

Free literature review on feminism, bi- cultural identities, and modern muslim wom...

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



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There are multiple faces and variances of feminism nowadays, differentiating both geographical as well as cultural (Dunand Zimmerman, 2013). The western feminism comprises the values of the developed and partly developing countries, whereas the African and Asian feminism comprises the values of these societies, where besides gender, race is another element that defines women and the feminism discourse (Dunand Zimmerman, 2013). But in practice things are much more complex than this simply structured formulation of localized feminism. Looking at the Islamic Asian countries, for instance, there can be observed great differences between women's condition in Turkey or Egypt, where women have a voice and speak out for themselves, preaching the Qur'an and the Hadith for asking for their rights, as compared to Bangladesh, where, although Qur'an is also the sacred book that sets the social guidelines for Muslim people, women do not have a voice and there is a silent acceptance of women's almost enslaved condition (Hasan, 2013). All in one, feminism is a social movement that fights for women's rights in terms of social, economic and political equality to men throughout the world (Edgar & Gedgwick, 2007).

Although due to migration Muslim women interacted with new cultures, mostly occidental cultures, studies indicate reluctance from Muslims in general to allow themselves to be absorbed into the national cultures of the countries in which they reached in a search for a "better life" (Islam, 2000). Based on Kunst and Sam's (2013) research, Muslim react negatively to the perceived acculturation expectations, and they express distinct reactions to adaptation: stress in the context of short-term adaptation and self-esteem and socio-cultural adaptation issues in the context of the long - term

adaptation, but on the other hand. Approaching this issue as a logical syllogism, the following inference appears: migrant Muslims express stress and lower levels of adaptation in the host countries, as they respond negatively to the acculturation and assimilation expectations; among the Muslim migrants there are also Muslim women and the logical inference is that Muslim women respond negatively to the acculturation and assimilation expectations.

This would indicate the fact that Muslim women do not want to associate themselves with the cultural symbols or the popular culture of the countries in which they migrate, but on the contrary, that they want to maintain their traditional identity.

Dunand Zimmerman (2013) has found that there are differences in approaching the western feminism among Muslim women, depending on their generation; as such, while the adult first generation Muslim women renounced at publically expressing Islam as their identity and are not generally associated with the wear of hijab, the second generation Muslim women, interacting with occidental women approach a negotiation of their identity, while they still remain loyal to hijab and to wearing the veil, as their cultural choice and as a statement regarding their sustaining of Islamic values (re-Islamization) and as a statement of their resistance to the intentions of eradicating religion of Islam.

This is happening in an era post 9/11, when the Arab values were severely hit, post Arab spring, where the Muslim manifestations showed little interest in Islam religion, but expressed strong interest for democracy, and this is happening in a postmodern imperialism, when the role of military industrial

complex is rising and the technology finds its imperial governance, where globalisation gives rise to the feminization of global labour markets and to inequalities of power and economy in different geographical regions (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). This is happening in an era where the Muslim women attend occidental colleges and have access to all types of media, promoting the occidental lifestyle, beyond modesty, promoting romance and the sexual liberty of women (Dunand Zimmerman, 2013).

Postmodernism refers to a move that appears as a reaction to modernism, which is not totally distinct as ideology from modernism as it proposes several corrections, such as emancipation from cultural, religious, legislative or linguistic oppression, freedom of expression, rationalism and aesthetics (Druzin et al., 2013). Modernism defines current, contemporary aspects of the world, implies being up-to-date, have new thoughts and ideas, and a personality adapted on the current context and values (Moghaddam & Rahman, 2012). Globalization refers to a multi-dimensional phenomenon, defining the “ increasing interconnection between countries or societies” (Moghaddam & Rahman, 2012, p. 6646).

Whether choosing to wear the veil and the hijab (which at a social interaction level is translated through choosing to either affirm the Islam identity or to integrate in the host countries’ society) (Brah & Phoenix, 2004), or whether deciding on maintaining the Muslim values (respect for family, modesty, common sense) or on approaching the occidental freedoms such as sexual liberty, dating, etc. is a matter of a “ selective acculturation”, wherein immigrants may choose to maintain specific aspects of their personal identity, while exploring/adopting others from the cultures of the countries in

which they migrated (Schwartz et al., 2012 p. 18).

Approaching biculturalism is considered to be the most favourable approach for the immigrant students to acculturation (Schwartz et al., 2012). Brown, Gibbons and Hughes (2013, p. 1108) also observe that “ integration, or biculturalism, is an adaptive acculturation strategy”.

In defining Muslim women’s condition nowadays, Turner (1999, in Marks, 2013) employs the social identity theory, which states that people desire to belong to specific social groups, meaning that individuals seek to group with others who share their attitudes and beliefs, expressing negative attitudes toward the out-group, people who are not in the group (who do not share the same attitudes and beliefs). Analysing the modern Islam women based on this theory, Marks (2013) observes that as individuals seek to be around people with the same values, religious individuals embrace the values that other religious people share (indicating self-categorization), which also praise the traditional values, such as marriage. Therefore, based on the social identity theory, Muslim women who share religious values, also share the norms and principles of the traditional woman’s role. In fact, as Hamdan (2006, p. 61) observes, the educated Muslim woman interviewed for the researcher’s conducted study stated that the problem of Muslims world reside in the culture, not religion, indicating a strict distinction between these two, whereas the culture defines the “ ideal woman” as perceived in Muslim countries. Yet, Hamdan (2006) makes no distinction between Muslim culture and its traditions, while Marks (2013) clearly indicates that traditions emerge from religion and this leads to a confusion regarding Muslim tradition and culture. Muslim women represents itself a categorization, to which the

women from Muslim countries associate themselves, based on the perceived attitudes regarding the religion or cultural aspects that differentiate them from women from other parts of the world (Offenhauerm, 2005). This indicates that Muslim women perceive themselves not as individuals, but as group members, sharing the values of that group (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), in their case, Islam, religion and, Muslim traditions and even Muslim culture, with Muslim women identify with, although they criticize them (Hamdan, 2006). Although they face multiple challenges and various complexities as a result of the evolution of the various societies they live in, Muslim women shape their identities based on Islam religion, which is the main determinant regarding their status and well-being (Offenhauerm, 2005) and this is reflected through their attitudinal and behavioural statements of restating Islam values, a work mostly promoted by the second wave educated Muslim women as Dunand Zimmerman (2013) observes.

Nowadays, Muslim women still confront with the misinterpretation of the Qur'an, as some Muslim countries do not respect their rights as described in this holly scripture, and gender role and women's rights are constructed on the cultural practices rather than on the Qur'an and Hadith teachings (Hamdan, 2006). However, there has been registered significant progress in redefining the woman condition in some Arabic countries such as Malaysia, Morocco, Iraq, Iran or Egypt (Hasan, 2013). The nowadays Muslim women residing in Indonesia also represent a model of changed status regarding the Muslim woman condition. As such, single women prior to their marriage experience sexual liberty, being conscious of their sexuality and desirability to the opposite sex, as compared to the preconceived image of Muslim

woman who prior to marriage is an asexual child without knowledge, experience or sexual desires (Bennet, 2005). Agha (2008) observes that the emerging of technology and the exposure to media correlates to the early sexual initiation, and the secondary education correlates with the increases in the age of sexual initiation.

The Muslim women nowadays live in a patriarchal society, just as their occidental counterparts do (Ahmed-Gosh, 2008), where the chivalry, as defined in the public press, is a term that refers to a “ form not of respect for an equal, but of condescension to an inferior” (Islam, 2013, p. 5).

Muslim laws reflect the patriarchal society, considering the fact that Muslim women do not have the same rights as men have regarding making independent decisions, deciding upon the marriage or divorce, or in the custody of their children, although the Qur’an advances equal rights to men and women regarding human dignity (“ Sexuality, Gender and Islam”).

This image portrays Muslim women as oppressed, victims of the patriarchal values that denigrates women in the non-Muslim societies this leads to associating the Muslim values, such as wearing the veil or hijab, to ethnical and religious stereotypes, considering Muslim women as passive unaware of their identity other than related to their religion (Bullock, 2013; Syed, 2004). Ahmed-Gosh (2008) observes that Muslim women trace their freedoms, rights and equality to men from religion, as the Qur’an guarantees their equal rights to men, but the author observes that the secular feminism is founded on human rights, enabling individuals to benefit of the rights of being human, considering, therefore, that the feminist discourse of Muslim women must take a secular feminism approach.

Muslim women vary between Qur'an and secular feminism in defining their feminine identity, with a strong self-categorization observed as related to their Islamic identity and the current research indicates a strong wave of re-Islamization in the light of the international events that negatively affected Islam's image. Although there are Muslim women that experience sexual relations previous to marriage (as a result of mass media exposure), others remain loyal to the traditions and values enlisted in the Qur'an and this is the effect of biculturalism, which allows for a selective acculturation, renouncing at certain Muslim values and accepting certain modern values.

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