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***GENERAL VIEW ON MUSLIM
WOMEN IN THE EUROPEAN UNION***

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
INTRODUCTION	2
CHAPTER 1	4
THE HISTORY OF ISLAM IN THE EUROPEAN UNION	4
Chapter 1.1	4
<i>The Formation of Islam in the Western Europe</i>	4
Chapter 1.2	6
First Muslim Women in the European Union.....	6
CHAPTER 2	7
MUSLIM WOMEN OF THE EUROPEAN UNION VERSUS OTHER WOMEN OF THE EUROPEAN UNION	7
Chapter 2.1	8
Women of the European Union.....	8
Chapter 2.2	9
Contemporary Muslim Woman.	9
Chapter 2.3	15
General view on Woman in Islam: the status, position and role of woman in the Qur'an and in early Islam	15
CHAPTER 3	21
MUSLIM WOMEN OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES	21
RECOMMENDATION	33
CONCLUSION	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY	345

ABSTRACT

The present time of widespread rethinking of the role and rights of women is perhaps the appropriate time to look with fresh eyes at the Islamic point of view on woman in general. This paper sets out to explore the Muslim women in the European Union. Topic analyses historical way that Muslim woman past, the formation and development of Muslim women in the European Union, immigration, legal status, issues of concern contemporary Muslim Woman, the differences and similarities of problem they face in European Union member states and other Muslim countries. It also attempts to clarify the opportunities and challenges the Muslim women of the EU face.

Key terms: *Muslim women, European Union,*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of Muslim women in European Union (EU) is highly controversial. On the one hand, the rights granted to women by International Convention of Human Rights, on the other hand rights of Muslim women given by Quran. The paper tries to clarify the reasons of disintegration of Muslim women in EU society. The globalization and the development of information technologies and increasing interconnectiveness, mass media, television, radio, internet, and other technologies, made the world more accessible, so that even among the Muslim women of EU there are some changes taking place. In reality, however, situation is not so simple, as it seems to be, so that it is very difficult period for Muslim women of the EU because there is a tendency stressing that Muslim women on the one hand want things that are modern, such as science, industry, technology, even cosmonautics; on the other hand they are very jealous of their own traditions and are very conservative in such issues.

This research starts with the general investigation of Muslim woman the historical way that she passed, her legal status, rights and obligations are studied. Topics Explains what it mean to be a female in Muslim society and in European society, and also examines the rights and responsibilities of woman given by Quran. The paper also compares the current situation of Muslim women of EU and other women of EU.

The paper attempts to answer a question of why the issue of woman in Islam is so controversial in Western world. I am trying to clarify the pre –conditions that caused the formation of contemporary Muslim woman. The paper mainly focuses on Muslim woman of EU. The problems that she faces, drawbacks in her way and opportunities for the development and integration. The main goal of this paper is to clarify of whether Islam or traditions or other factors do not allow Muslim woman of EU to develop and completely integrate into EU society.

CHAPTER 1.

THE HISTORY OF ISLAM IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The historical presence of Islam in the European Union dates back to the end of the seventh century, with the creation of the religion and its expansion. Since its first appearance in the European continent till today the religion played a great role in the politics, culture, identity and everyday life of the nation-states of the continent. With the work of Islam scholars (who translated works of ancient Greek philosophers) the Europe returned to its original root that has been lost and it directly and indirectly stimulated the process of rebirth- Renaissance. The role of Islam that assist to evoke the Renaissance is undeniable. "Western Christians freely barrowed from Islamic sciences, philosophy, medicine, and the arts developed during the tenth through the fifteenth centuries in Spain".¹

This chapter takes a small excursion to the history of appearance and formation of Islam in the European continent. The chapter focuses on the different stages of evolution of Islam and its impact to the social, political, and economical life of Europe. Later, the chapter examines the several processes of immigration of Muslims to the Western Europe, and it also concentrates on first Muslim women appearance in European countries.

Chapter 1.1.

The Formation of Islam in the Western Europe

The formation of Islam in the Western Europe can be divided into several stages, starting with the initial appearance of Islam in Europe, and ending with the nowadays' Islam in the EU.

The initial appearance of Islam in the Western Europe started with the beginning of Islam's expansion², when Arab armies started to spread their hegemony in the Southwest Asia and North Africa. As a result, the large parts of Eastern Christian churches such as Byzantines, Jacobites, Copts, and Gregorians among others

¹ "Muslims in the West: from sojourners to citizens", (2002), Y.Y.Haddad

² In 711 A.D, the Berber Army began to conquest the Spain

came under their control. This encounter created various experiences starting from peaceful cooperation to armed conflict. It also led to creation of polemical literature by both Muslims and Christians where each of the parties were trying to demonstrate the superiority of their own religion.³

This stage of Muslim appearance in Europe is known as a period of Islamic Spain and Muslim rule in Sicily and Southern Italy. During this period (between the eights and the fifteenth centuries), European areas that came under Muslim control in Spain, Portugal, Sicily and Southern France experienced a thriving cultural revival that had a significant influence in the birth of European Renaissance.

The fifteenth century - the fall of Grenada and the Spanish Reconquista - brought Muslim rule in the Western Europe to an end. The following stages of Muslim expansion in the Europe have left permanent communities.

The second stage started with the spread of the Mongol armies during the thirteenth century. After a few generations their successors established colonies in places such as Finland and the area which captures both the border between Poland and the Ukraine.

The third stage is related with the Ottoman expansion into the Balkans and Central Europe (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). As a result of this process a significant number of Muslim populations continued to live in the European countries such as Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and others, where the considerable number of local population converted into Islam.⁴

The current stage of formation of Islam in the European Union started after the World War II, and is still in progress. This period is mainly associated with the immigration of people from the Muslim countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey among others. The primary motive for the migration of people from Muslim countries to Europe was economic like in the other immigration processes.

Estimates show that the current number of Muslims now residing in Western Europe rang from ten to fifteen million.⁵

³ Haddat, Yvonne, 'The globalization of Islam: the return of the Muslims to the West', in John Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford History of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

⁴ "Muslims in the Western Europe", J.S. Nielsen, 2004

⁵ "What everyone needs to know about Islam", J.L. Esposito, Oxford University press, 2002

The composition of the Muslim communities in various Member States of the European Union is in part a result of earlier relations established between European nations and the Muslim world, and also the European expansion into Muslim territory during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is also formed by the political, economic and cultural relationships that were developed during the colonial period.

The majority of today's Muslim immigrant groups started their arrival from 1960s, as a result of lack of local labor force in European countries. Professionals, skilled and unskilled labor force flooded into the Europe from former European colonies in Asia, Africa and from the Arab world. Different legal agreements and recruitment agreements were signed in 1964 with Turkey and in 1969 with Morocco. This phase of the migration of Muslims consisted predominantly of males.

The process of labor migration was halted during 1970s as a result of oil crisis of that time and with the acceptance of passages in different European countries that limited the labor migration.⁶

Chapter 1.2

First Muslim Women in the European Union

Taking into consideration the fact that the first Muslims appeared in Europe since the seventh century, one can assume that not only male but also Muslim women have their role in the formation of Islam in the Europe, even though the footprints of Muslim women in Europe is not mentioned or there is a scarce information written about Muslim women by majority of scholars.

In spite of the fact that until 1970s the Muslims to come to Europe were mainly male, the situation has changed thereafter. Together with the legislations that passed later in several European countries and with the family reunification processes the new wave of immigration - migration of Muslim women in Europe- has started. It was the time when Muslim immigrants who were already in Europe, and former colonial citizens who had acquired the citizenship in the European

⁶ K. Pedziwiatr, 'Muslims in Europe: Demography and Organizations', in Y. Samad and K. Sen (ed), Islam in the European Union; Transnationalism, Youth and the War on Terror, Oxford University press,2007

countries decided to settle in Europe and started to call their families and spouses into Europe.

The Muslim women of this generation faced variety of challenges within the new country. They were mainly bound to their family and their primary job was to deal with the house chores and bring up their children. The other problem was that majority of them could not speak the language of the place where they reside and they were not familiar with the European lifestyle and customs. These all were the obstacles for their later on integration into European society.⁷

CHAPTER 2.

MUSLIM WOMEN OF THE EUROPEAN UNION VERSUS OTHER WOMEN OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Muslim women have always been considered as an oppressed object with a limited rights and authority in Western society in comparison with the other women of Europe. However, during the recent decades the situation changed completely, so that the Contemporary Muslim women are not striving for their rights and places in Europe but for active participation in the decision-making processes, taking an active role in social, political and economical life of the European Union, not denying their ethnic and religious origins, but being proud with it.

This chapter aims to discuss daily-life, social status and rights of the “insiders” (native-born women of European Union) and the “outsiders” (the immigrant women or the children of immigrants) of the European Union (EU) and also to examine the women in Islam and make the comparative studies on the Muslim women in the EU and the other women of the EU.

⁷ ‘Europe’s Muslim women: potential, aspirations and challenges’, S. Silvestry, 2008

Chapter 2.1.

Women of the European Union

If to have a glance at lives of women in the European Union it can be seen that they have the same gender inequalities that are common all over the world that are responsibilities for domestic work, occupational segregation, lower income and less political power than men, and fear of male violence against them. By global standards, women in the European Union Member States marry later, have fewer children, have relatively high incomes and levels of education and are more likely to live in urban areas, and are more likely to be elderly. By the comparison with women of other countries the European Union's women are more likely to enjoy benefits of the welfare state, such as paid maternity leave and success to state-supported health care, and are more rooted in place and have more hours free from paid and unpaid work.⁸

According to statistical data the situation of contemporary women in the European Union in comparison with men in all aspects of social life still is not heartwarming. The employment rate of women increases but remains lower than men's, despite the fact that women represent a majority of students and university graduates; Women continue to earn on average 17.8% less than men for every hour worked and this figure remains stable; Women are still very under-represented in economic and political decision-making positions, although their share has increased over the last decade; The division of family responsibilities is still very unequal between women and men; The risk of poverty is higher for women than for men; Women are the main victims of gender-based violence and women and girls are more vulnerable to trafficking of human beings.⁹

Even though there is too many laws regulating and providing the safety for woman in EU, it is the fact that huge number of woman are used as slaves in EU."Increased trafficking of women for prostitution is akin to slavery... women are bought and sold like cattle."¹⁰

⁸ 'Women of the European Union: the politics of work and daily life', M.D.G.Ramon, J.J. Monk, 2003

⁹ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=418> (accessed in 22.06.2010)

¹⁰ Anita Gradin, European Commissioner, *European Race Audit Bulletin* No 25, The Institute of Race Relations, London UK, 25 November 1997)

As a remedy, together with large number of legislations, several programs of the European Union (PROGRESS, EU Gender Institute, EU network of women in decision-making, and The Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men are among others) has been implemented that aim at covering actions against discrimination, equality between men and women, employment measures and the fight against social exclusion.¹¹

There exists a great diversity among the women of the EU that are based on nationality, language, religion, ethnicity, and status as a native-born of European heritage, or immigrant women or the children of immigrants. The situation of women, their right to work and their desire to work varies from one country to another, one society to another and within classes and between individuals and their own circumstances.¹²

Chapter 2.2.

Contemporary Muslim Woman.

The twentieth century Islam has been associated with reformation and revolution. As a result of political and intellectual movements independent and modern Muslim states and societies were established. In the end of twentieth century, a second struggle-Islamic resurgence-occurred. This resurgence has produced a variety of questions, starting from the nature of the state and Islamic law to pluralism and the status and rights of women and minorities.

The reexamination of the role of woman in Islam and their role in society has been one result of the contemporary Islamic revivalism. The reintroduction of Islamic law has often showed a negative impact on the status of women by rising questions about whether this resurgence causes a regress in what many societies have achieved.¹³

The legal and social restrictions on Muslim women, mainly regarding education, seclusion, polygamy, have been questioned since mid nineteenth century. Women have published works advocating reforms, established schools for girls, opposed veiling and polygamy, and were active in student and nationalist movements. In the

¹¹ www.europa.eu (accessed on 26.06. 2010)

¹² Women of the European Union: the politics of work and daily life', M.D.G.Ramon, J.J. Monk, 2003

¹³ "The Oxford History of Islam", J.L. Esposito, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp 684-688

post-World War II period women and gender issues were perceived very important to social development. In spite of the popular and religious oppose, women were given rights to enter male-dominated political sphere and professions previously closed to them.¹⁴

In the contemporary era, the debates over the appropriate level of female participation in the public sphere is still continuing. Like the women elsewhere, the Muslim women are typically viewed as key either changing or preserving tradition because of their roles in maintaining family, social continuity, and culture. The status of women has also been used as a means of defining national identity.

The question of Muslim women's rights also continue to occupy center stage throughout the world. According to A.A.Engineer this question will gain even greater importance in coming days. The main reason for this is increasing awareness and education among Muslim women in Muslim countries and also the impact of modernization. The other reason is that today more and more women are getting drawn into the job market and becoming independent of their fathers and husbands. The author writes that no country is an exception to this process. Even in Saudi Arabia where women are under strict control this process is on, and Saudi women are also debating on the issue of rights and are demanding more and more freedom.¹⁵

Unlike the Muslim women of Islamic countries, the Muslim women of EU today are facing different challenges than their mothers and grandmothers. The situation changes because the Muslim women, who are influenced with the EU spirit of freedom and rights, change themselves. Unlike from the first generation of Muslim women who could hardly speak the language and read, the new generation are composes mainly from the Muslim women who are born and educated in EU, speak fluently the language of the country they live in and are citizens of that EU society. The life example is the Muslim women of France that are ethnically Arabs but most of them even never set foot, they cannot speak Arab language and do not have nostalgia for the motherland that their mothers and grandmothers had¹⁶.

The new generation of the Muslim woman of EU play a major role in the formation of the so called phenomenon that some sociologists call it "elite immigration", thus

¹⁴ " The Oxford Dictionary of Islam", Esposito,2003, pp339-340

¹⁵ "Islam in Contemporary World", 2007, A.A.Engineer

¹⁶ The case of Sebbar's novel Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts is an exception to this, as the main character is determined to return to Algeria.)

they are getting high level of education sometimes higher than their male counterparts and other non-Muslim France origin woman¹⁷.

Another issue is the modern attitude to the religion and customs of this contemporary Muslim woman of EU that is, the religion, Islam, that was traditionally associated with the first generation of the Muslim woman of EU, is started to be dealt by modern Muslim women of EU in different ways. For instance, some of them choose to wear veil while others do not. The new generation of Muslim woman of EU considers the process of integration absolutely different from the previous generation of Muslim woman of EU so that they consider it as negative implication endlessly underscoring the idea that they are different, that they should be adjusted to the EU society. They are rejecting to accept their destiny dictated in terms of integration. The vivid example of this is the Malika Ahmed who were elected MDC at Aubervilliers, for the question of integration she replied boldly and perceived the notion of integration as violence¹⁸.

Contemporary Muslim women of European U, unlike from the first generation of Muslim woman who were trying to be accepted as EU citizen and considered as EU women, do not reject their origins French-Algerians, English Arabs and so on.¹⁹

The contemporary Muslim women are active participants in grassroots organizations, development and other projects like economic, education, health, and political, charitable associations, and social services. The Muslim women, like Benazir Bhutto (the prime minister of Pakistan 1988-1990, 1993-1996), Tansu Chiller (prime minister of Turkey 1993-1996), Shaykh Hasina (prime minister of Bangladesh), can be the great example of Muslim women leadership roles in Muslim world.²⁰

Nevertheless, in spite of the achievements of Muslim women in the contemporary era still a lot of problems concerning contemporary Muslim women remain unresolved, and the tensions remain between traditionalists who advocate continued patriarchy, and reformists, who advocate continued liberation of women.

¹⁷ This is what European Deputy Alima Boumédiène-Thierry has noted in her plenary address entitled "Les Femmes maghrébines issues de l'immigration dans l'Union Européenne," at the opening of the Unesco Scholarly Program on Migration and Human Rights at the University Hassan II in Casablanca (Morroco) in 2001.

¹⁸ Libération, April 19, 2002

¹⁹ Cited in "Portrait de la France: Le repli communautaire, crise de l'intégration," in Libération, Lundi 15 Avril 2002, 7.

²⁰ "Oxford dictionary of Islam", Esposito, 2003

What does it mean to be a female in Muslim society? Muslim women are going the same sort of transition as does women in the world in general. The recent phenomenon in most developing countries is that these societies are going on through some kind of redefinition of sex roles. However, some Islamic studies specialists state that the focus needs to be put on that the overwhelming majority of Muslim women are illiterate. This means that these illiterate women are cut off from all the developments that are taking place in the world because they cannot read or write. However, the globalization of information technologies and increasing interconnectiveness, mass media, television, radio, internet, and many other means of technology made the world more accessible, so that even amongst these illiterate women there are some changes taking place.²¹ In reality, however, situation is not so simple, as it seems to be, so that it is very difficult period for Muslim women because there is a tendency stressing that Muslims on the one hand want things that are modern, such as science, industry, technology, even cosmonautics; on the other hand they are very jealous of their own traditions and are very conservative in such issues. So, there is an enormous dispute between this desire to be modern and the wish to be traditional. This issue is becoming more problematic if we will put Muslim men with whom Muslim women are cut up in the struggle, because Muslim family is really the last citadel for the Muslim men and they are very reluctant to permit any changes in the family.

The main problem of contemporary Muslim women is that they are very often becoming victims of pre-Islamic traditions, even though Islam tries to liberate them and the Qur'an, if properly interpreted is a very human document. But the intent of the Qur'an was subverted by the fact that there were all the inherited traditions and that Muslims don't even know what is Islamic and what is pre-Islamic. So, if we want to understand the traditional role of contemporary Muslim women we have to talk about the period.

Traditional role of contemporary Muslim women is also affected by a lot of other factors-political, social, cultural and the role that religion plays at any particular moment in history.

Today, the main issue concern with talks about the resurgence of Islam that in these periods of time religious arguments are coming to the force. Even though they

²¹ "Pillars of Islam". *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. (accessed 09.05.10)

have always been there but in reality they have not always been used as powerfully as they being used today. It is something good in transition, despite the fact that there is still a lot of religious oppression in Islamic world and women are being oppressed in the name of God.

The fact that religious arguments are stated publicly is raising the consciousness of people with regards to these statements. Actually, most of women are very much affected and threatened by some of these religious arguments, and so, women groups necessarily have to pay attention to them.

If we compare different periods of history of Islam, it seems to be obvious that today the level of awareness is much more heightened that used to be.

With Islamization women are going backwards in some sense. But probably, in the long run, it is not a bad thing. As historical evidence show, whenever there is a repression, there is a rebellion, and this rebellion can be creative. Traditionalists, opposing this argument could say that the rebellion is destructive, because it is aimed at destroying what are seen as traditional roles. But, unfortunately very tradition need to be reviewed from time to time and we have to constantly shift and sort out what is of value, and what is not of value. The tendency of defining tradition can lead to a better understanding of the role of Muslim women.

Islamization, in this sense, has done a lot of good, if just in terms of raising consciousness. It is fact that Muslim women often do not even have consciousness of what are called women.

From the moment of birth, till the moment of death Muslim women cast into these roles which are very rigidly defined. There is no opportunity to grow out of them, or to grow beyond them, or to question them. It is situation that they even do not know what their rights are, let alone articulate them. They may be in a cage and not know it. And for others who witness this, Muslim women seem to be in oppression and bondage. Unless they, in a sense are able to get out, they don't know what is to be inside.

The station, however, is not so hopeless. New generations of very dedicated Muslim women are struggling for restoration of the real rights given to them by God and stated in Qur'an , that go in contrast in many sense with this traditions.

In this sense education is vitally important. Muslim women should know that there are other possibilities and that God's word and will can be interpreted in variety of ways. And that this is not monopoly of anybody.

Today there are more and more Muslim women movements, assemblies, conventions taking place. Examples for this could be movements in Iran before and after revolutions, also organizations succeeded in the forcing their government to establish the national commission for investigating the status of women.

If the Qur'an is correctly interpreted and knowledge is made widespread the improvement in the status of women will automatically follow. The argument for this is that the Qur'an is considered as a main resource of Islam, and so if you can show by means of scholar researches that something is indeed in the Qur'an, it will become very difficult for believing Muslims to ignore it. Another argument is that this women's movement in Islam needs a direction. It could totally be secular and then it could be tragic because it is not real to have a concept of human rights that is not grounded in some sort of a transcendental vision.

To my mind, Muslim women movement in Islam should be religiously rooted, and it should present the real content of the Qur'an that has been lost because of centuries of male chauvinist interpretation of it.

There are some Muslim women who accept these facts. But, on the other hand, they are terrified by it .Because they started to believe that they are equal to men, and that this will influence their lifestyle. This is a very challenging situation, so that knowledge also brings some responsibilities with itself. They are afraid that the price for the change will be too high. A Muslim women, who does not wish to confirm to the traditional pattern of life is perceived as a deviant and has to be ostracized.

Changes are going to take time and a lot of effort. And it is not going to happen until women change their roles and then men will be forced to. This just seems to be a law of a nature that anybody who is in a dominant position is not willing to have a change of inside.

Chapter 2.3

General view on Woman in Islam: the status, position and role of woman in the Qur'an and in early Islam

In Islam, woman is accorded full spiritual and intellectual equality with man, and is encouraged to practice her religion and develop her intellectual abilities throughout her life. "I shall not lose sight of the labor of any of you who labors in my way, be it man or woman; each of you is equal to the other".²² In her relations with men both are to observe: modesty of behavior and dress, and a strict code of morality.

While reviewing Qur'an one would be impressed by the image of men and women as equal partners in all spheres of life, and by justice, freedom and equality that it gives for all. In fact, the second longest sura in Qur'an Nisa (which means woman) refers to women. In Qur'an, parallel with men, women were given the same rights and responsibilities from legal, moral, and spiritual point of view. However, there were also some natural differences which weren't omitted. Therefore, as the obligations of both sexes differed inside their community, their roles in their lives were also different. However, these natural differences and the differences in their roles were not accepted as a privilege. On the contrary, it was accepted that woman and man complete each other.²³

According to Prophet Muhammed, woman and man are two halves that make a whole. It means, if a woman is a half of a man, then the man is also a half of a woman.²⁴ Neither a man is a biologically developed form of a woman, nor is a woman a developed type of a man. None of them can be similar to each other from physical and psychological point of view. According to Ismail Ozsoy; professor of International Black Sea University, there always exist meaningless and harmful attitudes such as trying to reach absolute sameness between men and women, or not seeing the natural differences between them. Because the absolute equality may load women with the obligations attributed to men, and vice versa. In such case the women will be in a situation where they will have to do tasks which will not fit their nature, and while doing this they will have to carry the crucial hard work on

²² Qur'an, Al-I IMRAN, 195

²³ Canan, Ibrahim, 1980, p.337

²⁴ Ebu Davud, Taharet, Hadis, No.236

their delicate shoulders. Mr. Ozsoy also notes that striving for absolute equality will lead to creation of desires in women such as wanting men to give a birth, or this need for equality will create meaningless and purposeless disputes such as women's refuse to give a birth.²⁵

Islam is the religion that gives special importance to education. Prophet Mohammed said: "*Getting education is an obligation for every Muslim (both for male and female)*".²⁶ Women, as well as men, are encouraged to become as educated as they can in Islam, and therefore there is nothing wrong with women becoming scholars. The history of Islam is full of the great woman scholars. An author, named Omer Riza Kehale, in his five volume book *A'lamu'n-Nisa* which means Great Woman Scholars depicts the famous women in Islam history²⁷. It is not easy to find another example in the world history where women were advanced in education in such a number and degree during that period.

There are many arguments about the idea-women and work. Many Muslims say that men and women are treated as equals in the eyes of God. But this does not mean equality in all aspects of normal life. Many Muslim societies interpret gender relations as traditional Western societies have done, dividing roles between men and women, in which women's primary task is to perform her role as a good wife and caring mother, while men's primary responsibility is to work and financially support his family. Some Muslims believe that in spite of their "primary" responsibility, the Qur'an allows earning money by having occupations outside the home. In fact, the student of Ebu Hanife (the leader of Haife sect in Islam), Imam Muhammed, in his book "*Kitabu'l-Itisab fi'r- Rizki'l-Mustetab*" argues that going haste to the pursuit of earning is the obligation for every male and female Muslim.

Besides giving women the right to own, which entitles them to have personal possessions Islam also gives women inheritance rights. As in Qur'an: "From what is left by parents and those nearest related, there is a share for men and a share for women whether small or large-a fixed share."²⁸

In Islam woman is not burdened with any financial responsibility needed before marriage for marriage period. In contrast with this, men while marrying are

²⁵ Ismail Ozsoy, *Woman in Islam*, pp14-16 (translated from Turkish) 2005

²⁶ the prophet Mohammed delivered lessons to women, too, and personally answered all their questions.

²⁷ Canan, 1980, pp356-357

²⁸ Qur'an, Nisa,7

responsible to give dowry to woman, to provide her with house and furniture, to meet all kind of needs of his wife and children, during marriage period while women don't have to pay anything to men. "You shall give the women their due dowries, equitably. If they willingly forfeit anything, then you may accept it; it is rightfully yours". Even if the wife is rich and the husband is poor, the man is responsible to carry these burdens. That's why, according to Qur'an, in division of inheritance share, in order to establish justice and responsibility balance, the proportion for male should be two times more than of female's.²⁹

One of the main issues concerning women in Islam is rights for marriage. Throughout the history marriage institute functioned as a shield for moral and social values, and sometimes even as a protection of women rights in all societies. Like all other religions Islam also strictly forbid relations out of marriage (both for male and female), and declares it sinful. So, the marriage act is named as very powerful and difficult agreement and is qualified as God's mercy and grace. It is necessary not to forget that the importance given to a family is the importance given to women and women's rights. Women are given great rights in marriage, in Islam. Prophet Mohammed said that girl's approval is absolutely necessary in marriage; no one can make her get married against her will. Free, clever, and mature woman, according to Islam, can also get married without permission of her parents. On the condition that they were not been left alone, it was allowed and even ordered to the couple to meet before marriage. From the point of view of equality, women were given preference over men. It means that while a man can get married with a woman "lower" than him, woman can't get married with the man "lower" than her.³⁰

Both women and men are given equal rights for dissolution of a marriage. A woman in Islam can divorce her husband at any time if she feels that she has been dealt with unjustly or even if she is just unhappy with her spouse since marriage is based upon mutual responsibilities toward each other. In the course of marriage women are also given rights to stipulate her conditions, such as prohibiting the second marriage to her husband and demanding right of divorce to be given to her.³¹

²⁹ Qur'an, Nisa,4

³⁰ *Woman in Islam*, Ismail Ozsoy, 2005

³¹ <http://www.submission.org/noha.html>

The woman, according to Islam, has right to spent her own property the way she wants. Her husband has no rights to interfere or to oppose her decisions. The Qur'an gives the dominant position and responsibility of the family to men, with the purpose that he will organize, control and carry financial responsibilities. "The men are made responsible for the women, and GOD has endowed them with certain qualities, and made them the bread earners. The righteous women will cheerfully accept this arrangement, since it is God's commandment, and honor their husbands during their absence. If you experience rebellion from the women, you shall first talk to them, then (you may use negative incentives like) deserting them in bed, then you may (as a last alternative) beat them. If they obey you, you are not permitted to transgress against them. GOD is Most High, Supreme".³² In order not to abuse this authority, he was ordered to treat his wife in a good way, and even man's personality and values were measured, by Prophet Mohammed, the way he treated his wife and children.³³

Islam mainly accepts monogamy. However, in some necessary and obligatory cases, and because of some prerequisites to treat them justly, the polygamy was also permitted.³⁴ In spite of this permission, polygamy in many Muslim communities wasn't so widespread because of its difficult financial and legal obligations. For instance, this didn't exceed 7 percent in Ottoman communities.³⁵

The legal permission for polygamy in Islam has not been correctly interpreted by many western societies. Most westerners think that polygamy is another basis for women oppression. However, if to look at this problem from scientific, historical, and global points of view, it will be clear that this was to prevent relations beyond marriage. Permission of polygamy imposes some obligations on males and consequently protects women's rights. The circumstances bringing polygamy into a state of social necessity can be the subject matter. For instance, as a result of great tragedies such as wars, the number of male population may decrease. The best example of this is Germany after World War II. In such cases many women are left helpless and sometimes they could be forced to prostitution or simply die. In such cases, polygamy seem to be in favor of women than men.³⁶

³² Qur'an, Nisa,34

³³ Ibn Mace, *Nikah*, 2004, pp55-59,

³⁴ Qur'an, Nisa,3.

³⁵ *Islam in Ottoman Empire* , Ozturk, 2002, pp378-379

³⁶ Ozsoy, *Woman in Islam*, pp8-9 (my own translation from Turkish), 2005

Another right given to Muslim women and which have great significance for them is political rights. Islam gave women right to vote, and didn't prevent them from being elected. These rights were given to Muslim Women in VII century, while most western women earned the right to vote only just in XX century. It is also fact that through Islam history, together with men women also joined wars. Unfortunately, it can't be said that these rights were used as much enough as by western women. It is possible to relate this reason to fact that social conditions were not the same in different periods of history, and that women do not feel the same attitudes to politics, as men do.³⁷

Today one of the most debatable issues regarding the Muslim women is the Muslim women and her dressing. For westerners the veil has long been a symbol of the oppression of women in the Islamic world. 'The feeling still persists amongst non-Muslims that Muslim women wear *hijab** because they are slaves to tradition, so much so that it is seen as a symbol of oppression. Women's liberation and independence is, so they believe, impossible unless they first remove the *hijab*....For non-Muslims, *hijab* not only covers a woman's hair, but also hides something, leaving them no access. They are being excluded from something which they have taken for granted in secular society'.³⁸

The tradition of wearing veil in early Islam takes its roots from ancient empires like Byzantine, Persia and Greece where higher rank women wore these as a sign of their high status.³⁹ The Qur'an does not stipulate veiling or seclusion, it has been just a part of Muslim culture since the beginning of Islam. Muhammed has commanded his wives and daughters to draw veils around them, and this command was applied to all Muslim women. The veil would allow them to be recognized, but not molested.⁴⁰ *"O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognized and not annoyed. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful."*⁴¹

³⁷ <http://www.jannah.org/sisters/womlib.html>

³⁸ Hijab: The View from Inside, K. Nakata 1999, *Courtesy of Hamdard Islamicus Vol. XXIII. No. 2*

*Traditional Muslim women's head, face, or body covering, of numerous varieties across time and space, often referred to as the "veil". *"The Oxford dictionary of Islam"*, John L. Esposito, pp112, 2003

³⁹ *Islam: The Straight Path*, J. Esposito, p.98, 3rd Edition. Oxford University Press, 2005.

⁴⁰ Islam, K. Anderson, 2008, pp.84

⁴¹ Quran, AHZAB,59

The below mentioned verses of the Qur'an can also be cited in support of veiling: *"O you Children of Adam! We have bestowed on you raiment to cover your shame as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of righteousness, that is the best. Such are among the Signs of Allah, that they may receive admonition."*⁴² According to Prof.Dr. Suat Yildirim the more important thing in this verse than the clothing is the sense of piety and shame. The covering of the places that are necessary is the first condition of guarding honor. Nakedness is not the progress that can be boasted with, but it is rather a regress back to primitiveness and Jahiliyyah*.⁴³

*"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, or their brothers' sons or their sisters' sons, or their women or the servants whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex, and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O you Believers, turn you all together towards Allah, that you may attain Bliss."*⁴⁴ From this verse it becomes clear that the exceptions for the places of the woman's body to be closed are hands, face and feet.⁴⁵

According to John. L. Esposito, professor of International Affairs and Islamic Studies and the director of Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal center for Muslim-Christian understanding at Georgetown University, Islamic dress has the practical advantage of enabling some women to prove their modesty while functioning in public life in societies in which Western dress often symbolizes a more permissive lifestyle and it also creates a protected, private space of respectability in crowded places. The author argues that for some people the Islamic dress is a sign of feminism that rejects what they regard as the tendency of women in many Muslim societies to go from being defined as sexual objects in a male-dominated tradition to being used as sexual objects Western-style. Covering the body defines a woman and gender relations in society in terms of personality and talents rather than physical

⁴² Quran, A'RAF, 26

* pre-Islamic period, or "ignorance" of monotheism and divine law

⁴³ Explanatory translation of Qur'an, S. YILDIRIM (my own translation from Turkish), pp196

⁴⁴ Quran, NUR,31

⁴⁵ Explanatory translation of Qur'an, S. YILDIRIM (my own translation from Turkish), pp 416

appearance.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, in general the status of women in pre-modern Islam conformed not to Quranic ideals but to prevailing patriarchal cultural norms.⁴⁷

CHAPTER 3.

MUSLIM WOMEN OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

If we try to show the situation of contemporary Muslim women in the European Union societies, first of all there has to be made a distinction among women who remain under the very strong influence of traditions and family structure, and those who are modern and have access to education and professional skills which allows them employment and financial autonomy. This category of Muslim women comprises the women who were born in the European Union countries, and are descendants of the previous generation Muslims who decided to settle, and the Muslim women who arrived to EU when were very young. However, the situation is very different for those Muslim women who arrived in their twenties with their family, and also to the Muslim women who continue to be brought from the country of origin to be married to Muslim men already living in European Union. This at the first sight, from the sociological perspective, can be seen as a matrimonial strategy done for getting access to new positions through physical and social mobility. However, recent researches show that in terms of personal autonomy and mainly of contact with the European Union societies, the circumstances of these women are highly dependent on their educational skills and their ability to construct their own autonomy in parallel with the family.

One of the issues that concern the Muslim women living in the European Union member states is their collective visibility in public space. In this case, again, several points should be made.

The first is the political one: the Muslim women once acquired the citizenship in the European Union member state in which they live, can play an active role in the

⁴⁶ *The Oxford History of Islam*, J.L. Esposito, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

⁴⁷ "the Oxford Dictionary of Islam", Esposito, 2003

political sphere and benefit from the right to participate in the political life, either as a political candidate or as a voter. However, the situation is different for Muslim women in EU who are not the citizen of European Union member state.

The second level is the religious organizations. In most of the European Union member states Muslims are organized in associations that provide a number of different activities, which are either related to religious practices and education, or social and even economic activities. However, like in many other Muslim organizations, women are still underrepresented- that is men tend to still be in charge of the top roles. The exception is seen only in women's groups oriented to specific activities, mostly related to education of children.⁴⁸

Today the majority of Islamic centers and mosques in the European Union member states have its women groups, in which women meet to learn the faith and also get involved in charitable work, children's educational programs, social activities, and festivals. The transnational Islamist voices and movements, such as the Muslim Brothers, the Jamaat-Islami, Turkish Justice and Development Party and Gulen Movement, have created strategies of political engagement that openly rely on the education and involvement of women, and encourage them to take up positions of responsibility. There are also a number of feminist groups, such as the French network Ni Pules Ni and the Association of Moroccan women in Italy, that are mobilized mainly in secular terms. The Muslim advocacy networks, throughout Europe, such as European Forum of Muslim Women (EFMW), Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR), VOEM-the organization for the development and emancipation of Muslims, National assembly Against Racism (NAAR), and SOS Racisme, are campaigning mainly against ethnic, racial and religious-based discrimination. In the EU member states there also exist counseling services for women who experienced violence, discrimination of hardship. The best examples of such organizations can be the Italian association of Moroccan women ACMID, the Newham Asian Women's Project based in London, the Southall Black Sisters, and the Women Resource Center are among others.⁴⁹

Based on research on Muslim women in Europe done by the King Baudouin Foundation, it can be said that the Muslim women are satisfied to live in the European Union member states because of equality between genders, democracy,

⁴⁸ Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures: Family, law, and politics , By Suad Joseph, Afsaneh Najmabadi

⁴⁹ S. Silvestry, 2008, pp37-40

respect of diversity, the freedom of movement and expression. These women are also eager to emphasize their independence and to counter stereotypes about the submission of women in Islam. Different personal narratives, types of qualifications, age, and the status of “married” or “single” can shape opposite perceptions of the same situation, even among people living in the same city. The special appreciation of Europe in terms of being democratic, protecting and promoting values like respect of the individual and gender equality, can be observed especially among those women who before lived in Muslim country. All of these women value the European welfare system; its free health service, free schooling and income support schemes.

In spite of the fact that the Muslim women in the European Union are occasionally facing situations of stereotyping, discrimination, misunderstanding, and other, they still appreciate the Europe’s freedoms and sense of safety, openness to cultural diversity, and the possibility to interact with people from different backgrounds. However it is interesting that these women mention the issue of ‘ignorance’ rather than hate or discrimination. Through this it comes obvious that they are not homogenizing European society and that they have developed strong elasticity to situations of discrimination.

For Muslim women born and bred in the European countries it is their home. It is the place where their dreams have become true. They feel that the European countries where they have settled are in their hearts, their thoughts, and the way they behave. These women are not passively living in the Europe; they feel protected and empowered and are doing their best to integrate and to be seen as integrated in European society.⁵⁰

The Muslim women residing in the European Union member states may have such opportunities that cannot be available to them in most Muslim societies. However, this issue, according to S. Joseph and A. Najmabadi, should be viewed from two points. On the one side, the EU countries can be seen as places of freedom where praying or wearing a veil in the streets is not a problem, while comparing with the homeland countries (such as Turkey, Iran, Tunisia, etc.) of these Muslim women where certain religious signs such as headscarves are perceived as highly political and strongly controlled or forbidden. This view about the Europe of being a place of religious freedom is mainly true for countries such as the United Kingdom, Italy and

⁵⁰ “Europe’s Muslim women: potential, aspirations, and challenges”, 2008, S. Silvestry

Germany, where religion and politics have an institutional way of coping with each other. However, on the other hand, some limits to this religious freedom may occur and cause highly controversial discussions when it comes to recognizing the individual's right to wear headscarf at work, at school or on an ID card. In this case, "again the national political cultures and the way the 'neutrality' of the state is articulated with regard to religious pluralism have to be considered in a historical perspective to understand why this topic is so difficult to manage in some contexts, while in others it is rather smoothly discussed." Muslim women's wish to wear the headscarf in a daily life occurred simultaneously in many European contexts. Belgium, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom events are probably the best examples. While the problem has been quite easily managed when the veil is worn at school, it is different when Muslim women make the same claims for religious freedom in workplace and in the public sector. The tension between individual rights to practice freely a religion and state neutrality occurs and it remains a national debate and not a European one.⁵¹

Together with the wide range of opportunities the life in European Union member countries also provide the Muslim women with a number of challenges.

The primary problem of Muslim women in European Union, according to N. Hashmi, is discrimination. This can occur on two levels:

1. within the European Union's society
2. within the Muslim society

Within the European society, Muslim women first of all face problems as members of a racial minority group, and religious minority, in relation to the majority non-Muslim society. The discrimination in such case can occur while Muslim women wearing a headscarf are not allowed into public space, schools, work, etc. For Muslims, it represents inseparable part of dressing in everyday life. However, Europe is not accustomed to such kind of wearing and due to this fact Muslim women sometimes face discrimination. Even though it can be justified as being necessary to prevent a religious symbol being displayed in a non-religious public space, it is still discrimination. The wearing a headscarf in public in Europe has

⁵¹ "Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures: Family, law, and politics", 2005, S. Joseph, A. Najmabadi

been and still is debatable issue. And it is clear that it is still the national law and even the regional or local policy of the country that prevails.

The second type of discrimination, according to Hashmi, is the discrimination that Muslim women face in Muslim societies. Whilst the way which women should behave and what they are and are not allowed to do might have changed considerably in some countries and especially in the larger cities, and moved with the times to be more liberal, there are of course some places where women are not allowed to drive (Saudia Arabia) or sit in a car with a man unless he is her husband, so nor a male relative. This is not something which is a part of religion but rather the way in which the Muslim authorities of the country have decided to interpret the religion. Another example is of women working. Nowhere in the Koran does it say that women are forbidden to work. However many see work outside the home as hindering the role of the woman in a domestic context as this is where her main importance should lie. Therefore for many women in Arab countries, although they have been given the right to work, they are not the owners of their salary as their husbands were the ones who technically gave them permission to work in the first place, possibly at the expense of looking after the home. In Europe obviously women have the right to work (although there are still many who say that certain jobs are subject to prejudiced attitudes as to which gender should be doing them).⁵² If we generally focus on perception on Muslim women in the European Union we can see that in many cases Muslim women were associated with anti-democratic, fundamental and terrorist groups. The information in the society through different channels of mass media creates a condition for the formation a stereotypical image of Muslim women in the European Union society.

There are different organizations, across the European Union that are striving for Muslim rights. However, they cannot break these stereotypical images of Muslim women. This is evident that the EU society which consists of ethically majority of their society, lacks the information about culture, traditions, values, and life manner of Muslim women.

After 9/11 bombings the situation started even to get worse. This resulted to creation of a new stereotypical portraits of Muslims as terrorists.

If we consider all the laws and regulations accepted throughout the European Union it is obvious that from the vast majority of different ethnic groups that have

⁵² Hashmi, 2005

immigrated and living in the European Union member states, the Muslim ethnic group and particularly Muslim women do not eager to integrate to EU society. On the one hand, democracy, unlimited rights given to women, and on the other hand religious codes and traditional customs...

Daily life of the contemporary women of the European Union is totally differs from the type of behavior of Muslim women which is both accepted and allowed by tradition, culture and religion in Islam. The number of women that belong to original EU ethnic group are consuming alcoholic drinks, cigarettes and other habits that are fundamentally unacceptable and sinful action according to Islam. The dress type of the contemporary women of the European Union also is not acceptable according to Muslim customs and tradition. Since the integration starts from the "dialogue of civilizations" between different ethnic groups with different customs and religions, it is clear that the Muslim women, in spite of living in the States of Europe they could not and still are not able to integrate to EU society.

The main issue here should be either the modification of some laws regarding the religious groups, particularly Muslims, or the traditional and fundamental Muslim laws should be adjusted to EU laws, which is practically impossible, so that Islamic canons cannot be changed or adjusted.

The general view on Muslim woman is often misunderstood in most of western societies. Most of them view Muslim women as an oppressed object, hidden under their veils. As Alia Hogben, Executive Director of the Canadian Council for Muslim women notes "If you go to the corner of a busy Canadian street and ask 'What's your image of a Muslim woman?' I know the answer will be 'covered up, unthinking, oppressed.'⁵³

The role of women in Islam has been misunderstood in the West because of general ignorance of the Islamic system and way of life as a whole, and because of the distortions of the media.



Sensationalism Veils: The Portrayal of Muslim Women in Western News Media

This habitual focus by the news media on the victimization of women in Islamic cultures is frustrating, Alia Hogben says, because "If I, as an ordinary Muslim woman, have something to say, it is not heard, because it is not sensationalized, it doesn't fit the stereotype."⁵⁴

Underlying such images is the assumption that Islam is a blanket under which people from Islamic cultures are huddled together regardless of their regional, ethnic, cultural, class and gender differences.

However, Islam gives lots of rights to women that go in contrast with the references of these westerners. Muslim woman is accorded full spiritual and intellectual equality with man, and is encouraged to practice her religion and develop her intellectual abilities throughout her life. "I shall not lose sight of the labor

⁵³ www.reason.com/staff/show/140.html (accessed on 12.04.2010)

⁵⁴ New York Times, *Muslim Woman in US*, Cathy Young, October 24, 2006

of any of you who labors in my way, be it man or woman; each of you is equal to the other”⁵⁵. In her relations with men both are to observe: modesty of behavior and dress, and a strict code of morality.

While reviewing Qur’an one would be impressed by the image of men and women as equal partners in all spheres of life, and by justice, freedom and equality that it gives for all. In fact, the second longest sura in Qur’an Nisa (which means woman) refers to women. In Qur’an, parallel with men, women were given the same rights and responsibilities from legal, moral, and spiritual point of view. However, there were also some natural differences which weren’t omitted. Therefore, as the obligations of both sexes differed inside their community, their roles in their lives were also different. However, these natural differences and the differences in their roles were not accepted as a privilege. On the contrary, it was accepted that woman and man complete each other.⁵⁶

According to Prophet Muhammed, woman and man are two halves that make a whole. It means, if a woman is a half of a man, then the man is also a half of a woman.⁵⁷ Neither a man is a biologically developed form of a woman, nor is a woman a developed type of a man. None of them can be similar to each other from physical and psychological point of view. According to Ismail Ozsoy; professor of International Black Sea University, there always exist meaningless and harmful attitudes such as trying to reach absolute sameness between men and women, or not seeing the natural differences between them. Because the absolute equality may load women with the obligations attributed to men, and vice versa.⁵⁸ In such case the women will be in a situation where they will have to do tasks which will not suit/fit their nature, and while doing this they will have to carry the crucial hard work on their delicate shoulders. Mr. Ozsoy also notes that striving for absolute equality will lead to creation of desires in women such as wanting men to give a birth, or this need for equality will create meaningless and purposeless disputes such as women’s refuse to give a birth. Footnote should be here if this is all from Mr. Ozsoy. I agree with some thoughts of Mr. Ozsoy to some extend that women shouldn’t strive for “absolute equality”, for the works, jobs, etc. Being a male member of today’s society Mr. Ozsoy does not notice some injustice in gender roles that exist

⁵⁵ Qur’an 3:195

⁵⁶ Canan, Ibrahim, 1980, p.337

⁵⁷ Ebu Davud, Taharet, Hadis, No.236

⁵⁸ Ismail Ozsoy, *Woman in Islam*, pp14-16 (translated from Turkish) Year?

in our modern society by which women suffer so much, for instance, in Saudi Arabia, women are not allowed to drive by law ⁵⁹.

One can be especially fascinated with the rights given to woman in Islam. These are: social rights, political rights, rights to own property, rights related with marriage are among others.

Islam is the religion that gives special importance to education. Prophet Mohammed said: “*Getting education is an obligation for every Muslim* (both for male and female)” (. In fact, the prophet Mohammed delivered lessons to women, too, and personally answered all their questions. Women, as well as men, are encouraged to become as educated as they can in Islam, and therefore there is nothing wrong with women becoming scholars. The history of Islam is full of the great woman scholars. An author, named Omer Riza Kehale, in his five volume book A’lamu’n-Nisa which means Great Woman Scholars depicts the famous women in Islam history⁶⁰. It is not easy to find another example in the world history where women were advanced in education in such a number and degree. Here you need to explain what era you are talking about as it is otherwise not a true statement.

There are many arguments about the idea-women and work. Many Muslims say that men and women are treated as equals in the eyes of God. But this does not mean equality in all aspects of normal life. Many Muslim societies interpret gender relations as traditional Western societies have done, dividing roles between men and women, in which women’s primary task is to perform her role as a good wife and caring mother, while men’s primary responsibility is to work and financially support his family. Some Muslims believe that in spite of their “primary” responsibility, the Qur’an allows earning money by having occupations outside the home. (Qur’an, 4:32) In fact, the student of Ebu Hanife (the leader of Haife sect in Islam), Imam Muhammed, in his book “Kitabu’l-Itisab fi’r- Rizki’l-Mustetab” argues that going haste to the pursuit of earning is the obligation for every male and female Muslim.

Besides giving women the right to own, which entitles them to have personal possessions Islam also gives women inheritance rights. As in Qur’an: “*From what is left by parents and those nearest related, there is a share for men and a share for women whether small or large-a fixed share.*”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ismail Ozssoy, “woman in Islam” 2005,pp 18-22

⁶⁰ Canan, pp356-357

⁶¹ Qur’an, Nisa, 7

In Islam woman was not burdened with any financial responsibility needed before marriage for marriage period. In contrast with this, men while marrying are responsible to give dowry to woman, to provide her with house and furniture, to meet all kind of needs of his wife and children, during marriage period while women don't have to pay anything to men. "You shall give the women their due dowries, equitably. If they willingly forfeit anything, then you may accept it; it is rightfully yours⁶²". Even if the wife is rich and the husband is poor, the man is responsible to carry these burdens. That's why, according to Qur'an, in division of inheritance share, in order to establish justice and responsibility balance, the proportion for male should be two times more than of female's.

One of the main issues concerning women in Islam is rights for marriage. Throughout the history marriage institute functioned as a shield for moral and social values, and sometimes even as a protection of women rights in all societies.

Like all other religions Islam also strictly forbade relations out of marriage (both for male and female), and declared it sinful. So, the marriage act was named as very powerful and difficult agreement and was qualified as God's mercy and grace. It is necessary not to forget that the importance given to a family is the importance given to women and women's rights.

Women were given great rights in marriage, in Islam. Prophet Mohammed said that girl's approval is absolutely necessary in marriage; no one can make her get married against her will. Free, clever, and mature woman, according to Islam, can also get married without permission of her parents. On the condition that they were not been left alone, it was allowed and even ordered to the couple to meet before marriage. From the point of view of equality, women were given preference over men. It means that while a man can get married with a woman "lower" than him, woman can't get married with the man "lower" than her.

Both women and men were given equal rights to contract a marriage as well as to dissolve it. A woman in Islam can divorce her husband at any time if she feels that she has been dealt with unjustly or even if she is just unhappy with her spouse since marriage is based upon mutual responsibilities toward each other.

In the course of marriage women were also given rights to stipulate her conditions, such as prohibiting the second marriage to her husband and demanding right of divorce to be given to her, etc.

⁶² Qur'an, Nisa, 4

The woman, according to Islam, has right to spent her own property the way she wants. Her husband has no rights to interfere or to oppose her decisions.

The Qur'an gives the dominant position and responsibility of the family to men, with the purpose that he will organize, control and carry financial responsibilities. *"The men are made responsible for the women, and GOD has endowed them with certain qualities, and made them the bread earners. The righteous women will cheerfully accept this arrangement, since it is God's commandment, and honor their husbands during their absence. If you experience rebellion from the women, you shall first talk to them, then (you may use negative incentives like) deserting them in bed, then you may (as a last alternative) beat them. If they obey you, you are not permitted to transgress against them. GOD is Most High, Supreme⁶³".* In order not to abuse this authority, he was ordered to treat his wife in a good way, and even man's personality and values were measured, by Prophet Mohammed, the way he treated his wife and children.⁶⁴

Islam mainly accepts monogamy. However, in some necessary and obligatory cases, and because of some prerequisites to treat them justly, the polygamy was also permitted.⁶⁵

In spite of this permission, polygamy in many Muslim communities was not so widespread because of its difficult financial and legal obligations. For instance, this did not exceed 7 percent in Ottoman communities.⁶⁶

The legal permission for polygamy in Islam has not been correctly interpreted by many western societies. Most westerners think that polygamy is another basis for women oppression. However, if we look at this problem from scientific, historical, and global points of view, it will be clear that this was to prevent relations beyond marriage. Permission of polygamy imposes some obligations on males and consequently protects women's rights.

The circumstances bringing polygamy into a state of social necessity can be the subject matter. For instance, as a result of great tragedies such as wars, the number of male population may decrease. The best example of this is Germany after World War II. In such cases many women are left helpless and sometimes

⁶³ Qur'an, Nisa, 34

⁶⁴ Ibn Mace, *Nikah*, pp55-59, 2004

⁶⁵ Qur'an, Nisa,3.

⁶⁶ Ozturk, *Islam in Ottoman Empire*, 2002, pp378-379

they could be forced to prostitution or simply die. In such cases, polygamy seem to be in favor of women than men⁶⁷.

Another right given to Muslim women and which have great significance for them is political rights. Islam gave women right to vote, and did not prevent them from being elected.⁶⁸ These rights were given to Muslim Women in VII century, while most western women earned the right to vote only just in XX century. It is also fact that through Islam history, together with men women also joined wars. Unfortunately, it cannot be said that these rights were used as much enough as by western women. It is possible to relate this reason to fact that social conditions weren't the same in different periods of history, and that women don't feel the same attitudes to politics, as men do.

However, in the recent decades with the process of Globalization that tied up all cultures together the Muslim woman alongside with the woman of other religion and from other ethnic groups are struggling for their rights and places in the social ,economical and political life of their countries and society they live. With the growing number of woman working in different spheres of life in places which were traditionally captured by men. I hope that XXI century will be the century of equal rights of man and woman in all spheres of life.

⁶⁷ Ismail Ozsoy, "woman in Islam" 2005,

⁶⁸ Skard, *Woman History*, pp85-86

RECOMMENDATION

A long time have passed since the first appearance of Muslim women in the European continent, but unfortunately some traditional problems that Muslim women have faced in the European Union still remains.

Despite the fact that the contemporary Muslim women or the representatives of new generations of Muslim women successfully solved a range of problems that their mothers and grandmothers were facing when they first arrived. However, there still remains some problems and issues that drawbacks and creates a barrier for contemporary Muslim women to completely integrate into European society and become equal to other women of the European Union.

I recommend, first of all, to form non-governmental organizations for Muslim women in the European Union, which Muslim women will not only deal with teaching languages and cultural issues, but struggle for the places in parliament and for participation in decision-making processes concerning social, political and economical life of society.

Another recommendation would be the creation and further development of centers teaching women the rights in the burdens of the European Union.

It would also be important to create dialogue groups that would broke stereotypes of Muslim women that are formed in the western society, to create a friendship organizations of multiethnic and religious groups to share and exchange their values and experiences. If one group, no matter, ethnic, religious, or other group, wants to be accepted in a society, it should start a dialogue, to transfer or to interchange the values and different cultures.

CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that main burden for development of Muslim woman in general is the lack of knowledge of her own rights, oppression by the government they live in .I think main problem is misinterpreting the facts written in Quran. Woman is exploited in most of Muslim countries, even though Islam gave woman equal rights with man, there is problem with application of this rights. Traditions play one of the major burdens that do not allow Muslim woman to develop. The paper stresses that it is not Islam that burdens and limits the rights of Muslim woman but traditions, biases, and other factors. The paper suggests that the way out from that situation can be the education, creation of NGO that would be dealt with issues of Muslim woman, the increase in the size representatives of females in authorities such as parliament, executive offices and etc.

Concerning of European Union paper concludes that even though EU is giving more rights to woman the main problem of Muslim woman in EU again deals with their right within the EU society. One of the main problems that still remains is gender based discrimination . While this discrimination may not be as overt as in other parts of the world, or may take different forms, it does exist in Europe, nevertheless. Women often cannot achieve their highest potential in career or education and also the media continually depicts women as sex objects and nothing more. European women's salaries are still, dollar-for-dollar, less than the corresponding salaries for their male counterparts. Women who do work to earn a living still have primary responsibility for taking care of the home and family with little domestic support from their husbands. Women in positions of influence in the EU are few and far between. Because Muslims are a minority in the EU attempting to portray a positive image of Islam, the true image of the teachings of Islam, Muslims in EU are often reluctant to address the problems faced by Muslim women for fear that the enemies of Islam will use this information against them. The paper suggests for the forming Muslim woman of EU their own NGO's to struggle to solve these problems and also to concentrate on education, to come out from the shadow of traditions.

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