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Framing Western Stereotypical Image About Muslim Women and Their Hijab: Studying The Case of Female Converting to Islam in Independent Russia

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Abstract

This research examines the phenomenon of women converting to Islam, and the real situation of Muslim women in Islam in modern societies, more particularly in independent Russia. It will mainly highlight the several Western stereotypical views about the Muslim women and their dressing to Hijab (veil). Hijab has very often been considered as a way of oppression and restriction for the Muslim woman. Whether this or not is the truth, this research will follow the methodology of defining and analyzing several beliefs or views about the role of Muslim women in their societies and at the same time, replying critically at these views, mainly from the cultural and religious background of these Muslim women. These clarifications attempt to break the stereotype of the oppressed Muslim women by defining their own position in their communities as well as explaining their role and relation to their families. In order to gain a full understanding to the current situation about wearing hijab among Russian Muslim women, the study will present ethnic and age structure of Muslim women according to a sociological survey conducted in 2014. The research will conclude that Muslim women in Russian society, and also that of Islam has chosen to wear hijab by their own free will and without any forcing power from any of their male relatives.

Keywords: Hijab, Muslim women, Stereotypical image, Converting to Islam, Sociological Survey.

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Introduction

Today in the world, the number of Muslims is sharply increasing, including in countries that are not traditionally Islamic, like: the USA, France, Britain, Germany, and Russia. Among the "new Muslims", one can see ethnic Russians, Russians, Englishmen, Germans, and others like that. Many of the "new Muslims" are representatives of the middle class in the age from twenty to forty; many of them study at higher education institutions. Attention is drawn to the fact that the overwhelming majority of converted Muslims are women. For instance, in the United States, among the people who accepted Islam, women are four times more than men. (Esposito , 1999). Thus, in response to the phenomenon of women converting to Islam, the question which is raised is, "Why are Western women, who are raised in non-Islamic background and contexts, converting to Islam?". This research paper will study the numbers of women converting to Islam in Russian society as well as the reasons or this converting. The research will also examine the results of this converting, such as: gender equality and women's oppression.

It should be noted that this phenomenon has not been left out of the attention of researchers - historians, sociologists, lawyers, religious scholars. An important role in understanding the main tendencies of the studied sphere was played by the works of general theoretical fundamental character. The problem of Islam in the modern world is devoted to the work of such well-known scholars as John Esposito and Samuel Huntington. In 1991, the result of the work of a team of Soviet scholars was the publication of a fundamental encyclopedia of the word "Islam" .

Among domestic researchers, one should pay attention to the works of Anatoly Lubsky (2015) and M. Kyryushko (2004). For a better understanding of the views of Islam on women and women on Islam, it is also expedient to involve the works of Muslim scholars. For example, the Egyptian researcher Mahmoud Hamdi Zakzouk (2000) devoted the fifth section of his work, "The Fighting of Islam to the attempts of discrediting it" to describe the problem of women in Islam. Also, the Arabic scholar and theologian Muhammad Ali Al Hashimi explores different aspects of contemporary Muslim woman in his book *The Ideal Muslimah* (2003). Of great interest are the works of Muslim scholars and among the special studies, in particular those devoted to the topic of women in Islam are Mohammad Ali Syed's book *The Position of Women in Islam* (2004) and Suzanne Haneef's book *What Everyone Should Know About Islam and Muslims*, (2005).

The reference database of the study includes several groups of sources. The attitude of Islam to women is canonized in its ideological sources, mainly, Quran and Tafsir (interpretation of the Quran verses), and also theological literature. Thus, the problems of the relationship between a

man and a woman and marital relations are dedicated to individual verses of Quran, like that of: (4 – Women sura, 24 – Light sura, 58 – Dispute sura, 65 – Divorce sura, 66 – Prohibitions sura.. etc.). The legal basis of Islam is based on shari'a. Shari'a (Sharia's means straight, right way) is a set of rules of conduct for a Muslim from birth to death, organically linked with Islam and its principles. Muslim law is not divided into civil, criminal, or religious. It is the only one unit, based on Quran and Sunnah (the traditional portion of Muslim law based on the prophet's words or acts). Over time, norms of shari'a widely spread outside the Middle East, but this has led to an increase in its local features, manifestations of norms of customary law.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the real situation of women in Islam in modern societies, particularly in Russia. Also, the paper aims at answering the question of why modern Russian women turn to Islam; what they are trying to find in it and how it affects their lives. In addition, the paper will also check the most widespread negative stereotypes in mass consciousness about Muslim women, gender and family relationships in Islam.

Analysis:

A sociological research among Russian Muslims has clearly revealed the structure of the Muslim community in Russia. It has shown that 59.5% of Crimean Tatars, 18.7% of Volhynian Tatars, 4.2% of Azerbaijanis in Crimea, and also within the range of 1-2% of the respondents represented the Turks, the peoples of Dagestan, the Balkar, the Adjara, the Arabs, the Adygea, Chechens, Tajiks, Turkmen, Uzbeks, Pakistanis.. etc. A particular attention is directed to the appearance of a layer of Russens (5.7%) and Russians (4.1%). Men and women are closely related to the general structure of the population: 54.25% of women and 45.75% of men. Most of the Muslims surveyed are Sunnis Hanafi Muslims. (Esposito, 1999: 2) It is natural that the author considers the most common stereotypes of his own from this point of view.

One of the most widespread stereotype about Muslim women is the point of view that "according to the canons of Islam, a woman is a human being of the second grade". (Kyryushko, 2000: 57) In fact, a woman in Islam takes a very important place. She is seen as a precious thing that needs care and a special attention. A woman is a mother, a sister, a daughter, a wife. The Qur'an considers the model of the virtue of two women - the wife of the despot Pharaoh of the time of Moses, who adopted Moses as her son. The other woman is Mary, the mother of Christ. Both were purely spirits and noble. (Prozorov, 1991: 587) In the early Islamic era, there were three women represented as an example of enlightenment, deep spirituality, and many other great qualities - Khadijah, the first wife of the Prophet

Muhammad, Aisha , the young and faithful wife of the Prophet, and Fatima , his daughter. (Zolotuhyna, 2011: 174)

The axiom in Islam is that, according to Sharia, a woman is a living human being who has the same soul as a man. For instance, the first verse of the fourth sura of the Quran calls on people to "Fear the lord who created them from one soul and created from it couples and from them spread many men and women". (Prozorov, 1991: 102) The Qur'an provides a clear proof that the woman is completely equal to her partner before Allah: Every person, man or woman is responsible for their own actions: "Everyone who does something good - be it a man or a woman, and while believing - then these will enter paradise and will not be offended". (Prozorov, 1991: 123)

In addition, when performing religious rites (daily prayers, fasting, compulsory donations for the poor, pilgrimage), the responsibilities of women do not differ from the responsibilities of men. However, in some cases, a woman has some advantages over men. For example, a woman is freed from daily prayers and from fasting during the menstrual period and within forty days of the birth of the child. A woman also has the right to postpone fasting during pregnancy and breastfeeding and taking care of her if there is any danger to her health or child health, etc. Islam takes into account the physiological as well as psychological peculiarities associated with the natural functions of the female body, recognizing that a woman has a more subtle, sensual and emotional nature than a man, a thing that facilitates her duties in religion.

Other stereotypical images taken about Muslim women, like: Muslim women are considered for men as servants, subjects for humiliation, deprived of any rights and freedoms. Also that a Muslim man is a tyrant, a despot and a polygene. His wife does not leave the house without permission and escort. It seems appropriate to discuss these statements together. Since the nature of the man and woman is not the same, everyone is assigned to a special role in the society. These roles complement each other, each of which is essential and vital to the functioning of society.

The spirit of marriage in Islam is the spirit of mutual respect, kindness, love, cooperation and harmony relations. The wife finds in her husband a friend and partner who shares her life, cares about her, protects her and volunteers to perform the duties that cannot be fulfilled by her. The husband also finds in his wife a friend and an assistant who provides peace of mind, comfort and relaxation from the struggle with problems. Thus, the rights of women and men are united; all have the only reward for the correctness of the implementation and responsibility of the approach to the functions assigned to both of them. Actually, Muslim women depend on religion in upbringing the following generations. In Islamic societies, they are considered to be the guardians of peace, tranquility and religiousness.

In Islam, women have equal rights with men - to protect life, honor, property and dignity. These rights are inviolable. An example can serve as a protection for the Muslim women's rights is Mehr (dowry), a gift a man gives to the woman whom he wants to marry as a symbol of love and strength of desire. This gift cannot be taken by either her mother, her father or even husband, only on her own will a woman can spend on the family needs. The amount of dowry is set by the woman. For example, in modern Turkey, the bride's dowry reaches to the cost of a car, a house or a land price. The Prophet Muhammad did not allow a marriage without dowry, saying that the one who marries without the intention of giving dowry, will rise on the Judgment Day among thieves. Thus, according to Prozorov, dowry appears to be the insurance for the woman's right during her marital life. In case of sudden death to the husband or a divorce, the dowry helps the woman and gives her the opportunity to rebuild her own life and. Today, many Muslim men are trying to negotiate about the price of the dowry, that is why they prefer to go abroad and marry foreigners of non-Muslim origins.

Another stereotypical image taken about the Muslim women is that they are more often forced to marry the chosen man by their families. Indeed, the choice of the companion of life in Islam is different from the traditions that are existed in the West. In most Islamic countries, young men and girls are rarely encountered, and premarital sexual contacts are totally prohibited. Love usually comes to Muslim couples after marriage is occurred. The choice of a marriage partner, as a rule (but not always), is carried out by the parents. (Esposito, 1991: 27) In fact, marriage in Islam requires four conditions: The marriage formula must be pronounced in Arabic, the members of the marriage must be of an adult age and full of reason (Muslim lawyers believe that the marriage age for girls starts from nine years, and for boys from fifteen), they must call each other by name, and, finally, the man and woman must fully agree on the marriage without being forced on it. Thus, consent is a necessary element of marriage to Muslims. Signs of consent according to the Sharia's are silence or a smile for the girl, as a reason of shyness. The Prophet pointed out that "the girl should be asked to agree on consent in all matters concerning her, and if she silences or smiles, then this signifies her consent". (Esposito, 1999:141)

Marriage in Islam is "the lawful union of a man and a woman based on mutual consent. It is a contract that results in the man and woman living with each other and supporting each other within the limits of what has been laid down for them in terms of rights and obligations". (Dogarawa, 2009: 3) Marriage in Islam also requires that both the man and woman should realize their duty to God and responsibilities to each other. In an Islamic family, a woman is first and foremost a righteous wife and guardian of the

home. Family relationships are clearly depicted in Islam, the duties and rights of a husband and wife, where the husband is the head of the family, and the wife is the mistress of the house. Islam also requires husbands and wives to meet their own sexual needs exclusively in marriage. Infidelity is a sin and a serious crime. (Zolotuhyna, 2000: 178)

Despite the fact that Muslim marriages are very strong and highly respected, Islam recognizes the rights of both men and women to abandon their marital relationship. Although Islam basically grants the man the right to carry out divorce, it also gives the wife the right to divorce her husband and end the marriage relation through a procedure known as the name of *khul'* divorce which can be defined as a divorce initiated by the woman who must give away part of her dowry as a kind of self-redemption.

The attitude towards women in the family rejects any kind of control by men. The harassment and restriction of the rights of any of them is strictly punishable. As for the mothers in authentic *hadith* (prophet's speech) says: "Paradise is under the feet of mothers" to focus on the importance of showing kindness toward the relatives, especially toward the mother. In answering a question from a man about who among the people is most deserving of a fine treatment from his hand? He said: Your mother. He again said: Then who is the next one? He said: Again it is your mother (who deserves the best treatment from you). He said: Then who is the next one? He said: Again, it is your mother. He (again) said: Then who? Thereupon he said: Then it is your father. Then your nearest relatives. (Book 32, No. 6181: Sahih Muslim)

As for the women position in their family, it is worth mentioning that in order for a Muslim woman to leave home, one must have permission from her husband. Accompanying man is also preferable. However, this rule is intended to facilitate a woman to communicate in the cities of trade, transferring in hard work and protection. With regard to polygamy, indeed, Islam allows the man to have several wives, (not more than four at once). However, it should be noted that polygamy requires mutual consent and no one will force a woman to marry a married man. A woman can also nominate a condition on her husband in the marriage contract - not to take a second wife. It should also be said that currently in most Muslim countries, polygamy is a fairly rare phenomenon, and polygynous marriages are more rare than outside marriage ties in Western countries.

Another stereotypical image about the Muslim women is that they do not study and work, and that they are forced to wear hijab (veil). In one of the *hadiths* (Prophet's speech), the Prophet's words are stated clearly: "Education is the duty of every Muslim male and female", and in another position: "Knowledge is *Fard* (obligatory). In another it also says: "Welcome to those who seek knowledge! Indeed, the angels are surrounding by their own wings those who seek knowledge". Thus, every Muslim be a man or a woman must try to gain knowledge. A woman in Islam must also

participate in the husband's business. For instance, Prophet's wife Khadija was a wonderful wife, mother, in addition to being a successful and esteemed business woman. This shows that women in Islam can occupy important positions in their society in various fields of public life.

Regarding the *hijab* (veil), it should be said that recently in the mass consciousness for some reasons, the hijab is understood as a woman's handkerchief. However, *hijab* (barrier) is not a mere piece of texture on the head, but rather internal and external cover and mainly internal. This is an outlook, internal positions that agree with faith, manners of conduct, values, morality..etc. The outside hijab is the Muslim women's clothing (veil). In this position, it is worthy to identify certain rules of wearing hijab:

- 1 Clothing that should completely cover the head, the body, except the face and hands.
- 2 Clothing that should be made of opaque dense fabric.
- 3 Clothing that should be free cut to conceal the shape of the body.
- 4 Clothing that should be a female type and not a masculine type.
- 5 Clothing that should not serve as an ornament, so as not to attract the attention of men to women's beauty.

Many non-Muslims believe that the liberation and independence of women is impossible without the removal of the hijab. Such an opinion is also shared by the some "Muslims" whose, religion is eclectic and whose knowledge of Islam is very limited or absent altogether.

In fact, the purpose and the essence of wearing hijab are to strengthen the family links. For a woman, wearing hijab does not mean a blind obedience to a male relative. Indeed, hijab has a different meaning: protecting women from evil, misery and sins of the world. In Islam, Hijab is a sign of shyness, modesty and decency. It should be noted that wearing the hijab was until recently attributed exclusively to Arab women. Today, more and more Muslim women can be seen on the streets in hijab, such as: (Tatars, Azerbaijani, Russian, Turkish women, etc.). This can be explained by the desire of men (often such women are married to Arabs), internal motives - a person is proud of his own faith, this is also the characteristic of the neophytes. And finally, hijab might be a sign of fashion also, a desire will attract attention and stand out, although hijab has a completely opposite purpose.

Many Russian Muslims adapt to the Muslim style which is different from the Western clothing style. Their belief in Islam and its teachings of modesty are also present in their clothing: Long strait jackets, long skirts, straight skirts, scarves that tie behind the neck, ornaments with Arabic

symbols.. etc. However, in a relationship with her husband, a woman is free to choose clothes according to her own taste, desire and situation. , Among the Russian Muslims, there is no general agreement about wearing hijab. To illustrate the current situation around Muslim women in Russia, a sociological survey expresses the topic "Muslim woman in Russia". Twenty-three Muslim women in Donetsk were interviewed by students of the Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies. Most of the respondents were girls and young women aged 16 to 30 years (Table 1). It is interesting that Russens make up 30% of the respondents and share the first place with Azerbaijani people. The third place is occupied by representatives of the traditional Muslim community in the Donetsk region - Tatar.

Table 1 - Ethnic and age structure of Muslim women

No.	Ethnicity	Number	Age 16-19 years	Age 20 - 30 years
1	Russen women	7	4	3
2	Azerbaijani	7	1	6
3	Tatars	5	1	4
4	Leeches	2	2	-
5	Ossetians	1	1	-
6	Uzbečki	1	-	1
	Total	23	9	14

Table 2 discusses the dynamics of religiosity in Russian society. The analysis of the data in table. 2 indicates that 61% of Muslims believed since childhood, and 39% converted to Islam in the period from 2005 to 2009.

Table 2 - Dynamics of religiosity of Russen Muslim women

No.	Ethnicity	Believed since childhood	Believed in 2005 – 2009
1	Russen women	-	7
2	Azerbaijani	7	-
3	Tatars	4	1
4	Leeches	1	1
5	Ossetians	1	-
6	Uzbečki	1	-
7	Together	14	9

It should also be noted that among Russian Muslims, Russens were more active in the field of religious education, cultural and religious activities. Thus, 100% of Muslim women are actively attending a mosque and an Islamic cultural center in Donetsk (three times a week), studying Arabic, the Quran, listening to Sheikh Lectures, reading Islamic literature,

exchanging religious experience, communicating with someone faithful.. etc. In this center, a women's club was created.

Russian expressed great knowledge in Islamic doctrine, regulations, traditions and more. The representatives of ethnic groups, that are traditionally considered Muslim, gain knowledge about Islam in the circle of their own family, mosques, and mullahs from their public religious activity of Russian Muslim. Active communication and knowledge about Islam happens also through internet and mobile phones. In addition, the research has shown tolerance in society to Muslims and strong bonds between Family members, friends and acquaintances.

Among the factors that Russian women were given as to what contributed, motivations to adopt Islam , can provide the following:

- Disappointment in Christianity, searching for "true" faith - 29%;
- Being married to a Muslim - 43%;
- Interest in Islam, (people who have turned to Islam as an effect of spiritual explorations, - 28%.

In an interview diary "Today" with the Head of Religious Studies of the Institute of Philosophy of Skovorody- Russian, doctor A. Kolodny put forward the opinion that the main reasons for people transition from Christianity to Islam are: firstly, dissatisfaction of Orthodox Church, which does not pay enough attention to its followers. While Muslims actively support their brothers and sisters both morally and financially. Second, the Russian appreciated the cult of Islam in traditional family which mainly consists of the man - the breadwinner, and the woman - a homemaker. And finally, last but most important is perhaps their eagerness to find an certain identity in Islam due to the lack of Russian national identity. In fact, the motives for converting to Islam are varied. According to Golubchikov and Mnatsakanyan (2005) the reason for conversion to Islam could be the economic situation of the country and, predominantly, the wild "market-oriented democracy," which is difficult for young people to bear. They argue that Islam offers these young people a feeling of attachment to tradition and righteous organization of life in concordance with God. In addition, the Muslim community provides spiritual support not only within the mosque. Russians cannot find these values in the commercialized Orthodox Church, where "even participation in a service without money became embarrassing." (P. 388) On the other hand, it is noticed that today the female Russian who adopt Islam are mostly young women, not older than 30, primarily from student circles. (Izabela Kończak, 2019: 4). Similarly, Edwin Starbuck (2015) suggests that: "The ties between religious conversion and adolescent growth". (P. 40)

Another interesting feature can be noted here is that "ethnic" Muslims have a huge responsibility to reject the negative stereotypical image about Islam and Muslims and to reveal a better understanding to Islam to the world. Contrarily, often in today's world, they lost the true understanding of Islam, received widespread pseudo-Islamic tradition (many of which contradict Islamic basic principles). For example, Muslim children who believed in Islam from childhood do not understand (though may say) the words of the Qur'an; do not go to the mosque, and they considered Islam a big deal that is worth honoring but not directly related to modern life. The main source of knowledge about Islam for them is, first of all, parents or relatives. Many mosques in Russia are built as representatives of a national community (the Tatars, the peoples of the North Caucasus, Uzbeks.. etc.). And these people are incredibly attached to their traditions, which often have no relation to Islam.

Conclusion:

Although the majority of people in Russia adhere to the Russian Orthodox Christian faith, Muslims are not considered exotic or alien to the Russian society. This research studied the case of female Muslims who turned to Islam by their own choice, as well as the most popular negative stereotypes about their conduct. It is concluded that the most common negative stereotypes in the mass consciousness about Muslim women, gender and family relations in Islam often are without real support, and are built on pseudo-Islamic views. These stereotypes really confuse Islam as a religion based on tolerance, with old-fashioned customs, traditions, and often some bad attitudes toward Muslim women. An objective approach to the study of Islam needs to distinguish between those things.

Because of the devastating state of women in some Islamic, particularly Arabic societies, the stereotypes about the widespread ignorance among Muslim women are intensified in mass media and even in Western literature. Unfortunately, most Muslims help to intensify this state of affairs. Even in the Islamic movement, there are many men who believe that "true Muslim orthodoxy" (or Sunni Islam) should increase their requirements for women and give them their rights equal to their partner and to urge their societies to stop suppressing their intellect. However, a particular social reality, unfortunately, is often different from moral standards, ideals and canonical principles of Islam.

The situation in Russia about Muslim women does not differ fundamentally from global trends. It is important that the "New Muslim" women who were previously either Christian or do not believe in God have a fresh look at the world, and to free themselves from the influences of Eastern traditions, prejudices, vestiges of customary law and accept Islamic faith in its canonical version. However, it remains a danger that they may be under the influence of Muslim men and their relatives, media prejudices, customs or traditional law, which may be mistakenly perceived as an essential and integral proper Islamic culture.

تأطير الصورة النمطية الغربية عن النساء المسلمات وحجابهن: دراسة حالة
اعتناق المرأة للإسلام في روسيا المستقلة
عبير الرواشدة
المستخلص

يدرس هذا البحث ظاهرة تحول المرأة إلى الإسلام، والوضع الحقيقي للمرأة المسلمة في الإسلام في المجتمعات الحديثة، ولاسيما في روسيا المستقلة. سوف يسلط البحث الضوء بشكل أساسي على العديد من الآراء النمطية الغربية حول المرأة المسلمة وارتدائها الحجاب. غالبًا ما يُنظر إلى الحجاب على أنه وسيلة لقمع وتقييد المرأة المسلمة. سواء كانت هذه هي الحقيقة أم لا، فإن هذا البحث سيتبع منهجية تعريف وتحليل العديد من المعتقدات أو الآراء حول دور المرأة المسلمة في مجتمعاتها وفي الوقت نفسه، الرد بطريقة نقدية على هذه الآراء، وبشكل أساسي من الخلفية الثقافية والدينية لهؤلاء المسلمات. تحاول هذه التوضيحات كسر الصورة النمطية للمرأة المسلمة المضطهدة من خلال تحديد وضعها في مجتمعاتها وكذلك شرح دورها وعلاقتها بأسرتها. من أجل الحصول على فهم كامل للوضع الحالي حول ارتداء الحجاب بين المسلمات الروسيات، ستعرض الدراسة التركيب العرقي والعمرى للمرأة المسلمة وفقا لمسح اجتماعي أجري في عام 2014. وسيخلص البحث إلى أن النساء المسلمات في المجتمع الروسي، وأيضًا في المجتمعات الإسلامية اخترن ارتداء الحجاب بمحض إرادتهن وبدون أي سلطة قسرية من أي من أقاربهن الذكور.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحجاب، المرأة المسلمة، الصورة النمطية، اعتناق الإسلام، المسح الاجتماعي.

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