are often argued to be insurmountable, the Muslims in Slovenia are in majority South Slavs like Slovenians, speaking mutually intelligible languages and sharing the historical legacy of Yugoslavia. Their "Muslimness" is accepted as part of their identity and tolerated as long as it remains secluded to the private sphere. Claiming that the Muslims in Slovenia are *tolerated*, I invoke Kuzmanič's (2004) discussion of (in)tolerance, highlighting the inherent majority-minority relationship that it entails, and adding that tolerance by no means should be mistaken for equality. It is in this view that intolerance should be regarded as not only a problematic absence of the very minimum necessary for coexistence (i.e. tolerance), but a phenomenon dangerously tied to exclusionary bias, such as can be observed in instances of Islamophobia.

3. PREJUDICE AND ANTI-MUSLIM ATTITUDES

"Muslims of Slovenia have a strong wish to be an active part of the population but we're very often considered foreigners [...] Muslims are experiencing Islamophobic attacks that go from verbal threats to physical attacks. But the data on religiously motivated incidents is gathered only in limited form." (Fajla Pašić Bišić, a practicing Muslim)

Intolerance towards Muslims in Slovenia stems from negative stereotypes that are not exempt from school curricula and that are reproduced by the media (cf. Kalčič, 2006; Dragoš, 2003; Kuhar, 2007). In recent years, anti-Muslim attitudes are tied with Islamophobia that intensified after 9/11. Even though this is related to the "war on ter-

⁹ For an elaboration of pejorative terms associated with members of the former Yugoslav nations, see Velikonja (2003), Bajt (2005), Kalčič (2007a).

ror” dictum that stigmatises as violent and dangerous all Muslims on account of a few extremists, the Slovenian Islamophobia originates from a different source. Rather than being a response to Islamic fundamentalism, it has a longer history: it is “a reaction to the failure of compulsive assimilation” (Dragoš, 2004:11). It is also a consequence of biased and Eurocentric teachings of history, as well as an outcome of a nationalising Slovenian nationalism that uses “culture” in exclusionary way (Bajt, 2005). Tied with their often corresponding Bosniak ethnicity and lower social class, the Muslims are grounded in the context of the Other and as such vilified. Since most Muslims in Slovenia subscribe to the Bosniak ethnic affiliation, their position is inevitably connected to their minority status not only as a religious group but also as an ethnic group that is denied the status of a national minority.¹⁰ They experience juxtaposing of the ethnic marker “Bosniak” with Eurocentric perceptions of “the south” (i.e. the Balkans), toppled with socio-economic exclusion reflected in lower educational achievements and low-skill professions.¹¹ These multiple layers of discrimination are hard to disentangle:

“It doesn’t have to do with religion, the reason can be that Muslims come from parts of ex Yugoslavia [...] Is it because they’re from so-called “south” or is it because they’re Muslims?” (Imam Osman Đogić)

Psychological violence in the form of derisions, verbal insults and name-calling is the most prevalent form of negative attitudes experienced by Muslims in everyday life. Existing research (Kalčić, 2007a) confirms that Muslims experience multiple discrimination; particularly salient in terms of employment, it is exhibited in low skill positions and barriers to achieving workplace promotion. These practices of discrimination can be observed already in school, as Muslim students are advised not to pursue further education, but are instead geared into lower skill professions (cf. Razpotnik, 2004). Pašić (2005:108) notes that average education for a Muslim in Slovenia is 9.2 years, corresponding to primary-school educational level. The mechanisms of the Muslims’ structural subordination thus reveal intersections of a wide array of dimensions, e.g. their lower social, economic and political position, which cannot all be addressed here.

4. ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Slovenia’s constitution specifies secularity by separating the state from religious communities and granting equal rights to all religious communities.¹² In February 2007 the Religious Freedom Act was adopted, which further guarantees religious freedom in private and public life, as well as prohibits discrimination, incitement of religious hatred and intolerance.¹³ Despite its long-awaited adoption, the Act was not universally

¹⁰ For more on national minorities, see Kralj in this volume.

¹¹ Research supports numerous anecdotal evidence that lower education and consequent low-skill professions are also related to, on the one hand, the vicious circle of structural inequalities, reproduced by the majority society, and on the other hand, to lower expectations for and aspirations of the Muslims (cf. Razpotnik, 2004). The multifarious structural underpinnings, as well as the inherent influence of nationalistic prejudice, related to such stigmatisation, cannot be fully addressed here.

¹² Article 7, *Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia*.

¹³ Articles 2 and 3, *Religious Freedom Act*.

welcomed, but adopted without broader political consensus or support of the experts. One of the most common criticisms has been the claim that the law favours the Roman Catholic Church particularly at the expense of smaller religious communities (Babić *et al.*, 2007).

The government signed special agreements with five religious communities, including the Islamic community in Slovenia, which entered into force in July 2007.¹⁴ According to the data of the Office for Religious Communities, 43 churches and other religious communities are registered in Slovenia, though estimates speak of about 80 different religious communities (Dragoš, 2006). In 1976, the first 9 communities were registered, including the Islamic community (*Islamska skupnost*). In 2006, the Slovenian Muslim Community (*Slovenska muslimanska skupnost*) was registered, signalling disagreements about the way that the Muslims in Slovenia should be represented. Though this internal split has to a certain extent resonated in tensions among the Muslims, the two communities should be regarded as equally justified in their existence, particularly in view of constitutional freedom of religion and equality of all religious communities.¹⁵

4.1. The mosque

Despite formal anti-discrimination provisions and constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom, legal relationship between the state and religious communities lacks corresponding implementation in practice. The issue of a mosque is the most obvious reminder of a systematic disregard of the Muslim community's rights. Mosques are quintessential Islamic symbols and as such, they represent the evolution of Islam from the private to the public sphere: "Whereas, in the past, Muslims in Europe were isolated within invisible and private prayer rooms, the mosque openly, publicly and visibly marks an Islamic presence" (Cesari, 2005:1018). Conflicts over the building of mosques depend on the level of legitimacy acquired by the Muslims in the public sphere. Discussions on mosque establishment have been studied in different European cities and research shows that usually projects involving the construction of a mosque are faced with resistance of local communities.¹⁶ The level of resistance reflects the degree of acceptance of Islam in a particular environment; therefore, the debates that surround the plans for establishing a mosque can serve as a litmus test that provides access to broader discussions on the Islamic presence. Because "the mosque debates"

¹⁴ The agreement is of merely declaratory nature and has 11 points, which specify the legal position of the Islamic community in accordance with the constitution and other legal regulations.

¹⁵ With the collapse of Yugoslavia the Islamic Community of Yugoslavia fell apart as well, thus from 1994 onward the Islamic Community of Slovenia has been operating under the wing of the Islamic Community of BIH, with Sarajevo as its centre. As a consequence of the 2005 incident, when the then mufti Đogić was ousted from his position in Slovenia by the BIH Islamic Community's Assembly, a separate Slovenian Muslim Community was formed that renounces the BIH primacy. Đogić maintains that the Islamic Community, with longer presence and bigger membership, has been privileged in the media to the detriment of the younger Slovenian Muslim Community's ability to appear in the public discourse as an equally valid representative of the Muslims in Slovenia.

¹⁶ See special issue of *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* on mosque conflicts in Europe, 2005, 31(6).

highlight the issues related to the Muslim religious practice, they inadvertently also reveal the state of general acceptance of the Muslim rights.

The Muslims in Slovenia can observe their religious rites in several prayer rooms, yet they do not have a mosque. Having lodged the first request for a mosque in 1969, the question of the Islamic religious and cultural centre in Ljubljana has become a political issue that spurred extensive public debate particularly in recent years, revealing a spectrum of anti-Muslim attitudes.¹⁷ Though these various Islamophobic manifestations cannot be addressed here, they reveal widespread anti-Muslim prejudice. And even though the Constitutional Court blocked the referendum on building a mosque in Ljubljana municipality (which represented a blatantly Islamophobic attempt to thwart the Muslims' religious rights) and though the latest agreements between the mayor and the Islamic Community about the location of the mosque give hope that the issue will finally be resolved, the Muslims nevertheless feel they are being treated as second-grade citizens.

Putting things in perspective, Dragoš (2006) made a detailed numerical comparison with the number of Catholic churches in Slovenia, calculating that 125 mosques would have to exist in order to provide a comparable ratio of believers per religious object. No such claims were ever made by the Muslim community; the debate is about building one mosque in Ljubljana. Maussen (2007a:995) makes a similar comparison when tracking the years-long debate about establishing a mosque in Marseilles, summarised by one French journalist with: "Marseilles: 117 church bells ... zero minarets". The minarets seem to be particularly "problematic" also in the Slovenian case because, while the prayer rooms have obviously remained unnoticed, a mosque cannot be ignored. Regardless of the nature of the Muslim community's request, local communities are likely to respond with an initial refusal, which then constitutes the beginning of a dialogue and negotiation involving leaders of the Muslim community, local, city and regional authorities (Cesari, 2005). With resistance to new mosques dissipating in France and Britain, Slovenia is kept company by Germany, but particularly Italy and Spain, where such projects encounter various obstacles.¹⁸

"For sure there are powers that have been working against the existence of a mosque [...] Of course we expect from the authorities that this will finally be resolved [...] In the Constitution ... this is guaranteed by the Agreement that we signed – and now we are only demanding that this is put to practice." (Mufti Nedžad Grabus)

4.2. Religious holidays

Public holidays in Slovenia correspond with Catholic holidays and Muslims are left to their own devices when it comes to celebration of religious holidays. The in-

¹⁷ See analyses of media and political discourse on the mosque establishment in Kotnik (2003), Pajnik (2003), Dragoš (2003; 2004) and Kalčič (2006). Note also that in December 2008, when the Ljubljana mayor and mufti signed a contract on the sale of plots for constructing the mosque, intolerant discourse again escalated.

¹⁸ See note 16.

formants reveal that it is a common practice for parents to write excuses for their children to be able to miss school on Ramadan, while staying away from work depends on the nature of relationship with employers. Most often, Muslim employees take a day off from work, though there are instances when they are prevented to do so.

“As a child I wasn’t able to celebrate Islamic religious holidays (very negative attitude of teachers) [...] Muslims who celebrate holidays in Slovenia have to make up for missing days at work or take leave.” (Faila Pašić Bišić, a practicing Muslim)

The Muslim representatives agree that it would be beneficial if this area was more regulated. If labour legislation envisioned the right to a free day in order to observe religious holidays, employers would be prevented from obstructing their employees to take a day off. It is important to emphasise that neither mufti Grabus nor imam Đogić deny the primacy to Catholic Church in Slovenia. This illustrates, on the one hand, that the Muslim community has adopted a defensive position, wilfully recognising its minority status. In other words, by waiving the right to equality, they opt for mere tolerance. On the other hand, it confirms the tacit adherence to the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*. Accepting their subjugated position, rather than demanding the enactment of constitutionally prescribed equality of all religious communities, the Islamic community is inherently reserving the right to primacy in “its own” lands. The Muslims do not oppose public celebration of Catholic holidays, reasoning that they live in a Catholic country, where the primacy of Catholic Church should be respected. As a consequence, rather than questioning the current selection of public holidays in Slovenia or demanding free days to observe their own holy days, they are merely suggesting that it would be good if the Muslims could be spared working for at least the two days per year when they celebrate Ramadan.

4.3. Daily prayer

Labour Law in Slovenia does not consider religious practice at workplace, thus the right to pray is not envisioned among the employees’ needs. The only exception is the right to pastoral care for military and police personnel, though even this provision lacks full implementation in practice. My informants confirm that Muslims lack religious care in hospitals and military, though the issue of prayer is of most importance and the possibility to pray at workplace represents a significant concern for many believers. Whether or not they are able to observe their religious practice often depends on their relationship with the employer; if they are on good terms with the leading cadre, the Muslim employees are usually allowed to pray, though this is not always the case. Even when they are able to come to an agreement regarding their need to pray at workplace, the issue of space becomes apparent. In most cases the place for praying is inappropriate:

“I used to go bowing [praying] during working hours in our cloakroom. I was uncomfortable there because all our things were there; that somebody would say that anything went missing.” (Layla Malus, a practicing Muslim)

Research shows that many Muslims are afraid to bring up the issue of praying during working hours, revealing intersecting exclusion based on religion and ethnicity. Unable to speak Slovenian “properly” or convinced that their “accent” would “give them away”, it is not uncommon for Muslims to refrain from speaking out altogether. This acceptance of marginality has been observed in numerous social contexts and can be argued to contribute to an ever-greater exclusion when a person’s prescribed ethnicity is augmented by religious difference.

“People don’t even ask, because they’re afraid of saying anything, afraid of this ‘no’. I’m not afraid of it. I’m a Slovenian and also because of this I’m thinking ‘Why can’t I practice my religion in my own country, like I want it?!’” (Layla Malus, a practicing Muslim)

“I think that very few Muslims in Slovenia enable themselves to practice praying at workplace. Because it’s easier to avoid challenges.” (Faila Pašič Bišić, a practicing Muslim)

My informants point out that most Muslims choose not to expose themselves by bringing attention to their religion. They usually do not ask for the enactment of their religious needs, afraid of being misunderstood and not accepted by their employers, colleagues and their general social environment. This confirms that the Muslim community in Slovenia is in a phase that lies somewhere in between the seclusion of religion to the private sphere and the first attempts to enter the public sphere by taking part in debates about Islam and becoming more vocal about the rights of Muslim believers. The fact that the Muslims remain associated with lower social classes, whose educational levels are below average, renders their position one of a multiple minority, based on religion, ethnicity and class. While the new generation of educated Muslim leaders in France and Britain is successfully negotiating Muslim demands and achieving acceptance of their proposals by the community at large (Cesari, 2005), mufti Grabus notes:

“In order to talk about problems or position of the Islamic community, we have to understand its cadres; who are the people working in the Islamic community, how can they articulate their interests [...] We in Slovenia really have a big problem with cadre.”

4.4. Halal food and hijab as test cases of how a society relates to Islam¹⁹

Following from examples of other European states and their experiences with accommodating the Muslim religious needs, Slovenia appears a latecomer in terms of state provisions, the level of public debate on issues of religious freedoms, and in terms of the Muslim community’s organisation and ability to express its demands unequivocally. The provision of *halal* meat and reactions to the issue of headscarves

¹⁹ *Halal* means proper and legitimate, conforming to dietary laws, signifying meat from animals that have been slaughtered in the prescribed way according to the shariah. *Hijab* is adopted here to mean “wearing the veil” or “headscarf” that conceals women’s hair and neck, though the term has a wider meaning (see Abu-Rabia (2006) and Kalčić (2007a) for discussion).

serve as paradigmatic test cases that reveal the specificity of a society's relation to Islam. Governments of particular states vary widely in their responses to the religious needs of Muslims, reflecting different historical legacies of church-state relations, as well as contemporary national policies of integration. Thus, while France is unwilling to accommodate the religious requirements of its Muslim residents, and Britain is usually cited as a country where such needs are more openly accepted, Germany remains a "hybrid" case, with notable sub-state differences in treatment of the Muslims depending on its particular *Länder* legislations (Soper and Fetzer, 2007). In Britain and France, for example, the debate about the need for provision of *halal* food opened the path of the Muslims' entering the public sphere in the early 1980s (Grillo, 2004). Followed by expression of other demands, the Muslims increasingly articulated their needs, participated in public debates and refused to restrict Islam to the private sphere.

As the second largest religious group in Slovenia, the Muslims have the ungrateful task of being the first to bring attention to their dietary requirements. *Halal* meat has only recently become available and the selection on offer is very limited (Kalčič, 2007b). The issue is reportedly most problematic in schools, where Muslim children's ability to choose an alternative meal is usually not available. Some progress has been made, as certain schools enable their Muslim pupils to refrain from certain foods. Nevertheless, in most schools the issue of special dietary requirements still has not been opened, thus parents resolve this by packing lunch for their children. This measure, practical as it is in view of absence of other alternatives, segregates the Muslim children by making them visibly different and instantly recognisable as opposed to their fellow pupils who can eat the food that school cafeterias provide. Though mufti Grabus notes that this issue is not a general concern, since some schools have introduced satisfactory solutions (particularly where Muslim pupils are a group of significant size), the lack of provision of *halal* food is a significant drawback. Mufti is pleased with responses of the relevant authorities, reporting that certain officials are quick to lend their ear in search of solutions. At the same time, he maintains that the problem lies in not defining whose prerogative it actually is to resolve such matters, representing a system failure and an ongoing downside of Slovenia's many well-defined bills and declarations, which lack implementation in practice.

Provision of *halal* meat being one of the test cases, wearing *hijab* presents another important example of the state's resolve between secularism and accommodation of religious practices. Muslim women who wear headscarves and dress according to Islamic code stand out as different especially in societies where they represent a curious minority. This is the case for Muslim women in Slovenia who wear *hijab*; their numbers are small and their dress code makes them highly visible. The reaction of the majority population is usually one of curiosity, since *hijab* represents a novelty that people are not used to seeing. However, the prevalence of prejudice combined with the lack of knowledge about Islam together contribute to greater exposure to negative attitudes that the Muslim women endure if they appear visibly identifiable as Muslims:

"Muslims are more visible; women maybe even more in this environment because they're so few. [...] When I decided to cover, I can't say that any incidents hap-

pened or that anyone attacked me, but I did notice weird glances here and there; I am different after all, because of different dress.” (Layla Malus, a practicing Muslim)

A contributing factor to women’s exposure to anti-Muslim attitudes is the widely spread belief in their oppression and subjugation. Orientalist images of Muslim women breed generalisations and stigmatise them, particularly through representations of covered women. *Hijab* is thus associated with religious fundamentalism and the Western gaze sees it as a symbol of inferiority (Abu-Rabia, 2006; Kalčić, 2007a). In Slovenia, only a handful of women choose to follow the Islamic dress code. My informants explain who the women who wear *hijab* are, confirming Kalčić’s (2007a) observation that Muslim women have in the last decade or so began forming a new identity that ties with Islam:

“We now have a phenomenon: these older and these new generations. New generations are educated. Women who decide for this [to wear hijab] are more secure [...] It’s much easier if a person speaks Slovenian and wears a headscarf. If she doesn’t speak the language, then [...] For somebody wearing a headscarf, the prejudice is probably that she’s backward, without the possibilities that others have, but these are really prejudices. [...] Some members of Islamic community wear headscarf but when they go to university they take it off and then they’re ‘normal’. [...] They think that it’s easier this way, rather than being under scrutiny every day.” (Mufti Nedžad Grabus)

Young educated Muslim women “across the social structure are returning to wearing the veil” (Abu-Rabia, 2006:92). While wearing *hijab* and observing Islamic religious practice has come to represent a new identity for some young Muslim women in Slovenia as well, they remain a minority, since many at the same time still feel pressured to assimilate into the majority society. Research shows that it is particularly education and employment where the Muslims feel most pressure to refrain from publicly professing their religion. Rather than wearing *hijab* to school, university or work, women report choosing to “blend in” instead. Fearing discriminatory treatment by their colleagues, professors or employers they note that observing Islamic dress code would draw too much unwanted attention. My Muslim informants list examples of being denied employment because of Islamic dress code. This opens up questions about the delicate balance between state professed ideal of secularity and the right to express one’s religion freely:

“A person practising Islamic dress code is very exposed in Slovenian public. The duty of such Muslim women to accept all conditions of employers is accentuated, while there’s very limited readiness on the side of employers to enable a friendly process of integration into a working environment [...] In one hospital a nurse who practiced Islamic dress code was prevented from gaining suitable employment. Now, when she abandoned such dress code, she is employed as a nurse in the same institution.” (Faila Pašić Bišić, a practicing Muslim)

5. CONCLUSION

In opposition to publicly professed demands for a greater role in public life characteristic of the Catholic Church, minority religious communities in Slovenia are rarely heard. Rather than being vocal about their demands, they couch their discourse in terms of rights as specified by the constitution and legal stipulations. Aware of Islamophobia and affected by prejudice, the position adopted by Muslim representatives when in public is carefully considered in order to come across as non-conflictual as possible. When asked about any potential barriers to equity in terms of religious rights, they rationalise that the state simply cannot grant all the religious communities' demands. While my informants are very cautious when using the term "discrimination", noting that all grievances should be verified before any public complaints are made, they do point to unequal positioning on the labour market and the problems experienced by Muslims when practicing their religion, as well as the varieties of social and ethnic distance. This paper focused on the question of provisions for Islamic religious practice as explicated by the Muslim representatives; a topic that has so far remained unaddressed. The lack of provisions for religious practice and anti-Muslim attitudes were argued to be of greatest concern.

The Slovenian Islamic community is a late-comer in terms of its ability to express its demands unequivocally and remains in a phase that lies somewhere in between the seclusion of religion to the private sphere and the first attempts to enter the public sphere by taking part in debates about Islam and becoming more vocal about the rights of Muslim believers. The fact that the Muslims remain associated with lower social classes, whose educational levels are below average, renders their position one of a multiple minority, based on religion, ethnicity and class. An important conclusion is in recognising the perpetuation of marginality, which stems from intersections of religion, ethnicity and class. Though the Slovenian Muslims are in majority citizens of Slovenia, whose rights and privileges should be respected, the gap between legal provisions and their implementation in practice remains significant. Moreover, Slovenia has much to learn in terms of state provisions for religious practice.

As confirmed by the new empirical material presented here and exhibited by the test cases of availability of *halal* meat and reactions to women wearing *hijab*, the position of Muslims in Slovenia remains somewhere in between tolerance and discrimination. On the one hand, Islam is tolerated, the Muslims' religious rights are formally recognised and the officials are gradually making progress in accommodating their religious needs, albeit predominantly based on various EU legislative provisions (e.g. anti-discrimination declarations). On the other hand, Islam is far from "accepted" in Slovenia and the present research confirms the existence of deeply seated prejudice, which fuels discrimination, as well as the blatant disregard of the Muslims' right to have a mosque. What remains to be seen is which path Slovenia will take when it comes to church-state relations and the equity in granting also minority religious communities' policy needs.

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MUSLIMANI U SLOVENIJI: IZMEĐU TOLERANCIJE I DISKRIMINACIJE

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Članak razmatra položaj muslimana u Sloveniji, posebno se osvrćući na njihove potrebe pri prakticiranju islamskoga načina života. Iznoseći nove empirijske podatke, članak se oslanja na intervjue s predstavnicima muslimanske zajednice. Slovenski muslimani nalaze se u specifičnoj situaciji: s jedne strane, oni su tolerirani, dugujući to naročito zajedničkim južnoslavenskim povijesnim vezama s većinskim katoličkim stanovništvom, dok se, s druge strane, suočavaju s diskriminacijom i predrasudama. Istraživanje pokazuje da – kao što i islam uglavnom ostaje izvan javnoga diskursa i tako izložen stereotipima, bremenitim krivim predodžbama i predrasudama – muslimani u Sloveniji ostaju ispostavljeni predrasudama i izloženi diskriminaciji u vezi s prakticiranjem svoje religije.

Ključne riječi: MUSLIMANI; ISLAMSKA RELIGIOZNA PRAKSA; DISKRIMINACIJA; SLOVENIJA