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## *Islam and female identity in Turkey*<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Un ampio dibattito affronta il tema dell'Identità dell'Io e dell'identità sociale delle donne musulmane nei Paesi islamici in relazione alla pressione di una società maschilista. La ricerca è stata ipotizzata per far emergere l'identità soggettiva di giovani donne musulmane in Turchia. Il campione è composto da 200 intervistate di 18-30 anni che vivono in conformità alle prescrizioni sociali islamiche. I risultati mostrano che tra esse un'alta percentuale acquisisce il senso d'identità nella maggior parte dei domini dell'identità dell'io più che nelle altre dimensioni dell'identità. Ciò significa che, contrariamente a quanto atteso, esse esplorano e prendono le proprie decisioni senza alcuna pressione delle famiglie e della società maschile. Scelgono, tuttavia, forme differenti per l'attualizzazione del sè. Si potrebbe sintetizzare nell'affermare che questi cambiamenti dalla tradizione alla modernità intendono e valutano gli effetti dell'urbanizzazione e della modernità in una diversa prospettiva.

Keywords: Femministe islamiche, Identità femminile, Identità dell'Io, Identità sociale

According to Bronfenbrenner (1998), Vygotsky (1962), Veer and Valsiner (1991), and others, individuals since the prenatal period are under the influence of external features, besides internal ones, such as: socio-psychological, mother-child relational, and socio-historical-cultural characteristic, in particular: family types, child rearing techniques, social environment, school, religion, economy, politics, globalization, modernization, national or international laws, media, inter and intra cultural factors. When Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) drew the ecological theory of development, they gave some clues about the importance of environmental features but they missed explaining both the possible effect of globalization and modernization and the interaction with cultural factors (Sandrock, 1997).

Culture is not only a material technology but it is also a memetic technology of concepts and ideas that affect our behaviours. The variability of culture can be explained in terms of an universal human nature interacting with unique historical and environmental forces. These forces act upon human beings and help them create the epistemological dynamics of culture (Wilson, 1998). Today, in the 21st Century, no one can operate separately from these forces. For individuals are not only passive receivers but they are also active constructors who live within ecological settings. Any change to the economic or political system or the introduction of new technological inventions is liable to bring about cultural changes. It is no accident that

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<sup>1</sup> English version edited by Salvatore Di Martino

the social balance of the world has been recently turned upside down by the use of high technology and new social networks. And as a consequence, economic, politics, and ethnicity have been redefined by these new conditions.

As said earlier, the aforementioned factors influence and shape individuals since the childhood and throughout the life cycle. During this process, they help them answer questions such as: “who am I?” and “what am I?”. The answer to these questions gives also some cues about the construction of our identity (Erikson, 1968);

By and large, it is possible to refer different identities to the same individual, such as: ego, gender role, social, collective, and ethnic identity, only to name a few. Personality is the Gestalt-like result of all these identities put together. It follows that it is impossible to set apart anyone of them from the others. Each of them has, indeed, its peculiar importance to one’s life. In this article in particular the construction of female identity within Islam Countries shall be explained in terms of the formation of Ego identity and social identity.

### *Ego-Identity*

It is not an easy task to precisely define Ego-identity, though it is possible to give its dimensions, to wit: continuity, sameness, and uniqueness. According to Erikson (1968) Ego-identity is also the end product (outcome) of the interaction between biological determinations (abilities, tendency to pathological behaviour, physical appearance, and intelligence), life time experiences, and cultural environment. This means that Ego-identity has got its roots in the individual life other than in the socio-cultural-historical environment; moreover it is partly conscious and partly unconscious. Ego-identity starts to be shaped since childhood by means of mechanism such as introjection and identification and it closes its cycle during the late adolescence. Of course this is not set in the stone. The intervention of different experiences such as traumas, migration, wars, earthquakes, economic conditions, and revolutions is liable to change people’s life (Kroger, 1993).

There are different Ego-identities within every life domain (family, religion, ideology-politics, friendship, career etc.) with which individual constantly interacts. These different identities come together making the whole of the identity configuration (Erikson, 1968).

According to Marcia (1966) there are four identity statutes, to wit: *Identity achievement*, *moratorium*, *foreclosure*, and *Identity diffusion*. Marcia has classified these statuses according to their degree of exploration as well as their level of commitment. They may be either the same in each domain or they may be different.

*Table 1 Exploration and Commitment Characteristics of Identity Statutes*

<b>Identity Status</b>	<b>Exploration</b>	<b>Commitment</b>
Identity Achievement	Yes	Yes
Moratorium	Yes	No
Foreclosure	No	Yes
Identity diffusion	No	No

### *Characteristics of Identity Statutes*

*Identity achievement:* Individuals who have formed this kind of identity explore alternatives and make commitments. They know the reason why they chose and defend such commitments. They are thoughtful, introspective, albeit not immobilized by their reasonings, functioning cognitively well under stress. They are characterized by sense of humour and open-mindedness over and above by high self-esteem. Also they are able to listen to the others and judge according to their own inner standards. Their moral development stage is post conventional.

*Moratorium:* Individuals at the moratorium status are able to explore different alternatives but they suffer of a lack of commitment. Although they are sometimes active and energetic they find difficult to detach themselves from their parents. According to Marcia (1983) an ambivalent struggle characterizes the moratorium status. Moratorium subjects are intense regarding interpersonal relationships. They are able to think clearly under stressful conditions. Their moral development level is also post conventional (Donovan, 1975).

*Identity foreclosure* means that the adolescent blindly accepts the identity and values that were given in childhood by families and significant others. The adolescent's identity is foreclosed until they determine for themselves their true identity. The adolescent in this state is committed to an identity but not as a result of their own searching or crisis. According to Marcia's (1983) scheme foreclosure subjects are happy and self-satisfied. They are very authoritarian and conventional in their moral reasonings. They do not feel particularly anxious about the fulfilment of their commitments. They are also approval seeking.

*Identity Diffusion:* Individuals at this status are not able to make commitments. They show low self-esteem and scarce autonomy. They function at a pre-conventional levels of moral reasoning and use only a few complex cognitive styles. Some of them may drift through life in a carefree, uninvolved way, while others may show a severe pathology along with great loneliness. They are also superficial and unhappy (Guest, 2009; Kroger, 1989)

### *Social Identity*

Social identity comprises those parts of personal identity that belong to particular groups such as: age, ethnicity, religion, and gender. The two main processes involved in the formation of social identity are self categorization and social comparison. In social identity theory the Self is reflexive in that it can take itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications. This process is called self-categorization or, in other words, identification within group and consists in the personal knowledge of which group or category an individual belongs to (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). A social group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification hence viewing themselves as members of the same social category. The direct consequence of the categorization is that the members of the group tend to perceive similarities between themselves and the other in-group members in terms of attitudes, beliefs, values, affective reactions, behavioural norms, dressing styles, rituals and other features. They also use cultural symbols in order to set themselves apart from the out-group. In each category of a structured society some roles and performances associated with a specific vision is expected from its members. Thus, expectations and meanings form a set of standards that guide behaviour (Burke, 1991). In-group identity shows itself in several cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural features. The central cognitive process of social identity

theory is depersonalization or, put in other terms, seeing oneself as an embodiment of the group prototype. In this light, “I” becomes therefore “We”. Individuals uniformly tend to make positive evaluations towards their own group once they become group members. Indeed, once identified with their group, they start feeling a strong attraction to the group as a whole (Hogg and Hardie, 1992). In-group identification leads to a greater commitment to the other members and less desire to leave the group even if his/her own status within the latter is relatively low. This condition may be called group solidarity (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje, 1997; Sheriff 1966).

Social comparison process is also related to self enhancement since a group member evaluates and judges the in-group dimensions positively and the out-group dimensions negatively. That leads to an increase in self-esteem. However, this kind of social identity is not always triggered. The situational features are extremely important in activating social identity. According to Strayker (1994) the term “salient” is used to explain these situational features and it refers mainly to the psychological significance of a group membership. It is not relevant to individuals’ goals and purposes. Oakes (1987), proposed that the activation of social activities is more than cognitive and perceptual. It is also tied to social requirements.

### *Females prefer Islamic tradition in Turkey*

In Turkey, the number of females who refer to themselves as Islamic has increased since the last three decades. To understand the reasons behind such an augmentation, we need to give an overview to the gender identity background of Turkish females. Women in Turkey have been traditionally placed into the foreclosure identity status hence with no exploration but commitment. It was thought that they were norm dictated, subordinated to the values and the behavioural patterns of the group of elders. This is in part due to the fact that traditional Turkish families used autocratic child rearing techniques. Parents used to value their sons more than their daughters hence women’s status was low in this kind of families. Due to the introduction of television and other technological changes women in Turkey have begun to look at the world from a different perspective considerably improving their social status almost everywhere except in some regions of Anatolia (especially in the Southeast). Women have also witnessed the raise of new role models and learnt different behaviour patterns as a consequence. They have gone out of their family membrane which in turn has begun to switch from a traditional to a modern lifestyle. However, instead of becoming completely modern, they developed a hybrid family-type which is neither totally traditional nor completely modern. From the 1950’s onwards Turkey has also been witnessing a rural to urban migration and the immigrants involved in this process have experienced a serious struggle with anomie. They attempted to bring with them their traditional values but the latter could not stand against the modern urban ones. In order to accommodate themselves to this new life they created a series of hybrid values. One of these is the redefinition of Muslim tradition which reflects in turn women’s psycho-social lifestyle. As the educated female population increased women started to attend university, choose their own career, work in public office, as columnists for instance or as candidate to the parliament. They began to give their contribution to the family budget, raising their voices in family matters as a consequence. Research carried out among university students (Celen & Kusdil, 2009), showed that female university students reached Ego-identity

achievement at par with men. Some sociologists (Göle, 1999) have defined this state of affairs as “modernization of Islam”, but there still are contradictory voices. One of them claims that women are still under the sway of male society.

The aim of this study is to bring out the ego-identity status of females who define themselves *Islamic* instead of *Muslim*, whom changed their dressing codes according to a redefined Islamic point of view but unlike Iran and Afganistan they wear colourful scarves, (although they do not show their hair) jeans, modern dresses, and make up. Androgenity has been pursued as a gender role model while male partners have begun to help them with housework. They also follow Islamic rituals and rules which were partly reformed after the constitution of the Turkish Republic in 1923. They redefine the rituals free from the constitution and they fought against their obligations. In a way the scarf ( hijap) represented this new activation as a symbol of autonomy. This research also sets out to clarify some of these issues.

### *Method*

#### Participants

Our sample consists of 200 university students and young professional graduates Islamic females who work outside their private realm. They all fall between the age of 18 and 30 coming from two different Turkish cities (Bursa and Istanbul). The sample can be regarded as geographically representative since the 60% of the population of these cities consists of immigrant families who came from rural areas of Anatolia in search of job opportunity.

#### *Instruments*

1-The *Objective Measure of Ego-Identity Status (EOM-EIS)* by Grotevant and Adams (1984) has been utilized for this purpose. This scale includes 64 items which assess the four Identity statutes proposed by Marcia (Identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, Identity diffusion). Each Ego-identity status refers to two subscales called *Ideology* and *Interpersonal sub-scale* respectively. The Ideology sub-scale consists of four domains: Occupation, Religion, Politics and Philosophical Life-Style. The Interpersonal sub-scale consists of four domains as well: Friendship, Dating, Sex Roles, and Recreation and Leisure. Each scale contains items which define the exploration and commitment of the individual according to specific domains. Participants rated each item on a six point Likert scale.

This scale is based on Marcia and Erikson’s explanation of Identity and is easily applied to homogeneous groups in order to seek out developmental configurations (Adams et al., 1979; Bennion and Adams, 1986). Eryuksel (1987) translated the scale into Turkish and subsequently three clinical psychologists reviewed the translation. The scale has been used by several academicians. Reliability of the scale has been examined by Cronbach Alfa and test-retest techniques finding .67 for ideology sub-scale and .68 for personal relations sub-scale.

2-Interviews have been conducted with the Identity Status Interview: Late Adolescent College form (Marcia, Archer, 1993).

### *Procedure*

Step 1 – The scales have been distributed to small groups of respondents who have filled out the items in about twenty minutes.

Step 2 – After analysing the scales the researcher has shared the results with some fellow scholars of identity theories. Since they proposed to confirm the results with some interviews, these have been conducted with small groups requiring several hours of work.

### *Results*

1- The analysis of the data gathered by means of EOM-EIS has showed the following Ideology subscale ratings:

Religion: Identity achievement 74.7%; Identity diffusion 4.8%; Foreclosure 10.8%; Moratorium 9.7%.

*Table 2 Frequency Distribution of Identity Statuses for Religion*

Religion	F	%
Identity achievement	62	74.7
Identity diffusion	2	4.8
Foreclosure	6	10.8
Moratorium	12	9.7
Total	83	100

Politics: Identity achievement 73.5%; Identity diffusion 14.5%; Foreclosure 8.5%.

*Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Identity Statuses for Politics*

Politics	F	%
Identity achievement	61	73.5
Identity diffusion	12	14.5
Foreclosure	7	8.5
Moratorium	3	3.5
Total	83	100

*Philosophical Life-Style* domain: Identity achievement 75.9%; Identity diffusion 2.5%; Foreclosure 3.5%; Moratorium 18.1%.

*Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Identity Statuses for Philosophical Life-Style*

<i>Philosophical Life-Style</i>	F	%
Identity achievement	63	75.9
Identity diffusion	2	2.5
Foreclosure	3	3.5
Moratorium	15	18.1
Total	83	100

Occupation: Identity achievement 75.75%; Identity diffusion 2.50% Foreclosure 7.25%; Moratorium 14.5%.

*Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Identity Statuses for Occupation*

Occupation	F	%
Identity achievement	63	75.75
Identity diffusion	2	2.50
Foreclosure	6	7.25
Moratorium	12	14.5
Total	83	100

2- The analysis of the data gathered by means of EOM-EIS has showed the following Interpersonal subscale ratings: Friendship: Identity achievement 91.6%; Identity diffusion 1.2%; Foreclosure 2.4%; Moratorium 4.8%.

Sex Roles: Identity achievement 63.9%; Identity diffusion 1.8%; Foreclosure 7.2%; Moratorium 18.1%.

*Table 6 Frequency Distribution of Identity Statuses in Friendship*

Friendship	F	%
Identity achievement	75	91.6
Identity diffusion	1	1.2
Foreclosure	2	2.4
Moratorium	4	4.8
Total	83	100



*Table 7. Frequency Distribution of Identity Statuses in Gender Domain*

Sex Roles	F	%
Identity achievement	53	63.9
Identity diffusion	9	10.8
Foreclosure	6	7.2
Moratorium	15	18.1
Total	83	100

Recreation and Leisure: Identity achievement %79.5, Identity diffusion % 3.5, Foreclosure % 2.5, Moratorium % 14.5

*Table 8. Frequency Distribution of Identity Statuses for Recreation and Leisure*

Recreation and Leisure	F	%
Identity achievement	66	79.5
Identity diffusion	3	3.5
Foreclosure	2	2.5
Moratorium	12	14.5
Total	83	100

Dating: Identity achievement 27.7%; Identity diffusion 56.6%; Foreclosure 2.4%; Moratorium 13.3%.

*Table 9. Frequency Distribution of Identity Statuses for Dating*

Dating	F	%
Identity achievement	23	27.7
Identity diffusion	47	56.6
Foreclosure	2	2.4
Moratorium	11	13.3
Total	83	100

The results of the present study's first part have showed that in each domain of the Ideology subscale the percentage of Identity achievement status is higher compared to the other statuses. We might draw the conclusion that the women who constituted this sample tend to make their own explorations and fulfil their commitments without being under the influence of the others. In this light they can be deemed to be decision makers.

The Interpersonal subscale shows a high percentage of Identity achievement but a low percentage of dating as well. Based on the Ideology subscale ratings, it can be stated that these



women feel a good sense of solidarity for their group, but they do not have any deep relationship or love affairs with the very group members. They also report the highest percentage of Identity achievement in Recreation and Leisure domain, the second highest percentage in moratorium status. Therefore they may be considered as persons that are still exploring their leisure without making any specific commitment yet. The percentage of Identity achievement in the Sex Roles domain is the highest within its own status but quite low if compared to the other domains. The percentage of Moratorium status is high if compared to the other domains. It can be stated that they are still exploring the characteristics of gender identity in transition from tradition to modernity.

Each interview has been conducted with groups of five females in order to explore their degree of commitment. According to the content analysis these interviews show that family does not interfere in their decisions and Islamic rules are taken up of their own volition. Some of the interviews even pointed out how much their family is democratic. Some of them described reading a lot of books about Islam (exploration) and asking many questions to competent people in this matter (exploration and commitment). One of these women summarized what just said with these words: "I explored and then I made my decisions... I initially used to wear the scarf (tesettur- hyjap) to obey the Islamic rules and rituals, and then I realized that wearing it could have been a personal choice (commitment)". Other interviewees expressed the importance of wearing the "turban" as the result of a personal decision: *I asked myself "Is it not too early?" then I made my choice... I won't put pressure on my child about the "tesettur". She must choose by herself... If someone puts on a scarf because is under pressure she will change very soon and eventually will end up reacting against it.*

The researcher also observed during the interview that the participants were self-assured, self-confident, and they exhibited no self doubt. They also felt they had enough information about what they were doing and what were their decisions. The results of the group Interviews supported the EOM-EIS scale's quantitative results.

### *Discussion*

This study aimed to show the ego-identity status of young Turkish females who prefer an Islamic way of life. Another purpose was to clarify their position within a more and more modern and globalized society. The sample has been constituted by women from 18 to 30 years of age since this interval represents the period in which identity gets crystallized (Adams and Jones, 1983; Muuss, 1996).

The results showed that Identity achievement status is very high among females who chose an Islamic lifestyle. The earlier research conducted by Celen and Kusdil (2009), with university students proposed that the percentage of Identity achievement was higher in females than in male students. In this research the sample consisted mainly of women who preferred an Islamic life-style and dress code (Hyjap-tesettur). Findings showed that the females who preferred Islamic lifestyle do not show any subordination coming neither from their family nor from male chauvinistic society.

The common belief deems all Islamic females to be under male's sway. Although in some cases this is true a glance at history will help better understand the current situation. During the time of Abbasi (A.C. 9th Century) and Amavi's empire (A.C.7th Century) and also in the first three centuries of the Ottoman Empire Islamic females used to have a certain autonomy and even commitment in social and political affairs. These were the times when these empires were economically and politically powerful (Bulut, 2000; Lewis, 2003).

As time proceeded the empires could not keep up with the renaissance reforms with a consequent loss of power and an experienced period of economic crisis. Islamic males could not compete with Western economy. From 19th Century on Islam Countries have witnessed another shift to the Western world based on industrialization, productivity, and class conflicts. Western modernization refers to universality and decrease of differences (enlightenment, industrial revolution, individualism, equality and laicism (secularism)). Karl Marx, in his book "Selected Writings" edited by Lawrence H. Simon, pointed out how the economic way of life is one of the main causal agents of culture (1994); Sigmund Freud also explained the effects of economics on personality. With reference to Freud, Schumacher (1989) stated, that inferiority turned into rage against the Western World, Thus hence men started to use a projection defence mechanism by directing this rage towards a more fragile group that is females. They moved their rage feelings against females and by submitting them under their authority. It follows that females have been kept in their private realm every since. Males evaluated Islamic rules very radically and females were turned into a kind of victim. This condition has been a source of experienced learned helplessness handed down through behaviour patterns from generation to generation.

The modernization experienced nowadays throughout the Islamic world is deemed as a bearer of change for cultural norms, behaviour patterns, and gender role identity. Specifically in Turkey modernization has been perceived as female independence far away from traditional Islamic values. Indeed, women have been put at the centre of the modernization process in Turkey in the second part of 20th century and now they are becoming more and more autonomous and individualized. Yet, unlike young females' lifestyle, many middle-aged women in Turkey still live a very traditional life characterised by traditional religious and conservative practices

Islamic society reshaped the Muslim identity against the modern world by using females not only to represent a reaction to sovereignty but also to propose a cultural model and a new identity paradigm against Western modernization.

The high percentage of Identity achievement within the friendship domain may be explained in terms of the young Islamic females' collective identity. As touched on above, these women belong to immigrant families and also they attended university in big cities. Therefore they most likely came into contact with new values of urbanization and acculturation processes which must have stood against anomie. Given that there must always be a balance between assimilation and differentiation processes, they might have used some cognitive defence mechanisms against anomie like, for instance, by changing their perceptual point of view, by avoiding to be assimilated into a secular young females lifestyle and by setting themselves apart through dress codes (hijap).

They also differentiated themselves from their mothers' old traditional lifestyle by being more autonomous. We might say that they have internalized an Islamic political point of view. In this sense they managed to balance assimilation and differentiation.

This Islamic female movement looks like a feminist and ethnic group movement. By categorising themselves as feminists, women feel more secure and strong with a direct benefit for their Ego and social identity. What they experience is, also, a sense of solidarity for the other group members. Salient factors like counter attack attitudes of out-group members made them increase in their categorization and in uniformity of perception. Researchers have found that individuals who identify themselves with a group feel strong attraction to the group as a whole, independent of individual attachments within group (Hogg and Hardie, 1992). The greater the commitment to the group the less the desire to leave the group itself even when his/her group status is relatively low. This finding is similar to Sheriff's (1966) friendship solidarity studies.

When young Islamic female groups seek to differentiate themselves from traditional values they tend to adopt some peculiar elements like *the hijap* used as a symbol of this movement. They use the word "*turban*" for it because Hijap represents the collective power of religion and politics. Women who prefer the *hijap* tend to take issue with the passive traditional rural culture; rather they actively try to take up opportunities of modernism. Higher percentages of Identity achievement in politics and occupation domains may be considered as a result of this movement. The message they bring forward is: "We cover our hair, not our brain" (Haddad et al., 2006).

This is only an illustrative study which refers to the social identity theories to address the use of turban among young female students. The explorative research refers to the formation of social categorization and it is therefore a valid tool of reflection on the use of traditional symbols in relation with modernization.

This study showed that the percentage of Identity achievement in friendship domain is high as well as the Identity diffusion percentage in dating domain. It seems that there is a role focused relationship pattern (White et al., 1997) among the members. According to Hogg and Hardie (1992) uniformity of perception reveals itself in cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural way. They did not mention the emotional part of it.

The percentage of Identity achievement in sex roles domain is lower than the other domains except the dating one. The results are in line with what is expected in a transitional period. It is not easy to differentiate from traditional gender role identity and construct a new one like being assertive, competent and competitive in or out of the family. Hybrid family style is still giving importance to emotional ties. It is easily seen relatedness and autonomy together (Kagitcibasi, 2005; Kagitcibasi, 1996) for some females who live within traditional families. It is hard to change old traditional cultural values in all domains

On the whole, one of the main factors which made a difference for these young Islamic females seems to have been university education. Indeed, the sample has been extracted from university ongoing students and post graduates. There are, however, other factors involved, such as: urbanization, globalization, technology and modernization. By the help of social networks these factors affect the child rearing techniques hence changing world-view. These are the new outcomes of this transitional period. Yet, cultural values cannot easily be changed

like technological ones. It is not possible to find Western Modernization aspects in Traditional societies but there is a change in the sense to attribute them.

Science and technology dispose of mass produced roles and individuals choose whatever proper for themselves. At the same time technology makes individuals feel lonely and prone to ritualisation in several groups. Being a member of a group, feeling solidarity and social identity in some way may keep the young interviewees from becoming victims of urbanization and globalization.

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