

THE EXPERIENCE OF MUSLIM IMMIGRANT WOMEN
IN SPAIN: BETWEEN SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGE,
DISCRIMINATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

VALERIA BELLO



FEMALE AGENCY, MOBILITY AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGE

UNU-GCM

Policy Report 03/05



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY

UNU-GCM

Institute on Globalization,
Culture and Mobility

This is a report of the United Nations University Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility. It forms part of the series, *Female Agency, Mobility and Socio-cultural Change*. It should be cited as:

Bello, Valeria. *The Experience of Muslim Immigrant Women in Spain: Between Socio-cultural Change, Discrimination and Civil Society Participation*, Policy Report No. 03/05. Barcelona: United Nations University Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility (UNU-GCM), 2015.

The United Nations University (UNU) is the academic arm of the United Nations (UN). It bridges the academic world and the UN system. Its goal is to develop sustainable solutions for current and future problems of humankind in all aspects of life. Through a problem-oriented and interdisciplinary approach it aims at applied research and education on a global scale. UNU was founded in 1973 and is an autonomous organ of the UN General Assembly. The University comprises a headquarters in Tokyo, Japan, and more than a dozen Institutes and Programmes worldwide.

The UNU Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility (GCM) focuses on globalization, culture and mobility through the lens of migration and media. It engages in rigorous research in these areas, sharing knowledge and good practice with a broad range of groups, collectives and actors within and beyond the academy. Its commitments are at local and global levels, whereby it seeks to bridge gaps in discourses and practices, so as to work towards the goals of the United Nations with regard to development, global partnership, sustainability and justice.

This research programme focuses on the feminization of migration as one of the most significant social patterns to have emerged in the course of the last century. Too often, female migrants occupy vulnerable positions in their host societies, engaging in domestic work, sex work and other unregulated sectors. Despite being so vulnerable and despite established patterns of exploitation, the numbers of women who choose to migrate is rising. This research programme focuses on this phenomenon, in order to better understand why and how migration may offer routes to empowerment to women. A specific area of focus will be the extent to which migration allows women from the global south new sociocultural horizons as they cross over and settle in the global north.

The Experience of Muslim Immigrant Women in Spain: Between Socio-cultural Change, Discrimination and Civil Society Participation

Valeria Bello

- Summary | 1
- Aims and Objectives | 2
- Introduction | 3
- Muslim Immigrant Women in Spain | 4
 - Factors of Socio-Cultural Change | 4
 - Stereotypes and Reasons of Discrimination | 6
 - Women's Status, Freedoms and Female Agency | 7
- Conclusions and Recommendations | 9
- References | 11

Summary

In the light of UN discussions on the role of women in the world, this policy report investigates how socio-political systems can empower women immigrants and diasporas in ways that they can both play a relevant socio-political role in the public sphere and negotiate their role in the private sphere. It aims to understand the factors that allow Muslim immigrant women, in particular, to contribute to socio-cultural change as a consequence of their migratory experience, both individually and through their involvement in the collective agency within the broader civil society of countries of residence.

From the evidences that different analytical tools offered, it is clear that, while the administrative and political systems do not provide stimuli, contribution to the civil society of the host country depends to a great extent on the personal attributes of women leaders. Their activities can subsequently affect socio-cultural change in countries of residence in positive ways. Therefore, in order to propel female agency further, governments should provide stimuli for female migrants to organise collectively, especially at the local level.

Another extremely interesting research finding is that the economic integration of Muslim women in the labour market of countries of residence appears to be the first driving force of socio-cultural change for Muslim families. Therefore, robust efforts to include more Muslim women in the labour market should be a priority for all government levels. In this light, economic incentives to hire Muslim women in small, medium and large business and enterprises would be a wise and affordable way to integrate Muslim women immigrants, empower them in their private spheres and, concurrently, contributing to important socio-cultural change of benefit for both these immigrants' families and the countries of residence.

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this policy report is to suggest recommendations highlighting those measures that could be useful in 1) integrating women in countries of residence, and 2) empowering them to develop female agency and, through it, engage in socio-cultural change. Finally, this policy report aims at 3) creating the conditions to soothe the gender-based conflict of values between Western and Muslim groups by both improving knowledge and awareness of one another and ameliorating women's conditions.

As substantiated by research (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007), a key aspect of the current hostility towards Muslim groups in Europe is a gender-based conflict of values between Western and Muslim societies that concern both the role and the treatment of the respective group of women, along with the subsequent type of education their corresponding children receive. The decision to focus on the case study of Spain lies in the fact that, amongst the European countries, this is the country with larger figures of female Muslim migrants, for both geographical and cultural reasons (Dietz 2005; Gomez-Camarero 1995; Ribas-Mateos 2004).

Therefore, the objectives of this work consist in identifying those factors that can help Muslim immigrant women integrate into host societies, empowering them both in private and public spheres. Better integration can actually help them negotiate their role and identities within their families and outside, enabling them to organise collectively and publicly.

Introduction

Migration is amongst the most delicate issues in contemporary European societies, as well as in most other parts of the world, for a variety of reasons, not least of them being the insiders' perception of migration as a menace to self identity (Quillian 1995). Specifically, this happens when the local communities perceive the minority group under scrutiny, or else said the "main reference group" (Tajfel 1982), as particularly different from ingroups for cultural, historical, contextual or ethnic elements (Turner et al. 1987).

Indeed, the migration of individuals and groups of Muslim faith has become a very sensitive topic in recent decades. The increasingly visible presence of Muslim immigrants - and especially of Muslim women, due to the veil some of them use to wear, which has become highly symbolic of the conflict of values between Western and Muslim groups itself - is something that can be traced back to the 1990s (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007). However, it is probably after the 9/11 attack to the Twin Towers that these groups of migrants are objects of fears and, consequently, xenophobia. This is probably due also to the spectacular way it happened, being displayed in almost all TVs of the world while it was taking place. However, as important research has demonstrated, the main reasons for this intergroup conflict are neither religious nor political. It is, instead, a conflict of values mainly based in gender issues (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007).

In "When Ways of Life Collide", Sniderman and Hagendoorn (2007) lay out the results of their research concerning the Muslim migration in the Netherlands and in Italy. From their findings, the main issue that emerges around this question is that there appears to be a conflict of values between Western societies and Muslim societies. The sources of this conflict of values principally lie in the different views of what are the appropriate

treatment and behaviour of women in these respective peoples (idem: p.128-129). On the one hand, Western societies consider that Muslim women are discriminated against both socially and politically in their homelands and that this discrimination is brought in Western societies through "Muslim" migration. Also, according to Western societies, the way Muslim families - and women mainly - educate their children appears to perpetuate this discrimination, as female children are brought up in different ways than males are, and especially with less degrees of freedom. In general, there is a perception that Muslim families educate their children in a more authoritarian way, which seems to be particularly harsh towards girls. On the other hand, Muslim groups perceive that, in Western societies, women are not given the respect they deserve and that children are lacking discipline (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007).

The objective of this work is a better understanding of: 1) what do female migrants of Muslim origins consider of this issue, 2) whether or not they are exposed to socio-cultural change in host societies and for what reasons; 3) whether or not they fight to have more freedom in Western societies, and in this case could they get support from the socio-political system in countries of residence, or 4) they think these features attributed to Muslim groups are stereotypes and they fight against this form of prejudice.

This report specifically focuses on the case study of Spain, due to the large presence of Muslim women migrants for both geographical and historical reasons (Dietz 2005; Gomez-Camarero 1995). In order to understand more of this perceived conflict of values based on gender discrimination, the present report analyses both previous research developed on the topic and the situation, along with the civic engagements, of some Muslim women in Spain. A variety of research tools, including document analysis, ethnographic research and statistical analysis of available data offered useful insights into factors that allow to empower women both in their private and in the public sphere.

Muslim Immigrant Women in Spain

Factors of Socio-Cultural Change

As Natalia Ribas-Mateos noticed in an interesting special issue around the theme of Migrations in Southern Europe (Ribas-Mateos 2004), although migration is not new as a phenomenon, it is indeed

possible to identify some novelties in recent trends, and one of these consists in the increase of female migration.

In this same special issue, Zontini (2004) analyses how female migrants cope with the consequences of transnational lives and, through an analysis of everyday experiences of Moroccan women in Barcelona, she highlights how, for these women, migrating has meant changing the way they see themselves. In particular, the caring work, which usually constituted their main role as households before migrating, was gradually replaced by a different view of her economic role for the family. In fact, for those who started to get paid work, their valuable economic contribution involved a transformation of the entire structure of the family and the different roles that women and men hold within it, with other people taking responsibilities for care needed persons, including men (Zontini 2004).

Similar results also appear in an earlier study of Moroccan women immigrants in Spain (Vitale 2000), which shows that Moroccan women integrate easily into Spanish society in terms of labour market and family roles and status. As a consequence, they become the major channels of socio-cultural change in Muslim families, as they start negotiating family roles and new identities with the men. Interestingly, in this study, which was conducted before the 9/11 attacks, these women do not feel so much discriminated against in Spain and do not perceive any form of cultural shock (Vitale 2000).

The subsequent discrimination that Moroccan female migrants perceive, as it appears in this investigation and which other studies also reported (Dietz 2005), cannot be currently explained by a growing number of Muslim women migrants in the country. In fact, despite the inflows of female migrants have seen increased figures around the world and in the Southern part of Europe specifically (Kofman 2003; Ribas-Mateo 2004), this is not the reality anymore. In fact, according to recent data of the Spanish National Statistics, since 2008 cumulative numbers of main groups of Muslim women immigrants have lowered again (see Table 1). If one looks at the data differentiated according to places of origins, though, it is clear that what is lowering is, indeed, the number of Moroccan women. Other Muslim women populations are growing, such as Algerian and Pakistani women, but they are only relatively increasing in terms of per year inflow numbers, which remain, anyway, very low in absolute numbers (see Table 1).

Table 1:
Main Muslim Women Immigrant Groups Immigration Inflows 2008-2013

Years/%	Total					
	Total	Argelia	Morocco	Bangladesh	Pakistan	Cumulative Percentages of Main Muslim Women Groups
2008	288812	1968	31222	287	1573	
		0,007	0,108	0,001	0,005	0,121
2009	200677	1737	21755	436	1272	
		0,009	0,108	0,002	0,006	0,126
2010	183876	1304	14411	171	5097	
		0,007	0,078	0,001	0,028	0,114
2011	190389	1738	13363	253	2991	
		0,009	0,070	0,001	0,016	0,096
2012	154304	1888	10566	333	2020	
		0,012	0,068	0,002	0,013	0,096
2013	141299	2012	9445	410	1711	
		0,014	0,067	0,003	0,012	0,096

Statistic data provided by INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística).

However, the perceptions of locals are that a growing number of Muslim women are arriving in Spain. The reason for this is consequently to be found in different causes and, perhaps, in the 9/11 attack, the subsequent xenophobia and in the gender-base conflict of values that the veil somehow symbolises.

1. Currently, the region with the highest numbers of individuals of Muslim faith is Catalonia (see Data from the Spanish Institute of National Statistics).

Stereotypes and Reasons of Discrimination

In an interesting analysis of Muslim women migrants carried out through an ethnographic analysis in some specific Spanish cities (Cordoba and Granada), Gunther Dietz (2005) notices how, since the end of the Franco years, two parallel phenomena have been taking place in Andalucía. This is one of the Southern regions of Spain and once was the core of the "Muslim Spain"¹. On the one hand, there is a growing number of the population that is converting to the Muslim faith, and, amongst these groups, particularly women. On the other hand, there is a growing

discrimination towards Muslim women immigrants (Dietz 2005). Immigrant Muslim women feel openly discriminated against, prejudiced, offended and also physically menaced by local populations, who hold a variety of stereotypes towards them: first of all religious and ethnic stereotypes, but also cultural and gender-based labels (Idem: 36).

From the study developed for this policy report, it is evident that, because of the high symbolic representation of the “veil”, Muslim women are more visible than other female migrants² and more visible than their male peers. The investigation also made clear that an aspect that also accompanies the formation of these stereotypes is the fear that, because of the presence of second-generation Muslim migrants, Spanish society and, mainly, the Spanish school system worsens, especially in those districts where Muslim percentages are high. In these cases, due to the fact that Spanish public schools are assigned territorially to families, many amongst the local population complain that their children will attend “Muslim schools”, because of the high percentages of Muslim children in these districts.

Many of these stereotypes are based on presumptions that Muslim families engage in more authoritarian and “less-developed” education, which is judged to particularly impact women. Also, this “less-developed” education and their religion is considered the reason for which Muslim families have more children than Western families and other groups of migrants³. However, these women, when they try to engage in acts of female agency in the public sphere to fight these stereotypes, attract discrimination from their own groups of origins (see ACESOP 7th Nov 2012; ADIS 26th Oct 2014). For these reasons, the female leaders studied in this report consider that the prejudice that host societies could hold of them is something that second-generation immigrants need to battle. First-generation Muslim women immigrants involved in civil society activities, instead, think they need to engage in order to integrate more successfully in host societies and be empowered, through this, also in their private spheres for the negotiation of their role and identities in the families (Torres Garijo 26th Sept 2012).

Women’s Status, Freedoms and Female Agency

Various works take into account the situation of Muslim immigrant women in Spain (Alcalde et al. 2002; Terrón-Caro 2008; Vitale 2000; Zontini 2004). One study compares the education that children receive in Moroccan families living in

2. With the exception of immigrants of indigenous ethnic minorities coming from Latin American countries, that are also highly visible because of ethnic facets and that experience exactly the same kind of gender-based prejudice and stereotypes, including the ways they educate their children.

3. It would be perhaps here worth noticing that Spanish, Irish and Italian immigrants, because of the strong role played by Catholic religion in their societies of origins, were also objects of the same kind of prejudice and stereotypes in the US (Hirschman 2005).

the city of Huelva, in Spain, by comparing them with Moroccan families living in the Tanger region and the Casablanca region - the places of origin of most of Moroccan migrants in Huelva (Terrón-Caro 2008). Remarkably, the author shows that, the more time Muslim families spend in Spain, the more they get assimilated and become more similar in education attitudes, behaviours and trends to Spanish families than to families in places of origins. Particularly relevant for this policy report is the finding that this socio-cultural change is strongly related to the extent of the economic role that women migrants play. In fact, the more women migrants work and consequently earn, the more Moroccan families show education and family structures and role patterns similar to Spanish ones. Therefore, this research also confirms previous research findings, developed in different disciplinary studies and with different objectives (Vitale 2000; Zontini 2004): women's integration in the labour market is the primary source of socio-cultural change for Muslim families.

In an earlier study of Moroccan female immigrants living in Catalonia also focusing on socio-cultural change in family roles due to migratory movements in Muslim families, instead, the authors suggest that outcomes of the move are not always the same for Muslim women immigrants. These depend on some personal factors, such as the reasons for which the women decide to migrate, personal characteristics (education levels, leadership attitudes, life projects, places of origins, ...) and social networks (Alcalde et al. 2002). These results are extremely interesting because they confirm some intuitions that one could get from the literature on women diasporas. In these studies, it clearly appears that the organizational capabilities of women depends on their education and that, through participation in civil society, activities of female associations and diasporas can empower broader groups of women and produce socio-cultural change (Dwyer 2000, Moghadam 2005; Roces and Edwards 2010).

From in-depth interviews and the analysis of online documents concerning the leaders of some female diasporas, including "Asociación de Mujeres Inmigrantes subsaharianas (ADIS)", "Women of the World" and "Asociación Cultural Educativa Social y Operativa de Mujeres Pakistaniés (ACESOP)", it is clear that the personal characteristics of leaders are currently the main factor in the success of organised female diasporas. In the Spanish and in the Catalan contexts, there are not so many stimuli for the development of civil society associations and, as the research shows, most of these rely on the local programmes of "intercultural mediation" organised at the level of municipalities. From this experience, intercultural mediators can consequently become facilitators, and sometimes leaders, of both the creation and the

institutionalization of women's diasporas' associations. However, economic incentives seem to play a key role for the development of the activities of these associations in the public sphere. Examples are the prizes that allowed some of these associations to carry out their main projects.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Through statistical data, document and research analyses, this policy report highlights some of the factors facilitating the empowerment of women. This allows us to formulate robust recommendations to governments in order to help women stimulate positive socio-cultural change that would allow them to both play a relevant role in the public sphere and negotiate their roles in private spheres.

From the analysis, it is clear that there is a gender-based conflict of values between Western and Muslim groups that is the source of a series of stereotypes involving both sides. On the one hand, Western societies consider that Muslim women are discriminated against both socially and politically in their homelands and this discrimination is brought into Western societies through "Muslim" immigration. On the other hand, Muslim groups perceive that, in Western societies, women are not given the respect they deserve and children lack discipline. In order to challenge these stereotypes, the activities of individual immigrant women in general and female diasporas' organised associations are key.

In this light, this study emphasizes that, whereas the system does not provide incentives, the possible contribution of both individual female immigrants and female diaspora to the civil society of the country of residence depends to a great extent on the personal attributes of women.

As for individual female immigrants, it is their ability to integrate into the labour market of countries of residence that appears to be the first driving force of socio-cultural change in Muslim families.

On the other hand, extremely strong and well-educated women can become leaders of female immigrants' associations, which can consequently affect positively the socio-cultural change more broadly within both immigrants' groups and host societies more generally. However, in order to empower women more, support from local and national governments in terms of economic incentives in both directions would be necessary.

Consequently, all governments' programmes should prioritise policies reflecting the following recommendations at all government levels, to better support women and give them a voice in both private and public spheres:

- As the integration of Muslim women in the labour market is the first driving force of socio-cultural change in Muslim families, robust efforts to include more Muslim women in the labour market should be a priority for all government levels. In this light, there should be economic incentives to hire Muslim women in small, medium and large business and enterprises.
- More efforts should be made in order to decrease the level of prejudice towards female Muslim immigrants, and particularly by showing that, in contrast to perceptions by many amongst the local population, they integrate into countries of residence as well as others immigrants do and the way they behave and raise children in Muslim families become more similar to natives' ways of behaving and raising children, the longer they live in countries of residence.
- In order to propel female agency, it would be useful that governments provide stimuli for female immigrants to organise collectively and be active in the public sphere, especially at the local and at the national levels. Their involvement in the organised civil society of the countries of residence is amongst the most successful tools to soothe the gender-based conflict of values between Western and Muslim groups.

References

ACESOP (7 Nov 2012) "Mujeres pakistaníes de Barcelona se sienten atacadas por haber bailado en un acto público. La Vanguardia". ACESOP Blogspot. Online at <http://acesop.blogspot.com.es/2012/11/blog-post.html> (last retrieved 19th May 2015).

ADIS (23 Oct 2014) "Migraciones del África Subsahariana, por Bombo Ndir" ADIS Video on Vimeo. Online at <https://vimeo.com/109793366> (last retrieved 19th May 2015).

Alcalde, R., Garcia, C. Moreno, R. and M. Ramirez (2002) "Las mujeres marroquíes en Cataluña: entre la transgression y el cambio". *Revista Catalana de Sociología*, 18:27-44.

Dietz, G. (2005) "Discriminación y anti-discriminación en España: El caso de las mujeres musulmanas". *Campos*, 6(1-2): 27-51.

Dwyer, C. (2000) "Negotiating diasporic identities: Young british south asian muslim women". *Women's Studies International Forum*, 23(4): 475-486.

Gómez-Camarero, C. (1995) "Aproximación a la inmigración femenina magrebí en España". *Miscelánea de estudios árabes y hebraicos. Sección Árabe-Islam*, 44: 25-37

Hirschman, C. (2004) "The Role of Religion in the Origins and Adaptation of Immigrants Groups in the US". *International Migration Review*, 38(3): 1206-1233.

Kofman, E. (2003) "Women Migrants and Refugees in the European Union". OECD Conference "The Economic and Social Aspects of Migration", 21st-22nd January 2003.

Moghadam, V. M. (2005) *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Roces, M. and L. Edwards (2010) *Women's Movements in Asia: Feminisms and Transnational Activism*. London: Routledge.

Ribas-Mateos, N. (2004) "How can we understand immigration in Southern Europe?". *Journals of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30(6): 1045-1063.

Sniderman, P. M. and L. Hagendoorn (2007) *When Ways of Life Collide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Tajfel, H., ed., (1982) *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Terrón-Caro, M.T. (2008) "La perspectiva de las madres marroquíes sobre la educación de sus hijas e hijos en Huelva y en las zonas de origen". *Revista Española de Educación Comparada*. 14: 103-135.

Torres Garijo, A. (26th Sept 2012) "La suave batalla del velo". *Fronterad. Revista Digital*. Online at <http://www.fronterad.com/?q=suave-batalla-velo> (last retrieved 19th May 2015).

Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D. and M. S. Wetherell, eds., (1987), *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Blackwell, Oxford.

Vitale, S. (2000) "El status de la mujer migrante. Las marroquíes en España". *Investigaciones geográficas*. 24: 97-110.

Zontini, E. (2004) "Immigrant women in Barcelona: Coping with the consequences of transnational lives". *Journals of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30(6): 1113-1144.

ISSN 2412-2173

United Nations University
Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility
Sant Pau Art Nouveau Site - Sant Manuel Pavilion
C/ Sant Antoni Maria Claret, 167
08025 Barcelona, Spain

Visit UNU-GCM online: gcm.unu.edu

Copyright © 2015 United Nations University
Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility
All Rights Reserved
Barcelona, 2015

Cover Photographs:
© UNU-GCM Photo/Tatiana Diniz
Barcelona, 2015



gcm.unu.edu



unugcm



@unugcm

03/05



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY

UNU-GCM

Institute on Globalization,
Culture and Mobility