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Muslim Names the Bosnian Way

Bosnia-Herzegovina is multicultural, multiethnic and multinational, and the majority of names mirror this diversity – a personal name in Bosnia-Herzegovina often (although not always) tells about the background of the person with this name. Such diversity produces diverseness in the cultural, ethnic and national background of individuals. Names, however, often lack the potential to hold multiple intended messages about individuals and might be subject to interpretations not intended by the name givers.

In this paper, one part of this multitude is examined: a Muslim naming discourse in Bosnia-Herzegovina is studied here with the aim of formulating a socio-onomastic description of Muslim naming in contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina. ‘Socio-onomastic’ here denotes that the results are derived from the discourses in my materials and not an authority such as the Council of the Islamic Community (*Rijaset Islamske zajednice u Bosni i Hercegovini*).

As the materials used for the socio-onomastic study of this topic are obtained from the Internet, the aim of this paper is to discuss web discourse on Bosnian Muslim naming.

About the Terms ‘Muslim’, ‘Bosniak’ and ‘Bosnian’ in This Article

The terminology used in this presentation reflects the terminology in the sources used. Arguments for changing ‘Muslim’ and ‘Bosnian’ into ‘Bosniak’ could be made, as Bosnian Muslims often are Bosniaks, although there are small groups of Muslim Roma, Albanians and Turks in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In fact, thus far I have failed to find sources which discuss the religious composition of the Bosniak population in detail, probably because authorities have failed to agree on a census or a similar method of determining the exact ethnic and religious composition of the population of

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Bosnia-Herzegovina. Various sources cite that about 90 % of all Bosniaks are Muslim (see e.g. an estimation based on a US Department of State report from 2009).² The Bosnia-Herzegovina census now planned for 2013 will probably provide some answers to this question (Agencija za statistiku 2012a).

In the web discussions used in this article, ‘Bosniak’ and ‘Muslim’ seem to be used interchangeably with much the same meaning (albeit and notably so, they are not interchangeable for all individual writers). Some writers also seem to use ‘Bosnian’ in this sense, although the briefness of the contributions and the spontaneous nature of web writing will explain these instances.

In any case, Bosniak naming is predominantly Muslim, by tradition, culture and anthropological mores, and I have not tried to distinguish between Muslim and non-Muslim Bosniak naming in this article (and further, this material is not suitable for it). Furthermore, it is probable that the (possibly 10 % to possibly even up to 25 % of) Bosniaks who are not Muslim give similar names as the Muslims – mostly due to shared customs. Finding significant and systematic differences between two such closely related groups in the same environment is difficult, and this study does not focus on such findings.

This choice of terminology does not imply that ‘Bosniak’, ‘Muslim’ and ‘Bosnian’ are synonymous; in this article, however, separating Bosniak and Muslim naming is not feasible. Most of the literature available is on Muslim naming in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and literature on Bosniak names such as Lisičić (2006) includes the names of Muslim Roma within the Bosniak names as they do not differ (Lisičić 2006, 46).

Bosnia-Herzegovina Today

In Bosnia-Herzegovina today there is a very visible and natural turn towards the origins of Islam after the wars in the 90s. But how large are the differences and what kind are they in comparison with the situation of the 1970s or the 1980s? What has changed is visible in the rituals, attitudes and content of the daily life of individuals. To some extent it is a question of the **visibility** of the presence of Islam in daily life; it was not ‘cool’ to be a pious

² Note that the CIA World Factbook (2012) cites that 48 % of the Bosnia-Herzegovinian population is Bosniak and 40 % Muslim, which would make the religious composition of the Bosniaks significantly lower than 90 %, given that there are small groups of other Muslims in the country.

Muslim in the cities in the 1980s, and there was a vast gap between religious life in rural settings and religious life in urban settings – a gap which still exists (Pickering 2006, 83). Also, it seems that mostly non-Muslims – Christians, the irreligious, those who with fondness remember a multicultural, secular Sarajevo – comment on the growing visibility of Islam, not the devoutly religious Muslims themselves.

It seems, however, that there is less interaction between groups of different backgrounds now than there was before; schools that used to be totally integrated – what Tone Bringa (1995, 83) calls the Yugoslav element in people's lives – are now often segregated, and there is less respect for the customs and attitudes of 'others', often owing to the lack of knowledge and interaction.³ A similar situation is observed by Nora Repo⁴ for Muslim Albanian women in Macedonia; they feel that Macedonian society at large does not like the Islamic ingredients of their lives, such as their choice of clothes.

Apart from possible hardships in family histories in the 20th century, the overall economic hardships and political uncertainty make daily life more difficult (Merdzanic 2005). Thus luxuries such as understanding and tolerance for others are less prevalent than before. There are, however, some reports such as Paula Pickering's on mixed urban workplaces and specific civic organizations that promote positive interethnic relationships (Pickering 2006, 79–103). According to the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 30 % of the working age population was employed in April 2011 (Agencija za statistiku BiH 2011, 25), and the average net wage was 818 KM in February 2012 (Agencija za statistiku BiH 2012b, 1), which is slightly more than 418 euros.

A further change is that the earlier diaspora of *gastarbeiters* is now a diaspora of former refugees and highly educated young professionals. It has been estimated that 1.35 million nationals of Bosnia-Herzegovina live abroad (Nikolić et al. 2010, 5).

Previous Documentation of Naming Practices

Amongst the sources for naming in the times before the 1990s, there are some which are exclusively linguistic, such as Smailović (1977), and others which are ethnographic, such as Bringa (1995) and Sorabji (1989). Hadžišehović (2003) is more anecdotal, a tale of an individual life.

³ On respecting 'others', see Toijonen 2010.

⁴ Personal communication (19 January 2012).

In 1977 linguistic scholar Ismet Smailović published the extensive *Muslim names of Oriental origin in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (my translation of the title) in which he differentiates between Muslim names in Bosnia-Herzegovina and names that Muslims have in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Amongst the names that Muslims have – note that in his time the term ‘Bosniak’ (*Bošnjak*) was not in use – Smailović includes, of course, Muslim names of Oriental origin, but also names of Slavonic origin, names of other origins (*Indira, Denis*) and names that have a ‘Muslim feel’ but are combinations or variations of Muslim names, as this kind of innovative naming was present in the 1970s (and perhaps at other times, too). Smailović does not dwell on religious matters but discusses how Oriental names have been adapted to the local language (he goes through vowel, consonant, accent and morphological adaptations) and discusses the orthography and pronunciation of names of Oriental origin in the Serbo-Croatian of his day. Smailović is quite decisively of the opinion that Oriental names should be adapted orthographically and in pronunciation.

Tone Bringa’s (1995) account focuses on other issues, but when she mentions the cultural or ethnic reality of naming in the setting that she studied, most of her comments on names and naming boil down to the point that names tell the heritage of the subjects, and in mixed marriages the children are given *narodna imena*, Slavonic names. Mixed marriages are largely avoided in rural settings, but in cities they are rather frequent. Amongst the Bosnian Muslims in Bringa’s study, the primary group of identification was the Bosnian Muslim community or the Muslims of Yugoslavia, and a secondary group of identification was the worldwide Muslim community, which only what Bringa calls the ‘small urban-oriented economic and religious elite’ identified with. But, as ‘war changes people’, Bringa writes, ‘many Bosnian Muslims are redefining both the content and function of their collective identities, and identifying with a wider world community of Muslims more than before’ (Bringa 1995, 197–198; 224–225).

The informants in Cornelia Sorabji’s (1989) study have a different understanding of their identity as Muslims; Sorabji describes how they have a dual identity, where belonging to the Yugoslav Muslim community and belonging to the worldwide Muslim community (*Umma*) is simultaneous. When commenting on names in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sorabji writes:

Names always were, and remain today, indications of the affiliation of individuals. Certain surnames (Imamović, Hadžijahić, Mujezinović, Begović,

Spahić etc.) are distinctively Muslim but it is above all the forename that bears witness to the individual's affiliation. (Sorabji 1989, 36)

Munevera Hadžišehović's (2003) account is an autobiographical story about her life, and as such does of course describe her experiences, although with the aspiration of representing a group (Muslim females in Yugoslavia – the title alone reveals this). She grew up in Sandžak, went to school in Sarajevo and Belgrade, and lived most of her adult life in Belgrade. Although her life has been lived mainly outside Bosnia-Herzegovina, I have included her here because many of her relatives were situated in Bosnia and she tells about how her family gave names to their children. Hadžišehović writes that Muslims after 1946 'continued to give Muslim names to their children', and so Muslims were recognizable in a crowd. Further, she states that all Muslims in Yugoslavia 'had names connected with Turkish sultans', and names that 'indicated divine features' such as *Rahima* (Mercy), *Adem*, *Ibrahim* or *Ismail* (Hadžišehović 2003, 122).

The name Muhamed was given less often because it was seen as obligating the bearer to be a true Muslim, which could be unsustainable during stormy times, especially under communist rule. Common female names were Emina or Ema after the mother of the Messenger, Fatima or Fata after his daughter, or Aiša after his wife. As time went on, those who worked in the cities began to seek more modern names. Mothers wanted their children to have similar names, like Alma for a daughter and Almer for a son, Jasmina and Jasmin, and others that had no real meaning but were merely concocted. (Hadžišehović 2003, 122)

All of Hadžišehović's relatives that she tells of had, obviously, Muslim names, and some names such as *Abdullah* would recur in every generation, because the family had a custom of naming at least one child *Abdullah* in each family unit (Hadžišehović 2003, 123).

Rules of Muslim Naming

Hadith Abu Dawud, one of the collections of the Prophet's sayings, includes the most important rule of Muslim naming. Here we have two versions of it in English:

On Doomsday you will be called by your names and the names of your fathers – so chose [sic!] beautiful (or, graceful) names! (Schimmel 1989, 14)

It is reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'On the Day of Resurrection, you will be called by your names and by your father's names, so give yourselves good names.' (Muslim Baby Names)

In this context the phrase 'beautiful (or, graceful) / good names' is important, and it is translated as *lijepa imena* in Bosnian:

Vi ćete na Sudnjem danu biti prozivani po vašim imenima i po imenima vaših očeva, zato nadijevajte svojoj djeci lijepa imena. (Zukorlić 2004, 5–6)

There are a couple of other Hadiths where it is mentioned that you should not give names that denote ruler (*vladar*), because Allah is the only ruler, and in Muslim literature the names the Prophet preferred and which were unsatisfactory is well known.⁵

In the Bosnian context it is also a custom to give names that the local Catholic and Orthodox communities do not use. This is a cultural and spiritual tradition, as Zukorlić (2004, 7) has reported, and the following example from the web discussion forum *islambosna* illustrates this:

HUD-HUD: The only important thing about names is that they do not have an ugly meaning.

vjera_istine2: And that they are not characteristic of non-believers.

You cannot in Bosnia give a child a name like Marija or for example David, but Merjem or Davud are possible. (*islambosna*)

In the example *vjera_istine2* states that names should not be those typically used by non-believers. In the original *vjera_istine2* has *u jednoj Bosni*, in a (sic) Bosnia, which seems to imply that *vjera_istine2* knows this is true for exactly Bosnia and not necessarily for the rest of the world, and that parents in Bosnia should know this rule.

Current Name Books

Books on naming often aim to advise parents on the difficult task of giving appropriate names to their children. Here two contemporary guides for Muslim naming are compared, and a book on modern names in Bosnia-Herzegovina is presented.⁶

Both naming guides are published by El-Kelimeh in Novi Pazar, both start with advice for parents on naming and customs at the birth of a new child, and both include a longish list of names with their meanings explained. Zukorlić's (2004) *Muslimanska lijepa imena* includes the Arabic

⁵ Here name changes are not discussed, although they are a part of Muslim naming traditions, both when converting to Islam and if a name is unsatisfactory for other reasons.

⁶ Unfortunately I did not manage to obtain Sulejman Lisičić's *Nova imena Bošnjaka u BiH*, published in 2009, in time when writing this article (see K.K. 2010). It seems, however, to be fairly similar to Lisičić's *Savremena imena i prezimena Bošnjaka, Srba i Hrvata* (2006).

version of all originally Arabic names; Kurdić's (2008) *Muslimanska imena i njihova značenja* includes more names than Zukorlić's book.

The advice given to parents in these naming guides is very similar; both books (naturally) recommend giving beautiful names which were names of good examples or good persons. Both warn against giving shortened names as official names. Both, as expected, advise against names that the Prophet advised against. In addition to this, Zukorlić recommends going back to one's roots and giving names that show your nationality, whereas Kurdić specifically advises against names that are in fashion.

Name books such as these, of course, take a stand on the question on spelling, as the names are given in writing in the books, so in ambiguous cases the writer needs to choose among alternate spellings. In Kurdić we have an interesting example: in the introductory text part of his book he recommends giving the names *Abdullah* and *Abdurrahman* because these were reportedly the favourite names of Allah, but in the name list part of the book, the preferred spelling is *Abdulah* and *Abdurahman* without the double consonants (Kurdić 2008, 17–20, 40, 44).

Sulejman Lišičić's (2006) book *Savremena imena u Bošnjaka, Srba i Hrvata* describes names in Maglaj, a smallish town in the north part of the Federation. The book includes lists of names characteristic of these three ethnic groups and found in Maglaj in various sources, but predominantly in school registers. One could argue that Lišičić's division of names into Bosniak, Croat and Serb is problematic, but it does correspond to the current understanding of the differences between the ethnic groups.

Lišičić comments on how Bosniaks now do not necessarily know that names have a meaning and that their names have meanings, and that parents giving names trust their feelings and give names that sound Oriental but often do not have a meaning. Often, according to Lišičić (2006, 39), parents take care not to give Croat or Serb names, but give non-Muslim names from other languages, which he seems to think is not recommended. Lišičić gives corrected name lists in his book; the names are not the actual names of Maglaj dwellers, but their names as they should be, according to Lišičić.

In the web discussions, name books are mentioned only as a source when meanings are discussed (and then only generically without mentioning a specific book) and when Sulejman Lišičić's book *Nova imena Bosnjaka u BiH* (2009) was new and discussed in the news.

Material of This Study

My material is a selection of discourses on names on the web; most are derived from discussion forums of different kinds: forums for Muslims (*Muslimanka.net*; *Islambosna.ba*); for parents and parents-to-be (*bebano* and *ringeraja*); for the cool, hip and funny, or whoever joins a local forum (*sarajevo-x*; *dernek*; *tuzlarije*; *bljesak*); and for recovering drug addicts (*narkomanija*). In addition to these, some questions and answers on the Rijaset's web page *Questions and answers on birth and akika* (also *aqiqah*; the sacrifice of animals, usually sheep, on the seventh day after the birth of a child) have been included when these questions and answers are about names.

The full list of web materials used in this article is given at the end of the article.

How representative are web discussions on names and naming of the overall discourse on names and naming in the area? The question of whether a part of a social phenomenon is representative of the entire social phenomenon is often difficult to answer in any case; whether anything on the web can be representative of a social phenomenon is perhaps even more difficult to answer, since interaction in writing on the web leaves out many aspects of human interaction. Perhaps this material is comparable to sampling techniques such as snowball sampling; the selection is not complete, and what you get depends on where you start, as well as persistence, hard work, expertise and good sampling design – and luck.

A general characteristic of all of the web threads used is that most only list names without commentary. When Muslim naming (which comes up in all the threads; the Muslim forums are obviously all about Muslim naming) is mentioned, the most frequent question is: 'Is X a Muslim name?' Another general characteristic is that the tone of discussion on the Muslim, parental and drug addict forums is one of respect for the other participants on the forum, where offence is not intended and apologies are given when somebody has been hurt.

What then is Muslim in this context? There are of course no reliable discussion markers in the forums which are not explicitly Muslim whether the contributor is Muslim or not; I have made choices and interpretations and included into the 'Muslim pool' in my study only such posts that I feel discuss Muslim naming – not necessarily knowing what has been intended by the contributor.

Naming in the Discussions

The discussions on Muslim naming fall into three categories: 'real' Muslim names, traditional Bosnian Muslim names and neutral names. These three categories are described in greater detail below.

'Real' Muslim Names

In the web discussions parents, looking for Muslim names who do not trust their own interpretation of what is Muslim ask for help. In the most frequent situation seen in the discourses in these materials, the parents have found a name and wonder whether it is Muslim, as in the first example below. Some of these parents might have consulted a naming guide such as Kurdić and Zukorlić or a local Muslim authority and failed to find an answer; this is, however, not mentioned in the questions.

Ime Nora

Friday, 03 July 2009 10:32

 Share

Pitanje

Esselamu alejkum!

Molim Vas za pomoć, zanima me da li je Nora muslimansko ime. Za dvije sedmice, ako Bog da, treba nam se roditi kćerka, ime sam našla na jednoj od internet stranica (NORA- svjetlost) ali nismo sigurni da li je to muslimansko ime. Drugo ime je Lana- nježna.

Odgovor

U principu ne bavimo se tumačenjem značenja pojedinih imena budući da postoje djela na temu muslimanskih imena te onaj koji želi znati značenja pojedinih imena može se obratiti na ta djela. Ali kada je urednik već prihvatio Vaše pitanje, citirat ćemo Vam značenje riječi "NURA" kako ga je naveo Muftić u svom Rječniku. "NURA: žig, vapno, kreč, žitka smola, sredstvo za uklanjanje dlaka, žarulja, sijalica." Arapi ženskom djetetu nadjevaju ime NUR, što znači svjetlost. NORA je engleska verzija riječi NURA Samoglasnik "u" pretvara se u "o". Koliko nam je poznato kod nas postoji žensko ime Nura, ali ne i Nora.

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- Namaz musafira
- Muškarc i zlatni zubi
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- Svadba i dženaza
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Pitanja i Odgovori

Prof. dr. Enes Ljevaković
fetva-i-emin



Pitanja možete slati na mail:
pitanja@rijaset.ba

Question:

As-Salāmu `Alaykum!

Please help, I would like to know if Nora is a Muslim name. In two weeks, God willing, our daughter will be born, I found the name on one web page (NORA - light) but we are not certain that it is a Muslim name. The second name is Lana - delicate.

Answer:

In principal we do not deal with the interpretation of the meaning of individual names because there are volumes on the theme of Muslim names and those who want to know the meaning of individual names may turn to those volumes. But as the editor has accepted your question, we will cite the meaning of the word 'Nura' as Muftić has in his dictionary. 'Nura: stamp, lime, razor, light bulb, light'. Arabs give the name NUR to female children, and that means light. NORA is the English version of the word NURA, the vowel u changes into o. As far as we know the female name Nura exists in our community, whereas Nora does not. (rijaset.ba.)

The above example is a question on the *Rijaset's* web page; apparently this Prof. Dr. Ljevaković is the one who has answered the question on whether the name Nora is Muslim or not. In my opinion he is here advising against choosing that name. Amongst the other questions and answers on the *Rijaset's* family pages, there are many about names as well as a separate comment that people should consult books about Muslim names and not ask the *Rijaset* about this.

There are those who will inquire about whether a name is good or not at their local mosque, and the *rijaset* is probably a web version of the answer you might get there. In the web discussion it is not mentioned whether an imam was asked, but there are mentions of other people who have wanted to give the same name who received a negative answer.

Within this category there is a sub-group where participants in the naming discussions refer to an authority on Islam such as the international Muslim community, often represented by a website or the customs of a Muslim country.

X_Hidzab_X: As-Salāmu `Alaykum, could somebody tell me if Larisa is a Muslim name and if it is, what it means ☺

sejfuiddin: http://babynamesworld.parentsconnect.com/meaning_of_Larissa.html
(islambosna.ba.)

This is a question in a thread on *islambosna*; here the answer to the question of whether Larisa is a Muslim name is probably no, because the link given in sejfuiddin's answer does not go to a Muslim web page such as MuslimBabyNames.net.

Many of the questions in this category are also questions on spelling and pronunciation. Contrary to Smailović's categorical opinion mentioned earlier that names should be adapted to Bosnian linguistic conventions, it seems that names now do not need to be adapted, at least not in the opinion of all parents. Lisičić (2006, 40–41, 43) also discusses this and thinks of it as a

retrograde phenomenon. In the web discussions some of the more unusual spellings reflect a wish to adhere to Arabic.

A common comment in this category is seen in the excerpt below, where an individual experience of foreign Muslims is translated into something that is representative of Muslims elsewhere.

dana3: For almost all the names mentioned – they are not strictly Muslim (they are not given only to children of the Muslim denomination) because people from that region interpret that their name has the importance of a beautiful meaning and not which faith it belongs to.

With me at work is Abdulah, who is Catholic – Iran

Mahmud – Catholic – Afghanistan

We talked about my name, which is derived from Persian, and in translation would mean approximately Dušanka and so we talked about names [in general] and they thought it slightly strange that names are divided like that in Bosnia. (ringeraja.ba.)

Here a local foreign community (somewhere in the world outside Bosnia) has also discussed Bosnian naming and found it strange that names are divided between the nationalities as they are in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Traditional Bosnian Muslim Names

The subject of what is Bosnian, reclaiming Bosnian names and using names that are traditional comes up in some of the discussion threads, as the example below states:

Although, honestly, I think that we Bosniaks need to preserve and we have a right to Slavonic names ... Now I am not talking about the typical names Christians give, but names such as Badema ... etc.... are super names in my opinion. For instance, I do not know one Badema who is not Muslim, at least by birth, and Badema is a character in an old Bosnian tale (Badem djevojka). I remember an old grandpa whose name was Karanfil ... Also I see nothing bad in searching for names from the Bogumil times ... They are our forefathers, the Bosnian language is our language, and I do think it would be indifferent of us to give that up ... (islambosna.ba.)

This is part of an answer on *islambosna*; the whole thread discusses which names are Muslim and which are not, and this comment is about traditional Bosniak names.

A number of posts promote traditional Bosnian Muslim names (in addition to the Slavonic ones mentioned in this example) such as *Alija* instead of new, fashionable Muslim names with foreign spellings. Zukorlić (2004, 7), Lisičić (2006, 71ff) and Kurdić (2008, 10) point out problems

with giving untraditional names: they might mean something that was not intended, or do not mean anything, and are thus not good names.

In general, I would say that this category of traditional Bosnian Muslim names does not stand out in the web discussions. It is not probable that a Bosniak parent would need peer support on whether *Alija* or a similar, traditional name is Muslim or not. And I would expect that in a later analysis of web discourse, this category would be called traditional Bosniak names, but for now my general impression is that Bosnian Muslim better describes the discourse on these names.

Neutral Names

Many parents want names that are neutral, either because the parents are of different denominations (discussed further below), or because they do not want their child to be marked with a nationality or ethnic group. In the first example, the Muslimness of this post is unknown.

Yuna: I need a neutral international name for our second boy.

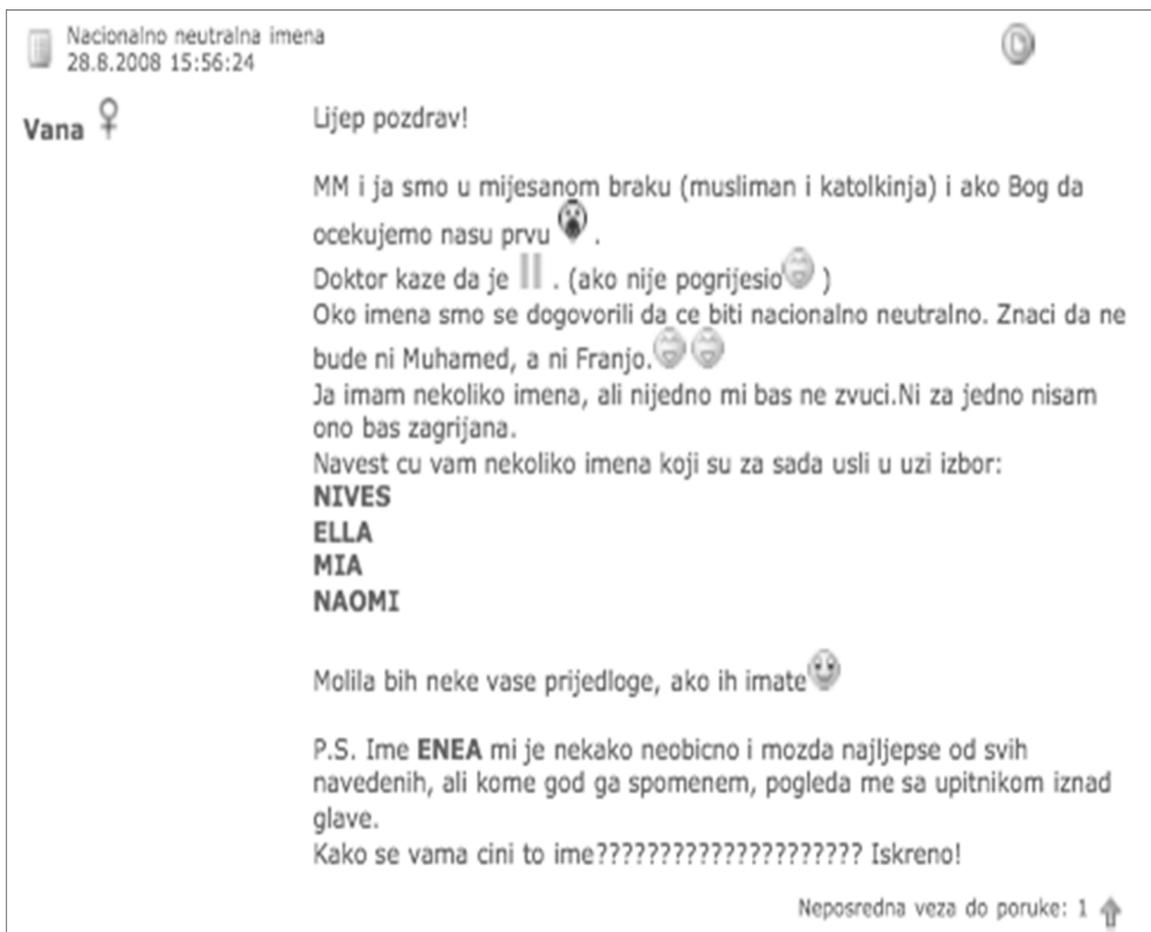
Help!

We would consider also religious names, but only neutral ones.

bebacha: Damir. (ringeraja.ba.)

This example comes from *ringeraja*; the discussion goes on to say that it is impossible to have religious names that are neutral. On the other hand, the name *Sara* has really gained in popularity in recent years in Bosnia-Herzegovina; it really seems to be both neutral (in the sense that *Sara* is common both internationally and within the different local groups) and religious. *Sara* is exceptional (also with regards to its history in the Third Reich). The name mentioned here, *Damir*, is also perceived as non-denominational, but (as parents on the forums have joked) it seems to be overrepresented in advertising in Bosnia-Herzegovina in recent years.

A common feature of neutral names is that they are intended to gather two different denominations in one name, as the following example shows:



Vana: Greetings! My husband and I are in a mixed marriage (Muslim and Catholic) and God willing we are expecting our first [baby].

The doctor says it is [a girl]. (if he isn't mistaken 😊)

About names we have agreed that it will be nationally neutral. This means the child will be neither Muhamed nor Franjo. 😊 😊

I have a couple of names, but none of them really sound right to me. I am not enthusiastic about any of them.

I will mention some names to you which are now on our short list:

NIVES
ELLA
MIA
NAOMI

I would ask you for suggestions, if you have any 😊

PS. The name ENEA is somehow uncommon to me and maybe the most beautiful one of all mentioned, but whomever I mention it to, they look at me with a question mark above their heads.

What do you think about that name????????? Honestly! (*ringeraja.ba.*)

Finding a name suitable for all parties involved can be tricky. All of the examples Vana here gives (*Nives, Ella, Mia, Naomi, Enea*) are generally perceived as international, including the way that they are spelled.

Some Thoughts

Comparing the web discussions with Smailović (1977), Bringa (1995), Sorabji (1989) and Hadžišehović (2003), it seems that only Smailović discusses the fact that Muslim naming in Bosnia-Herzegovina has not been entirely without variation. The others are rather direct: if you are Muslim, you will give your child a Muslim name. The current sociopolitical climate forces parents to choose between expressing a Bosniak Muslim identity (which Aldrin (2011) calls social positioning) or expressing an identity without a denomination. The discussion on mixed families is brief in these sources, similarly to Lisičić (2006), and gives no guidelines for those seeking to comply with several traditions at once. Zukorlić (2004) and Kurdić (2008) do not mention mixed situations, as would be expected of Muslim naming guides.

Also, in comparison with the books, the web now documents discussions that would not have been documented before – discussions between neighbours or friends would never have come into the hands of a far-away researcher. In the nature of web discussions, of course, lies the fact that they are not easily authenticated; for all we know there might be one person logged on as several persons discussing naming with themselves. But why would anyone do that? And would not such fictional writing still mirror the actual world in some ways? It would seem that parents and parents-to-be are using the web discussion forums for peer support and in order to exchange thoughts on a variety of subjects.

A bold interpretation is, however, that the earlier categorical ‘(first) name shows origin’ is going to become even more invalid as the children being named now grow up. Certainly, some names do show origin; others are not intended to.

Conclusions

The results of the socio-onomastic examination of Muslim web discourses on names in Bosnia-Herzegovina were that three categories were found. These categories are positions that the discussants seem to take when names are discussed. The first position is the belief that there are ‘real’ Muslim names, as defined by the Muslim community; however, the person writing

defines that community. The second position is the promotion of traditional Bosnian Muslim names, sometimes called Bosniak names. And the third position is the choice of neutral names that can be given in mixed families or when parents do not want the names of their children to mark them ethnically.

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