Gender Attitudes of Muslim Migrants Compared to Europeans and Public in Sending Societies: A Multilevel Approach

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the gender attitudes of Muslim migrants in Western Europe compared to people in their sending societies and the European receiving societies. I employ the European Social Survey, the European Values Study, and the World Values Survey as data sources. Using cross-classified multilevel analysis, I compare individuals with respect to their country of origin and receiving society characteristics simultaneously. The results show that migrants are closer in their attitude to employment rights to local Europeans than to the public in their sending societies. People who left their predominantly Islamic countries of origin are much less prone to gender discrimination than those who stayed. This paper argues that the majority of Muslim migrants do not adhere to the values and attitudes of their countries of origin, but fall closer to the attitudes of the receiving societies as reflected in their perception of gender roles, particularly within the labor market.

Keywords: gender equality; Muslim migrants; equality in employment; ESS; EVS; WVS; cross-classified multilevel regression;

Introduction

Muslim migration has become an acute issue in European politics well before the “refugee crisis”, but the alarmist mode of current media coverage (described in depth by my colleagues who authored other chapters of this volume) has reached

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a dangerous level. Alt-right forces claim that migrants in Europe are mostly Muslim, young, undereducated and poor males who are potentially dangerous, especially for European women (Saeed, 2007; Dagistanli, Selda, 2016) Muslim females in Europe often lack agency in media representation as well as in academic discourse. They are considered wives who are even less integrated than their husbands, and have little chance for adaptation due to the paternalist and brutal limitations imposed by their men (Navarro, 2010). This narrative lays on several assumptions that are too often taken for granted. In order to challenge them in my analysis, I would list them here:

1. Most migrants come to Europe from Muslim countries.
2. All Muslims share similar (very patriarchal) attitudes regardless of their age, gender, education, or country of birth.
3. Muslims are likely to bring their values and attitudes with them unalterably when they move to different cultural contexts.

Disentangling those latent assumptions into falsifiable presuppositions makes it possible to fact-check them.

The first one can be checked by taking a glance at the country-level European statistics, for example, from the Pew research center. As they show, from 2010 to 2016 around 5.4 million regular migrants came to Europe (defined as EU + Switzerland and Norway) along with 1.6 million refugees (Cooperman et al., 2017). Out of all newcomers, 3.7 were Muslim, and 3.3 were non-Muslim. If we exclude refugees (many of whom won’t stay in Europe), among regular migrants 2.5 million were Muslims, and 2.9 million were non-Muslims (Ibid, p.14). Moreover, such a high share of Muslims among migrants to Europe is a very recent phenomenon, as in the earlier decades they constituted a smaller minority of incoming population. For this reason, Muslims form a minority among European migrants.

The latter two assumptions require more sophisticated data analysis. For this reason, I will refer to the literature regarding Muslim patriarchy and predictors of its variability. After that I will cover the topic of gender attitudes of Muslims in Europe and show the existing gap in the literature.

Data analysis that I provide is based on the survey data from three sources: European Social Survey, European Values Study, and World Values Survey. I analyze the gender attitudes of Muslim migrants in those European countries where they represent a sizable minority. I employ a double-comparative multilevel design to observe how the gender attitudes of Muslim migrants differ from those of local Europeans and of their peers who stayed in their sending societies. In this article I study gender egalitarian attitudes using the statement ‘Men should have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce’.
Islam, patriarchy, and gender attitudes of Muslims in migration

Gender inequality remains an issue almost everywhere, but in Muslim societies belonging to the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) it is more acute (Arab Human Development Report 2016). Despite the facts that the average number of children in MENA is now 2.8 ("World Bank. Fertility rate, total (births per woman)," 2018), female enrollment in primary school is almost universal, and in secondary and higher education it has risen dramatically (Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam, 2006), the level of employment in the formal labor market remains far from equal. A vast body of literature seeks to reveal the reasons for low female labor force participation in MENA, some associating it with the peculiarities of the economic systems in the region, and others with certain cultural characteristics of Islam. A third group, feminist scholars, criticizes both approaches for lack of attention to the nuances of local gender dynamics and for ignoring female activism and political participation that alters the status quo.

This region cannot now be taken as a whole for any analytical purpose, including studies of gender egalitarianism. Davis and Robinson mention that generalizing at the level of ‘cultural zone’ or ‘civilization’ leads to ignoring the ‘internal dynamics and plurality of Muslim nations’ (Davis and Robinson, 2006). Each society within the region is now ‘a field of contestation among feminists, fundamentalists, and the state’ (Moghadam, 2004), with a unique combination of forces in each case. Spierings and coauthors explore labor market participation in 45 Muslim countries more closely (Spierings et al., 2009). They distinguish between absolute and relative labor market participation, and find that the former depends on state modernization and oil revenues, whereas the latter depends on actual democracy (i.e. to what extent the public is involved in governing) and formal democratic structures.

The cultural explanation for patriarchy in MENA rests upon testing structural and cultural predictors in the same multivariate models, and finding that the variables on religiosity, mosque attendance etc. remain significant even controlling for institutions and state affluence. For instance, Inglehart and Norris claim that, controlling for many economic factors, Islam remains a key barrier to ‘the rising tide of gender equality’ (Inglehart et al., 2003). Spierings, Smits, and Verloo explore determinants of female employment in 6 Arab countries and conclude that the strength of traditional societal norms in a district, as well as personal traditionalism, are the most important negative predictors, along with labor market structure,
low level of urbanization, and lack of personal education (Spierings et al., 2010). Price uses the issue of equal employment rights for her rigorous analysis of gender egalitarianism in MENA and finds that neither Islam nor an oil-based economy are sufficient to explain the weak position of women in the labor force (Price, 2015). She mentions that ‘the negative regional effect is reduced by accounting for national religiosity, levels of female tertiary enrollment, shares of women in parliament, economic rights for women, and national economic development.’ She also shows that higher religiosity sharply decreases the likelihood of female employment in MENA.

Gender attitudes of Muslims in Europe, and generally in non-Muslim majority surroundings have been scrutinized in a number of papers. Many authors compare mores of locals with Muslim immigrants (Fetzer et al., 2005; Diehl et al., 2014), but those works lack comparison with other migrants (do not isolate the effect of migration). Studies of gender attitudes of Muslims in predominantly Islamic societies also have a different perspective, as they do not show any potential of attitudinal shift in case of moving to a less patriarchal context (Jamal and Tessler, 2008; Spierings, 2016; Kostenko et al., 2016).

Alexander and Welzel run multilevel analysis to disentangle cultural and structural effects of Islam on patriarchy. They juxtapose those Muslims who stay in Muslim-majority countries against those who left, to check whether “dissociation from patriarchal structures” opens ways to more liberal gender attitudes. They also compare non-Muslims living both in predominantly Islamic societies or otherwise. They find that Muslims are very heterogeneous in their gender attitudes, following the same patterns for equality support as adherents of other religions and atheists, but being more conservative as a group. They also note that Muslim migrants show flexibility in adjusting their attitudes to the surrounding society norms (Alexander and Welzel, 2011).

I continue this line of research by adding more nuanced background of migrants as well as taking into account characteristics of the receiving societies other than non-Muslim majority binary.

Data

For collecting data from the receiving societies, I use secondary data from rounds 2, 4 and 5 of the European Social Survey, a biannual representative survey of population of European countries (ESS 2004; ESS 2008; ESS 2010) as this project is specifically concerned with migration issues, and there are many detailed
questions on migration status and the country of origin of a person as well as her/his parents in the sample. It was of importance for the study to collect as many migrants as possible to have a larger number of countries of origin.

Though many migrant communities are represented by reasonably large numbers of respondents (the mean number of migrants from each country of origin is 70), some are very small, 7 to 10 people. I make use of those small numbers as multilevel design allows for such comparisons with small numbers at the individual level for some cells (Gelman and Hill, 2006: p. 275–277). This solution results in higher cross-country variation (73 countries). Due to the need for comparison between migrants and the locals left in their sending societies, I had to exclude immigrants from countries that are not covered by international surveys on values and attitudes, such as Cape Verde, Cameroon, and a number of other societies.

For information on those people who stayed in the sending countries, the most recent data of the World Values Survey (WVS 2010–2014) is employed for the following societies: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Cyprus, Ecuador, Estonia, Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Iraq, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United States, Uruguay, and Zimbabwe.

I also employ data for several countries from WVS 5 (WVS 2005–2008) for those societies that were not covered during the last wave. These are the following: Bulgaria, Canada, Egypt, Finland, Hungary, Indonesia, Italy, Iran, Moldova, Norway, Vietnam, Serbia and Montenegro, and Zambia. I add European societies that have not been covered by the WVS by using the European Values Study (EVS, 2008): Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Slovak Republic, and Slovenia. This gives 65 sending societies in total. As people could have migrated from the European countries of the main focus, namely, Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK, I add those as well, with a final total of 73 sending countries. As all the surveys have slightly different scales for a range of questions, I harmonize all six sources to generate a fully compatible dataset.

I take countries of origin (73 in total) as one source of grouping and countries of residence as the other. Countries of current residence are the same 73 societies, as the majority of people have never migrated. The subsample of societies where migrants are identified and studied is limited to nine Western European societies where the number of migrants is relatively large and their origins are heterogeneous.
Some countries were not selected for the core group of countries due to the fact that an absolute majority of the migrants come from only one society.

**Figure 1. Conceptual scheme of non-nested analysis of migrants**

Variables and Operationalization

The dependent variable is formulated as follows: ‘Men should have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce’. Originally a 3-point scale, it was recoded into a binary so that 0 stands for ‘disagree; or ‘neither’, and 1 for ‘agree’. Thus, in binary logistic multilevel models I estimate the probability of agreeing with the statement showing a gender-discriminative attitude to employment.

At the country level I control for Human Development Index (HDI) (Sen, 2003), which shows the overall development of a country in medical care, education, and wealth. As the level of gender egalitarianism tends to correspond with overall freedom in a country, and, consequently, with the political situation, I have introduced Polity IV into the models. As Islam is found to bar the ‘rising tide of gender equality’, I have tested a binary for it, then a subtler variable for the percentage of Islamic population in the country of origin as well as the country average for ‘How important is God in your life?’.

Migrant status was coded as 0 when a person was born in the country being surveyed, and so was at least one of her/his parents, and 1 if a person was born outside the country or both of her/his parents were born abroad. Variables on individual religiosity were introduced in several versions due to a lack of scholarly consensus on the best option. Denomination was coded as 1 for Islam and 0 for other religions, and the degree of religiosity was measured by the question ‘Are you
a religious person?’, with religious attendance on a 7-point scale. The controls at the individual level were gender, age, marital status, and educational level (binarized for higher education vs no higher education).

I run series of multilevel cross-classified regression models (the best models are represented in Table 1). Dependent variable is “Men should have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce”. From the models we see that some of the predictors have universal effects for all the cultural contexts, others are relevant for some specific cases only. Universal predictors are religiosity, employment status, and marital status at individual level, as well as HDI and Islam.

Religiosity measured by attendance results in a linear trend, where those attending every week or more often are prone to support gender discrimination in employment (surprisingly, this group has no significant differences from those who declined to disclose their religiosity). Adding self-attribution as a religious person adds power to the model, and those reporting that they are religious tend to show more support for discriminative judgment than the non-religious and those who declined to answer. Still, I should admit, following Spierings (2016) that a more nuanced explanation of the mechanisms for the link between religiosity and patriarchal norms is needed, as in most comparative studies it is mostly taken for granted.

Employment status has a significant impact on people’s attitudes towards discrimination in employment. People performing paid work and students are significantly less likely to prefer men over women in employment. The most discriminative answers came from people doing (unpaid) housework, the retired, the unemployed, and those who listed their employment status as “other”.

Concerning marital status, singles and divorced people are less supportive of gender discrimination than married people, while widowed people are more so. Those who declined to report their status show much more discriminative attitudes than those in all other categories.

At the country level, HDI proves to hold high explanatory power, meaning that people residing in the most developed societies are much more likely to report non-discriminative attitudes to female employment rights. People who live in societies with predominantly Islamic population are much more likely to support male privilege within the labor market. Some other country-level predictors show significance holding the previous two constants; however, the Polity IV index of democracy improves model fits more than the others. Thus, people living in the most democratic societies support non-discriminative employment practices. Share of women in parliaments also holds significance along with HDI and percentage of Islamic population, which means that female participation in formal politics
is vitally important for female employment rights in a country. At the same time, religiosity at the country level is not a significant predictor for employment discrimination support.

**Do Muslims share similar (very patriarchal) attitudes regardless of their age, gender, education, or country of birth?**

In Muslim countries, as well as in the rest of the world, females are less likely to support discrimination, as are younger people and those with higher education. However, the effects of those controls vary significantly by country.

Randomizing the effects of countries of origin (Figures 2, 3, 4) basing on a multilevel regression model, we see that in Muslim-majority societies, males are much less egalitarian than females, and the difference is much greater than in European societies (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Randomizing country-level effects for Muslim societies: Gender**
Age has a low and often negligible effect in the Muslim societies of the sample, which can be seen from the regression lines for 12 sending Muslim-majority countries that are almost parallel to OX axis. In Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia, the elderly is even more egalitarian than the younger generations. However, in Iran, Morocco, Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, and Tunisia younger respondents show somewhat less discriminative gender attitudes.

**Figure 3. Randomizing country-level effects for Muslim societies: Age**

Higher education results in more support for gender egalitarianism in the labor market in all the societies sampled, but the effect for predominantly Muslim societies is not as strong as for the European ones. Still, this effect can be considered universal, as in all 73 societies analyzed, people who attained higher education are significantly less likely to support gender discrimination in employment.
Are Muslims likely to bring their values and attitudes with them when they move to different cultural contexts?

As migration status and Muslim identity are my focal predictors, I enter them separately along with their interaction effect. Migrants from all backgrounds taken together show almost no difference in gender egalitarianism compared with locals. Muslim migrants are consistently less egalitarian than European locals; however, the effect size differs from country to country. The difference is lowest in Sweden, where it is almost negligible, and highest in Spain and Portugal.

Muslim identity has a stronger effect that holds independently as well as in interaction with migration status across all model specifications (see Table 1).

Length of stay has an unstable and very small effect (in line with Rudnev’s findings (Rudnev, 2014). Muslims are more likely to change their attitudes as the length of their stay grows, but this needs to be further explored.
I compare Muslim migrants to the public of their sending societies, controlling for socio-economic characteristics. Migrants to Western Europe from Muslim majority countries are less discriminative than their compatriots in their sending societies, holding religiosity, education, labor and marital status, age and gender equal.

Interestingly, personal identification with Islam and coming from a Muslim-majority country have separate (and large) effects. Moreover, the interaction effect of migration status and Islamic country of origin suggests that those who migrated to Western European countries are strikingly different in their attitudes towards gender discrimination in employment from those who stayed. Cross-level interaction effect of migrant status and Islamic prevalence in the country of origin is strong even when holding the interaction effect of migration and individual Muslim identity.

Discussion

If we ask whether Muslim migrants differ from European locals and from other migrants in Europe in their gender attitudes regarding employment rights, the brief answer is yes, they do. However, more nuanced look at the evidence gives a better, less biased impression.

The gender dynamics in MENA support the arguments of feminist scholars who describe the advance of female resistance and discontent with the existing gender regimes. In Western Europe the trends reflect the public consensus on non-discrimination and the high level of gender equity (the ceiling effect). In this context, migrants from the MENA region show less gender difference than one might expect, favoring non-discrimination over male privilege.

Age trends show a growing gap between predominantly Islamic and Western societies in gender-discriminative attitudes. Older generations do not differ much across the globe, as male privilege within the labor market has been evident and almost unquestioned for centuries. The younger generations in Western Europe demonstrate growing rejection of this long-standing practice, whereas their peers from MENA do not differ significantly from their parents and grandparents in this respect. This could potentially lead to increasing mutual incomprehension between people from different countries. It should be noted, however, that for migrants this gap is still surmountable.

As can be seen from data analysis, the heated discussion about gender attitudes of Muslim migrants in Europe has little to do with the evidence.
To finalize, we can note that most migrants came to Europe from non-Islamic majority countries; in Muslim countries people have very different opinions on gender issues (though, quite non-egalitarian as compared to most regions of the world); People who left their predominantly Islamic countries of origin are much less prone to gender discrimination than those who stayed. This paper argues that the majority of Muslim migrants do not adhere to the values and attitudes of their countries of origin, but fall closer to the attitudes of the receiving societies as reflected in their perception of gender roles, particularly within the labor market. The last finding resembles the results of Alexander and Welzel (2012) who show high flexibility of Muslim migrants in new cultural surroundings.

References


### Table 1. Multilevel regression tables (3 best models)

When jobs are scarce men should have a priority (0 – disagree, 1 – agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(Rand.by resid)</th>
<th>(Rand.by origin – 1)</th>
<th>(Rand.by origin – 2)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Gend+Age+Edu)</td>
<td>(Gend+Age+Edu)</td>
<td>(Gend+Age+Edu+Migr)</td>
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<td>Migrant</td>
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<td>−0.04 (0.07)</td>
<td>−0.07 (0.11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>−0.07** (0.03)</td>
<td>−0.06** (0.03)</td>
<td>−0.06** (0.03)</td>
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<td>Migr*Muslim</td>
<td>0.96*** (0.11)</td>
<td>0.72*** (0.11)</td>
<td>0.71*** (0.10)</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>0.50*** (0.04)</td>
<td>0.48*** (0.04)</td>
<td>0.48*** (0.04)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>0.01*** (0.002)</td>
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<td>Attend (Several times a month)</td>
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<td>−0.11*** (0.02)</td>
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<td>Attend (On holy days)</td>
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<td>Attend (Never)</td>
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<td>Attend (Refusal)</td>
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<td>−0.15*** (0.03)</td>
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