GENDER AND RELIGION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE
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Muslim Women in Poland and Lithuania. Tatar Tradition, Religious Practice, *hijab* and Marriage

Kobiety muzułmańskie w Polsce i na Litwie. Tatarska tradycja, praktyki religijne, zasłona i małżeństwo

INTRODUCTION

Muslim women in Poland and Lithuania are not numerous, because Muslims constitute only a small percentage of the total Polish and Lithuanian population. The population of Muslims in Poland is estimated at about 25-35 thousand[1], which represents 0.07-0.09% of the total population of Poland (Nalborczyk 2006, 62). In Lithuania, according to the national census in 2001, there were 2,860 Muslims, and they account for 0.08% of the country's population (Statistics Lithuania 2005).[2]

However, Polish and Lithuanian Muslim women form a very interesting and quite specific group when contrasted with Muslim women of other European countries. First of all, they can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of Tatar women, who are born Muslim, and the second of convert Muslim women, who are the wives and of daughters of Muslim immigrants, the latter born Muslim. The two groups differ, in most cases, in their outlook on the place of a woman in religion and marriage and whether it is necessary for Muslim

[1] The Polish national population census does not include a question about religion; therefore it is necessary to rely on estimates.

[2] Of these, 1679 were ethnic Tatars, 362 Azeris, 185 Lithuanians, 74 Russians (Statistics Lithuania 2005).

For the year 2008 some sources estimated a total number of nominal Muslims at about 7000. There could be more refugees of Muslim background, perhaps around 700, mainly Chechens.

women to wear a headscarf (that is some kind of *hijab*). Moreover, there are differences in their outlook on the functioning of religion in society.

The second group of Muslim women, that is, the wives and daughters of immigrants, who in Poland and Lithuania are predominantly of Arab origin, do not differ greatly from their counterparts in other European countries, including the Western ones, in their attitude towards Islam.

Tatar women, however, are a unique group. Their contemporary life, their present way of functioning in the religious community and their opinions are influenced by the past history of the presence of Tatar Muslims in Polish and Lithuanian territories, as well as by their social situation.

1. THE HISTORY OF THE ISLAMIC PRESENCE IN POLAND AND LITHUANIA

The first Muslims appeared in Lithuanian territories in the fourteenth century (Tyszkiewicz 2002, 15). They were Tatars who originated from the Mongol state of the Golden Horde, which was established in Eastern Europe and whose rulers in the thirteenth century officially accepted Islam (Borawski and Dubiński 1986, 15).

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania shared its borders with the Golden Horde and fought against it. Therefore, prisoners of war were the first Muslims to settle within Lithuanian lands (Tyszkiewicz 2002, 16; Tyszkiewicz 1989, 146). Later, however, mercenaries constituted the largest group among Muslim settlers (Tyszkiewicz 1989, 122f). They were brought to Lithuania in the fifteenth century by the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Vytautas the Great (Sobczak 1984, 20-23) and were used to fight the enemies of Lithuania, including the Order of the Teutonic Knights of St. Mary's Hospital in Jerusalem, known in Polish as *Krzyżacy* (the Teutonic Knights) (Tyszkiewicz 1989, 125, 183).[3]

In return for military service, Tatar mercenaries were granted fief (Sobczak 1984, 25). In subsequent centuries more Tatar mercenaries were brought to the lands of Lithuania (Tyszkiewicz 2002, 16f) and it is estimated that during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the population of Muslims in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania reached 25 000.[4] In addition to land rights, Tatars were granted the right to practice their religion, erect mosques and serve under their own Tatar banners[5] (Tyszkiewicz 1989, 298-299).

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[3] Lithuania was the last country in Europe to be Christianized in 1385, and was invaded by the Order on many occasions.

[4] Some sources suggest that Muslim population reached 100 000, but historians question these figures; see Sobczak (1984, 43 and on).

[5] The banner (Pol. chorągiew) was a basic administrative unit of cavalry in both the Crown

The grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland (at that time known as the Crown of the Polish Kingdom, Pol. Korona Polska) had been in personal union – that is, shared a common ruler – since 1386. The first Tatars were brought to Polish territories in the seventeenth century (Sobczak 1984, 34-38). They settled mainly in Podlachia (Pol. Podlasie), where in 1679 they were granted land by the King John III Sobieski (Tyszkiewicz 2002, 20).[6] Tatars served in the Polish army (Miśkiewicz 1993, 25-26) and fought, among others, in the Battle of Vienna in 1683 against the armies of the Ottoman Empire. There were also Tatar craftsmen, mainly tanners, and translators of oriental languages (Tyszkiewicz 1989, 214) – in time they became a part of the lower middle class, who liked to consider themselves to be minor gentry.

For reasons of military service and fief ownership, most Tatars in practice belonged to the noble class (Borawski and Dubiński 1986, 85-87), and in the second half of the seventeenth century their status almost equalled that of Christian Polish-Lithuanian *szlachta* (the Polish name for the nobility) (Borawski 1986, 178-180). The legal status of their land ownership was changed from fief to hereditary in the second half of the eighteenth century (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 31f), and in the Constitution of 3 May 1791 they received full political rights (Bohdanowicz, Chazbijewicz, and Tyszkiewicz 1997, 14) and the guarantee of freedom of religion (Miśkiewicz and Kamocki 2004, 40-41).

The Tatars living in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School who enjoyed freedom of religion, and there were no serious attempts to convert them to Christianity (Borawski and Dubiński 1986, 74). On the lands they inhabited they were allowed to erect mosques on royal privileges. They were organized in religious communities concentrated around mosques called *jami* (Pol. 'dżami', Arab. *jamī'*) (Sobczak 1984, 77).

In 1795 Poland ceased to exist as an independent state as a result of the Third Partition carried out by Russia, Prussia and Austria. The lands inhabited by Tatars found themselves under Russian authority. Tatars were repressed and subjected to Russifcation, because they took part in uprisings against Russia (Tyszkiewicz 2002, 21).

Poland attained independent statehood in 1918 after 132 years of partitions, but became involved in the Polish-Bolshevik War in 1919. When in 1921 the

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and Lithuanian army. It consisted on average of 100 to 200 horsemen and was commanded by *Chorąży* (Standard-bearer); there were, most importantly, district banners (chorągiew ziemska) formed by knights of the district, as well as clan banners (chorągiew rodowa) formed by clans, court banners (nadworna chorągiew królewska), Tatar banners (chorągiew tatarska) and Cossack banners (chorągiew kozacka).

[6] In two of the villages on this land, Bohoniki and Kruszyniany, are still Muslim communities, mosques and *mizars* (cemeteries). To this day, there are also Tatars living in Krynki, Suchowola and Sokółka.

war ended, apart from Podlachia, only a part of the territories inhabited by Tatars were within the Polish border. Nowadays these territories, known as the Vilnius Region (Pol. Litwa wileńska), belong to Lithuania. – and Vilnius, the present-day capital of Lithuania, was then one of the largest groupings of Muslims in Poland. The other part of Lithuanian lands formed a separate state with its capital in Kaunas.

In Poland Muslim Tatars enjoyed freedom of religion and Islam was officially recognized by the Polish State in 1936 in an Act defining the relationship between the State and the Muslim Religious Union (Pol. *Muzułmański Związek Wyznaniowy*),[7] a denominational organization established in 1925.

After the Second World War all the territories of Lithuania were incorporated into the USSR (the Lithuanian SSR and the Byelorussian SSR). This was a difficult time for Muslims as mosques were pulled down and the Soviets imposed atheization. During this period, immigrants from the Muslim republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus settled in the Lithuanian SSR.

Poland retained only a small proportion of the territories inhabited by Tatars (about 10%). However, as a result of migration programs (called "repatriation" by the Soviets), many Muslim Tatars were resettled by force from the lands taken over by the USSR into the so-called "Western Territories". The "Western Territories" had been a part of Poland at different times in the past, but had belonged to Germany before the Second World War and were left by the majority of Germans – some voluntarily, some as a result of expulsion – after the war.

In 1947 the Muslim Religious Union was reactivated, but then it was supervised by the state, and has operated ever since on the basis of the Act of 1936. As a result of postwar migrations Muslim Tatars were dispersed, there was lack of Islamic clergy, of places of prayer and of religion teachers. Therefore for years the functions of imams were held by Tatars who had been educated before the war (Nalborczyk 2006, 234).

After 1989, as a result of political transitions and the change of the government system, Poland and Lithuania became democratic states. The rights and freedoms, which were in accordance with European standards, were restored to the citizens, and these included the freedom of conscience and religion. Sunni Islam was recognised by the Lithuanian state as one of the nine "traditional" faiths according to the law adopted in 1995. The main Muslim organization in Lithuania, the Spiritual Center of the Lithuanian Sunni Muslims – Muftiate (Lith. *Lietuvos Musulmonų Sunitų Dvasinis Centras – Muftijatas*), was established 1998. It is dominated by Lithuanian Tatars.

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[7] For more details of this Act see Sobczak (2004, 173f).

In the late 1980s other Muslims started to come to Poland and Lithuania. These were mostly Arab students who established their own organizations, and in 2004 registered their own denominational organization, the Muslim League (Pol. *Liga Muzułmańska*). In Lithuania, an Arab dominated organization was also established: the Lithuanian Muslim Youth Society (Lith. *Lietuvos musulmonų jaunimo bendrija*). In Poland, unlike in Lithuania, Muslim immigrants currently constitute the majority of Islam believers in Poland. Nonetheless, Tatars still form an ethnically and culturally more cohesive community.

2. POLISH-LITHUANIAN TATAR WOMEN IN HISTORY

The situation of Tatar women was influenced by the social and economical situation of Tatars, for instance, by the fact that the majority belonged to the gentry. However, in works on the history of Tatars, Tatar women are marginal and rarely mentioned. Authors usually describe Tatar participation in battles and military campaigns, their armament, and their legal and political situation. Nevertheless, interesting information can sometimes be found in archives or individual historical studies, shedding some light on the situation of Tatar women in the past.

The first Tatars, who came as mercenaries to Polish and Lithuanian territories, married local Christian women (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 97; Tyszkiewicz 1989, 289-290). Polish-Lithuanian Tatar Muslims never practiced polygamy allowed in Islam (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 109), and Tatar women never wore veils (Miśkiewicz 1990, 151)[8], and indeed, in the second half of the nineteenth century, they dressed in the same way as their Christian contemporaries (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 143).

Muslim women in Poland and Lithuania could manage their own property and write wills: for instance, as early as in 1687, Milosia of the Baranowski family bequeathed "a garden and a pasture" to a religious foundation, a *waqf* (Pol. *wakuf*), connected with a mosque in Gudziany (AVAK 1687, 486-487); some time later Zonia Dowletynowa of the Aleksandrowicz family bequeathed "a garden parcel" to an imam in Mir (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 178). Documents also provide evidence that Muslim women could sell their property as well.

Since the nineteenth century, Tatar women belonging to the nobility, just like their Christian contemporaries, were educated and even travelled to Saint Petersburg in order to become so (Miśkiewicz and Kamocki 2004, 51).

During the interwar period, the social and religious activism of Tatar women can be observed. As early as the beginning of the twentieth century they were

[8] In this part of the world, the *hijab* was called the *charchaf* (Pol. *czarczaf*).

treated as equal to men in the family (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 115). However, they did not have the right to elect imams and muezzins during community meetings (Miśkiewicz 1990, 151); it is noteworthy here that women in Poland and Lithuania were given the right to vote in 1918. There was also inequality in divorce law, and under Sharia law it was much easier for a man to get a divorce. Women, however, spoke out against that situation: for instance, a Tatar activist, Zofia Miśkiewicz, published an article on the subject in Tatar press (Miśkiewicz 1990, 151). Already during this period Tatar girls attended Islam classes (Miśkiewicz 1990, 87; Kryczyński 1938/2000, 185), which was not so common in other Muslim communities.[9] Muslims from the outside world were impressed by the emancipation and modernity of Polish-Lithuanian Tatar Muslim women.[10]

The usage of the word "Mollina" to describe the wife of a Mullah (Pol. mołła or mułła; a Muslim title ascribed to an imam) was a curious language phenomenon observed in the Polish language. "Mollinas" were mentioned in official documents regarding the position of the imam; they occur, for example, in *Rewizja Dóbr z 1613 r.* (1991, 86, 88). "Mollinas" were regarded with respect and took their place in the middle of the first row of praying women (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 176).

Interestingly, just like Tatar men, women took part in armed fighting. The chronicles mention, for instance, Rozalia Buczacka, who served in the units of the national gendarmerie during the January Uprising in 1863 (Miśkiewicz and Kamocki 2004, 46).

Similarly, in the twentieth century, Tatar women participated in military conflicts as combatants. During the Second World War nine Tatar women served in the Women's Auxiliary Service in the Second Corps of the Polish Armed Forces in the West (Miśkiewicz and Kamocki 2004, 78). The most famous of them was Dżennet Dżabagi-Skibniewska (1915-1991), a daughter of a Caucasian freedom fighter, Wassan Girej-Dżabagi, and a Polish Tatar woman, Helena Bajraszewska. Before the war Dżennet Dżabagi-Skibniewska had worked as a women's military preparation instructor in secondary schools. In 1939 she took part in the defense of Gdynia, for which she was given the rank of Lieutenant. She was displaced from Gdynia by the Germans, fought in the Home Army (Pol. Armia Krajowa) in Cracow, and subsequently had to flee the country. In 1942 she became an educational officer and a war correspondent in the Second Corps of the Polish Armed Forces in the West. She sustained two serious wounds, one during the

[9] However, many researchers describing Tatar religious life of that period do not mention the girls, but use terms such as "children" or "pupils" – e.g. Kryczyński (1938/2000, 154, 186).

[10] For instance, Smaił Aga Czemalowicz, a Muslim from Yugoslavia, commented on it in an interview from 1934 for "Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny" (a Polish daily newspaper) (Miśkiewicz 1990, 151).

Battle of Monte Cassino in 1944. Skibniewska wrote poems and stories for children and towards the end of the war she worked for "Dziatwa" (Pol. "Children"), a magazine published by the Polish Red Cross in Italy. In 1947 she returned to Poland and became an active participant in the religious and social life of the Muslim community (Miśkiewicz and Kamocki 2004, 136-137).[11]

Thus, as the preserved documents show, Tatar Muslim women, constituted a specific group of Muslim women as far back as the nineteenth century. They received education, took an active part in the social and religious life of Polish-Lithuanian Muslims, and even fought for independence. Islam, in turn, allowed them to freely dispose of their property, a rare phenomenon among their Christian contemporaries.

3. THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF MUSLIM WOMEN

The present-day religious life of Muslim women in Poland and Lithuania has not been described in any published work. There are individual studies of varying quality in a number of unpublished diploma theses[12] or scattered across general texts on Islam in Poland and Lithuania. Apart from such texts, this article is based upon my own observations and on a microsociological survey[13] which I conducted in January and February 2009 among about 30 Muslim women, including converts. These women came from both rural and urban areas; the youngest of them was 23 years old, the oldest 73.

It must be noted here that, in Islam, as far as religion is concerned, a woman is equal to a man and in the Qur'an women are repeatedly mentioned in an explicit way; for instance:

For Muslim men and women, -
For believing men and women
For devout men and women (…)
For them has God prepared
Forgiveness and a great reward (33:35)[14]

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[11] She died in Grozny in the Caucasus, where a documentary about her life was being filmed.

[12] Part of the results of this survey was drawn from an unpublished BA thesis by Aneta Sękowska "Islam w życiu polskich muzułmanek – na podstawie ankiet" ("Islam in the lives of Polish Muslim women – based on surveys"), unpubl. BA thesis, University of Warsaw, Warsaw 2007.

[13] A survey of this kind does not give results, which can be evaluated statistically, but it indicates existing opinions and practices within a group of people.

[14] *The Quran*, transl. by M. Z. Khan. 1971. London: Curzon Press.

Therefore, women, like men, are separate souls (Wadud-Muhsin 1992, 34-40), and they themselves answer for their lives before God (Ahmed 1992, 64-65). Men and women will receive reward or punishment for their actions after death in the same way (Wadud-Mushsin 1992, 44-58), and in their earthly life they are equally capable of taking responsibility for their actions (Jawad, 1998, 5). Therefore, women have to fulfil the same religious obligations as men (Ahmed 1992, 72). The functioning of an individual in Islam is regulated by Shari'a law, which covers not only matters of worship – *ibadat* – but also matters concerning all interpersonal relations – *mu'amalat*. Shari'a, in contrast to canon law in Christianity, is not strictly a religious law. The equality of men and women concerns *ibadat*, but not *mu'amalat*, since women and men have different duties in society and therefore they also have different rights such as, for example, the right to seek divorce (see below).

3.1. The Mosque and Participation in Public Prayers

The mosque has always played an important role in the Polish-Lithuanian Tatar community as a place of Muslim public prayers and community gatherings. In Poland and Lithuania there remain some historical mosques from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and several new mosques have also been built. All these old mosques have a special room for women, which is situated behind a partition with a small lace curtained window at the height of one and a half meters (Miśkiewicz and Kamocki 2004, 102). Interestingly, from as early as the sixteenth century, Polish-Lithuanian Tatar mosques had separate spaces for male and female worshippers (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 166), in contrast to mosques in many other countries which do not have a room for women at all. However, whilst the lack of a separate space for women does not necessarily mean that they do not take part in public prayers (there is a custom that women stand behind men during prayers, since the view of a woman's body moving during a prayer is held to be capable of awaking feelings that would deprive a man of his ritual purity), in many Muslim communities it is the case that women do not participate in public prayers at all. It should, however, be noted that Muslims have no obligation to take part in public prayers, even the ceremonial prayers on Fridays at noon (Walther 1980, 33), but the existence of a separate space designated for women in Tatar mosques implies that they participated in public prayers already in the sixteenth century.

Most of the Muslim women surveyed said whenever possible they try to take part in Friday prayers. In Poland and Lithuania, Friday is a regular work day and it can be difficult for a working person to participate in prayers at noon. Some women surveyed noted that a woman does not have to take part in Friday prayers.

More Tatar women than other Muslim women said that they attend Friday

prayers – the reason for that may lie in the fact that Tatar women live in areas with traditional Tatar Muslim settlements where there are mosques. On the other hand, Muslim prayer halls and centres do exist in other cities.

One Tatar woman noticed that there is really no need for a separate prayer room for women. There are often more women than men present in a mosque during prayers; therefore, women pray in the main prayer room of the mosque, but take their place behind the less numerous men. This may be a characteristic of Tatar Islam, because in the Muslim world it is men who above all take part in public prayers in a mosque or a prayer hall.[15] At present, however, Muslim communities in the West, both in Europe and the United States, are witnessing increasing participation of women in public prayers. For many researchers, this is a sign of both the growing religious consciousness of Muslim women and their religious emancipation.

In Islam the ritual impurity of women is observed (Walther 1980, 33; Jawad 1998, 87): women should not enter a mosque immediately after childbirth or when they are menstruating. After the cause of their impurity has ceased, they have to perform a major ablution, called by Tatars *gusel* (from the Arabic word *ghusl*). (Miśkiewicz and Kamocki 2004, 184). Polish Muslim women follow this ritual.

In a mosque or prayer hall, and during any time of prayer, even at home, women have always been obliged to wear modest clothes and a head cover. However, as early as in the first half of the twentieth century, Polish-Lithuanian Tatar women could just tie up their hair with a hair ribbon (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 155), and this practice can still be seen among some Tatar women at prayer today.

3.2. Participation in Other Religious Ceremonies

It is an interesting fact that since the Second World War, in places where there is no imam, prayers for the deceased and burial ceremonies have been conducted by an elderly woman, knowledgeable in prayer (Miśkiewicz 1993, 49). This is a phenomenon which is rather not found in other Muslim communities, where nowadays prayers are conducted exclusively by men,[16] and only men par-

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[15] As has been pointed out by many researchers, in the early years of Islam, women took part in public prayers in great numbers, encouraged by the Prophet Muhammad (Jawad 1998, 87). Only later, in the Abbasid era in the eighth and ninth centuries, did women slowly withdraw from public life (Ahmed 1992, 76).

[16] In a famous case, a woman, Amina Wadud, a Muslim theologian from the USA, conducted prayer in New York on 18 March 2006. This aroused the objections of many Muslims, although according to the holy texts of Islam, women are not prohibited from conducting prayers, and at the

ticipate in burial ceremonies outside the house. In the Polish-Lithuanian Muslim community, however, women attend such ceremonies, except when they are pregnant or in the first year of their marriage (Miśkiewicz 1993, 48; Miśkiewicz and Kamocki 2004, 213).

3.3. Religious Leadership and Religious Education

Female Muslim community leaders are also characteristic of Tatar Islam. Naturally, such women do not hold purely religious functions similar to those of an imam. It should be noted that Islam does not exclude women's leadership. In the early period of Islam many women actively participated in the life of the Muslim community, engaging in both political and religious life (Jawad 1998, 83-88). Many religious authorities claimed that the Prophet Muhammad entrusted important functions to women (Mernissi 1987, 49, 60-61), and some Muslim scholars claim that if a woman is better educated or more talented than a man, then she should take over appropriate responsibilities, even that of leading prayer (Roald 2001, 192-193).

Among the eight religious communities of the Muslim Religious Union, three are presided over by women. Tamara Szabanowicz holds the position of community leader in Gdańsk, Mirosława Korycka in Bohoniki and Halima Szahidewicz in Białystok. Tamara Szabanowicz is the second woman to hold this position in Gdańsk; before her it was held for 21 years by Dżemila Smajkiewicz-Murman, the first woman in Poland ever to hold this position. The position of the Muslim community leader in Gorzów Wielkopolski was held for many years by Rozalia Aleksandrowicz, who died in 2008 and was a doyenne of the local Tatar community. The women admit that their function is met with surprised reactions from immigrants from the Muslim world, who sometimes find it difficult to accept the fact that the community is led by a woman.

There are also women among the members of the Highest Council of the Muslim Religious Union: Rozalia Bogdanowicz is secretary and Mierjema Chalecka-Giembicka – treasurer. Moreover, the office of the Muslim Religious Union is run by a Tatar woman, Dagmara Sulkiewicz.

Moreover, from 2004 to 2006, Iwona Alkhalayla was the president of the Muslim League, a denominational organization gathering mostly Arab immigrants and their wives.

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height of the classical period of Islam civilization women conducted prayers for other women (Walther 1980, 34). One of the Tatar women surveyed said that if the praying community is small and there is no man who is educated enough to conduct a prayer, it is led by a more skilled woman, however, she does not stand in front of the community, but on one side.

Women are also religion teachers. For example, Halima Szahidewicz, who, as mentioned above, is now leader of the Muslim community in Białystok, was previously an Islam teacher for many generations of Tatar students there and still is a supervisor of the religious instruction in the Białystok community. She is also a long time member of the Board of the Common Council of Catholics and Muslims, a Polish organization which engages in interreligious dialogue between Catholics and Muslims.

3.4. Marriage

Marriage is highly valued in Islam and recommended to faithful Muslims (e.g. Qur'an 32:34) for numerous reasons (Jawad 1998, 30f). Polygamy is allowed under some circumstances which are usually difficult to fulfil (such as equal treatment of all wives) and for this reason, nowadays many Muslim theologians, such as Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1992, 82-85), dismiss this form of marriage (Roald 2001, 202f).

Muslim marriage is a civil contract concluded between two parties (Jawad 1998, 35), but it also has a religious significance, although it is not sacramental in the Christian sense. Under some circumstances, it can be dissolved, and it is easier for a man to get a divorce than for a woman (Wadud-Muhsin 1992, 79-80). In the civil contract a so-called *mahr*, or marriage gift, is determined. Nowadays this is usually a sum of money paid by the man to the woman. The man pays half of the money at the beginning of the marriage and the second half is paid in case of a divorce (Walther 1980, 35; Jawad 1998, 35).[17]

As mentioned above, the first Tatars in Poland and Lithuania married local Christian women (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 97; Tyszkiewicz 1989, 289-290); they never practised polygamy (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 109). They do not practice it nowadays either, and this is part of Tatar tradition, and does not result from the fact that bigamy is a crime under Polish law. Muslim marriage in Tatar communities has to be preceded by a civil ceremony in a register office, since only a civil marriage is legally valid. Religious authorities ensure that the traditional Muslim ceremony takes place only after the document of civil marriage from the register office has been shown. This applies both to Tatars and to Muslims of immigrant origin.

The traditional Tatar marriage ceremony begins at the house of the groom, where an imam and other invited men gather before noon. The guests are received with refreshments and they talk about the advantages of marriage. Final-

[17] *Mahr* is owned exclusively by a woman and she does not have to share it with anybody else. It is supposed to cover any living expenses after a divorce, and it also protects the woman from an irresponsible marriage dissolution by a man (Walther 1980, 35).

ly, the assembled pray, and together with an imam circle the table three times. They then go to the house of the bride, where the family of the bride welcomes the bride and groom with bread and salt and showers them with birdseed which is supposed to bring prosperity and happiness (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 211; Borawski and Dubiński 1986, 192). The marriage ceremony itself used to take place at the bride's house (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 211), but nowadays it is often held in a mosque or a Muslim centre.

The marriage takes place at a table covered with a white cloth on which there are candles, water, bread and salt. The bridal couple stand on a sheepskin with their faces turned in the direction of Mecca. The ceremony is conducted by an imam in the presence of witnesses (called *vekil* or *viekil*; from Arabic *wakil*) and guests. The imam writes down the amount of *mahr* in the marriage contract, gives a sermon on marriage, says a prayer and after that the bride's face is covered with a veil (so-called *zaharemienie* from the Arabic word *harim* – a sacred or forbidden place; at home this is a room for a woman that only her husband can enter). The imam says another prayer, presents the wedding rings to the couple, and is first to offer good wishes to the newlyweds. While offering good wishes to the bride one must touch her veil, which is sometimes embroidered with the so-called Beautiful Names of God in gold thread. After the ceremony there is a wedding reception with traditional dishes and dances (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 212; Borawski and Dubiński 1986, 192-193).

After the first centuries of Tatar presence in Poland and Lithuania, mixed marriages were not welcomed (Tyszkiewicz 2002, 289). Moreover, Tatar women, as Muslims, are supposed to marry another Muslim, which is often difficult in such a small community. This was dealt with by means of endogamic marriages. There has long been a tendency to look for a husband or a wife of the same faith outside the hometown, sometimes even in distant places (Horodejuk 2005, 51). Warmińska (1999, 154-156), along with other contemporary researchers, argues that nowadays religion has to a certain extent become identified with ethnicity amongst Polish-Lithuanian Tatars, and that Tatar Muslims are preferred marriage partners. Consequently, sometimes people of Tatar origin from different countries such as Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine or Russia get married. In the past, families and friends helped in the search for a partner; today the Internet plays an increasingly important role. There is a matrimonial portal called Yuldaş (Yuldash.com) for Tatars from all over the world which is available in Tatar, Turkish, Russian and English. Visa difficulties can be an obstacle – Poland and Lithuania, for instance, are part of the European Union but Russia or Belarus are not.

Before the Second World War, so-called Tatar balls played an important role in the socialisation of young people. They did not differ from any others balls in Poland or Lithuania (Miśkiewicz and Kamocki 2004, 148-149) and Tatars wore

regular evening attire. The parties were supposed to help young people make friends and maybe meet someone that they might later marry. After the war the balls were reactivated and play the same role as before. They are attended by whole families (every family has its own table) and Tatar families from neighbouring countries are invited (Warmińska 1999, 158-160).

Polish and Lithuanian Tatars believe that the husband and wife are equal in marriage and that they are both responsible for the family, that a woman can work outside the home and does not have to ask her husband for permission when she wants to go out. The wives of Muslim immigrants hold a slightly different view on these questions: some of them think (in accordance with the classical interpretation of Islam), that they do not have to engage in earning a living. Some also said that they have to ask their husbands for permission to go out and to say where they are going.

3.5. Woman's Dress

The dress of Muslim women is a subject which raises many discussions and controversies. The Qur'an commands both women and men to wear modest clothes (24:31) and says that women should cover their bodies in order not to reveal their best features (33:59). Another verse which says of the Prophet's wives that they should cover themselves with veils (33:53), and as the Mothers of the Faithful, they should be role models to faithful Muslim woman. However, many of the scholars who are against the wearing of a veil by a woman emphasize their special status among women (Ahmed 1992, 55-56, Mernissi 1987, 180).

The Qur'an does not, however, describe precisely what a woman's cover should look like, and there is no mention of covering the face, hair, etc.[18] Hadiths, another important religious source for Islam, say little about woman's dress (Roald 2001, 267). This has given rise to much discussion amongst Muslim theologians as to how the excerpts should be interpreted (for more details see e.g.: Ahmed 1992, 144-168; Roald 2001, 267-292). Some theologians, for instance, indicated that during the *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, women, like men, have their hands and faces uncovered, so they should not cover these parts of their bodies on a daily basis either (Roald 2001, 269). The custom of covering the face was introduced only during the reign of the Caliphs of the Abbasid dynasty in the eighth century (Jawad 1998, 24). As it can be seen from above, Muslims themselves are not unanimous regarding the look of woman's dress and whether she should wear some kind of veil.

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[18] It is known that in the pre-Muslim times in the Near East free women from higher social classes covered their faces, while woman slaves did not (Walther 1980, 39).

As has already been noted, historical sources say little about Tatar Muslim women or about their dress, and what sparse citations exist suggest that Tatar Muslim women never wore veils (*hijabs*) or covered their faces (Miśkiewicz 1990, 151). For some time, the dress of Tatar women living in the villages was more colourful, but by the second half of the nineteenth century, Tatar women were already dressing in the same manner as their Christian contemporaries belonging to the same social class (Kryczyński 1938/2000, 143).

Nowadays, Tatar Muslim women do not wear any kind of headscarf or veil on a daily basis, except during prayers. There are extremely rare cases of young women wearing a headscarf or a full *hijab* similar to the one in the Arab countries. These are women who encountered strict Muslim immigrants, for example, while studying in the Western European countries. When asked about a veil, all the Tatar women surveyed answered identically: if a Muslim woman abides by all religious laws but does not wear *hijab*, she is still a Muslim who knows the principles of her religion, since Islam only commands modest dress and they all respect that. Tatar women emphasized that it comes down to individual choice and nothing should be forced on a woman. The fact that a woman does not wear a veil does not make her a worse Muslim.

The answers of Muslim women from mixed marriages who were born in Poland were similar, as were those of Muslim women who came to Poland and Lithuania to study or write a doctorate. They all agreed that there is a different law and different rules in Europe and here a woman without *hijab* is not viewed as immodest.

However, most of the women living in the environment of immigrants from Muslim, mostly Arab, countries, above all converts and their daughters, answered that they wear, or try to wear, a veil on a daily basis. They thought that a Muslim woman should wear a veil and that if she does not, she either does not have a good enough knowledge of the rules of her faith, or she does not have enough courage to start wearing *hijab*. Nonetheless, not all of them wear a veil every day, and they admit that they do not wear *hijab* at work or school so as not to "stand out". This is in part a result of the very small numbers of Muslims in Poland and Lithuania; a woman wearing *hijab* is a very rare sight.

Muslim groups in which women wear some kind of *hijab* are generally also characterized by significant segregation of men and women. For instance, during meetings women sit at separate tables and during Ramadan they eat the first meal after sunset, called *iftar*, separately. In contrast, in Tatar communities, apart from times of prayer, Muslim men and women work and celebrate together.

CONCLUSIONS

Muslims have been living in the territories of present-day Poland and Lithuania for over 600 years. Their history is described in numerous works, which, however, concentrate on Muslim participation in armed fighting and their legal and political situation. It can be concluded, based on the very sparse mentions of Tatar women and their legal, political, or religious situation in historical works, that since the nineteenth century they have been functioning in society in the same way as their Christian contemporaries, and in the twentieth century their situation also looked similar.

Contemporary Tatar women present a relatively high level of religious knowledge. They are able to justify why they do not wear *hijab*; they take part in religious practices, sometimes even in greater numbers than men; and some of them hold the function of Muslim community leaders. They are, therefore, a specific group of Muslim women when contrasted with all other female Muslims. Tatar women integrate with the local, Polish and Lithuanian, community, but, at the same time, preserve their Muslim identity and religious practices. They seem to represent a specific type of European Islam, a type of Islam which, according to some researchers and representatives of immigrant Muslim communities in the West needs to be developed.

At the end of the twentieth century, a new group of Muslim women appeared in Poland and Lithuania. These Muslim women exist in the immigrant Islamic communities. They represent a different attitude towards women and their place in the community, one characterized by Arab Islam. They are as religious as Tatar women, but probably on average less educated in religious matters. This type of Islam, which is more connected to the Arab Muslim world, and because of that seems to some to be "more Muslim" (on the basis that Islam was born among Arabs, and the Qur'an was sent in Arabic), is becoming popular with Tatar youth, including women.

These two groups of Muslim women differ in some aspects of their practice of the same religion, but they also display some apparent differences in their views on other issues connected with the functioning of Muslims in society. For example, when asked "Would you like to live in the country with *Shari'a* (Muslim law)?" all Tatar women answered "no", whereas almost all Muslim women connected with the immigrant environment answered "yes".

Both groups, however, were unanimous in their affirmation that they have no difficulties practising their faith in Poland and Lithuania; nor do they encounter any signs of antipathy from society.

Tatar Muslims still constitute the majority of Islam believers in Lithuania, whereas in Poland they are already a minority. Nevertheless, they have their own

mosques and cemeteries and the right to religious education in public schools and to issue certificates for ritual slaughter (*halal*). It will be interesting to see what the future of the Muslim community in Poland will be and particularly how the Tatar experience will influence other Muslim women and their religious practice in future generations.

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GENDER AND RELIGION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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