HYBRID IDENTITIES? TRAJECTORIES OF THE FATE OF OLD MUSLIM WOMEN IN POLAND

¿IDENTIDADES HÍBRIDAS? TRAYECTORIAS DEL DESTINO DE LAS ANCIANAS MUSULMANAS EN POLONIA

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RESUMEN

En el estudio de los procesos de integración de los inmigrantes, los temas relacionados con la transformación de sus identidades que están influenciados por la decisión de abandonar su propio país y vivir en otro son en este papel muy importante. Este momento es el punto de inflexión que transforma la identidad de los inmigrantes, quienes deben redefinirse a sí mismos y a su lugar en la nueva realidad política, social y cultural del estado de acogida.

El objetivo principal del artículo será mostrar los cambios que afectan la identidad de las mujeres musulmanas ancianas que han vivido en Polonia durante al menos 10 años. Esto permitirá mostrar la importancia de las identidades construidas por las mujeres inmigrantes para el proceso de su integración con la sociedad polaca.

ABSTRACT

In the study of integration processes of immigrants, issues related to the transformation of their identities that are influenced by the decision to leave their own country and live in another play a very important role. This moment is the turning point that transforms the identity of immigrants, who must redefine themselves and their place in the new political, social and cultural reality of the hosting state.

The main purpose of the article will be to show the changes that affect the identity of old Muslim women who have lived in Poland for at least 10 years. This will allow to show the importance of identities built by immigrant women for the process of their integration with the Polish society.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. THE PRESENCE OF MUSLIMS IN POLAND AND THE ATTITUDE OF POLISH SOCIETY TOWARDS ISLAM AND MUSLIM

In Poland, foreigners constitute only 0.5% of the population, and no more than 0.03-0.06% originate from Arab or Muslim countries. The difficulty in estimating the exact number is due to the fact that immigration from the Russian Federation comes mainly from the Caucasian republics (mainly from Chechnya), not from the European part. This increases the percentage of all Muslims among foreigners from 6 to 12 percent. The most numerous group are Turks, of whom there are less than 3,000, followed by Kazakhs. Then come the representatives of Arab nations: Egyptians, Tunisians and Syrians (Office for Foreigners 2015).

Despite such a small percentage of Muslims choosing Poland as the destination of their emigration, a negative image of this minority prevails among Poles. Recent studies on the attitude of Poles[1] to the followers of other religions and non-believers have shown that Muslims were the most disliked of the eight groups surveyed. Forty-four percent of Poles declared a reluctant attitude towards Muslims, and less than a quarter of the respondents had positive feelings towards them. 64 percent of the respondents believed that most Muslims were intolerant of customs and values other than their own. 57 percent of the respondents associated Islam with violence and believed that religion encouraged its use. 19 percent of the respondents did not agree with this claim. 51 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that Muslims generally accept the use of violence against followers of other religions; a different opinion was presented by 24 percent of the respondents. 63 percent of the respondents claimed that Muslim minorities living in Western European countries do not assimilate and reject the customs and values characteristic for the majority of citizens of these countries. According to only 43 percent of the respondents, it was possible to find a common, intercultural level of agreement. 34 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that a serious conflict between the Islamic and Western world would be possible in the future. In the last eight years, the number of people having such a belief has increased by 15 percent (Public Opinion Research Centre, 2015). These studies indicate the existence of stereotypical and biased perception of Muslim immigrants in Poland, which conduces to discrimination in this social category and constitutes a barrier to integration by building a picture of a Muslim as an «alien» (Switat, 2017). This has important implications for the process of adapting Muslim immigrants to socio-cultural norms of Poland.

According to Amin Maalouf (2002, p. 51), the more immigrants feel that their tradition, culture and religion are respected in the country they come to, the more they are open to its culture and less willing to close themselves to its influence. In this sense, the negative image of Muslims in Poland favours the isolation of this minority and hinders its adaptation to the new reality of the host society and integration.

The analysis of transformations within the identity of Muslim immigrants takes on significance in this context. It will allow to analyse their experiences in contact with a new culture and recreate

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[1] The CBOS survey was carried out on 5-11 February this year on a representative sample of 1003 adult adults in Poland.

the strategies they take by constructing images of themselves in a new reality that requires them to adapt to the functioning of the host country.

1.2. IDENTITY OF MUSLIMS LIVING IN POLAND AS A SUBJECT OF RESEARCH

In the analysis of immigrants conducted in Poland, identity issues are rare. Most often they concern the context of the Polish migration policy and European Union guidelines in this field (Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU from 2004), which impose an obligation on the host country to provide them with conditions for integration, while respecting their rights to preserve their own culture and identity (Iglicka, 2017,p. 124). Identity issues are also addressed in the context of refugee adaptation in view of the legal aspects of their stay and everyday problems related to their adaptation to the different reality of host countries (Chrzanowska and Gracz, 2007).

Few studies in the Polish discourse concern issues related to the transformation of the identity of Muslims resulting from the need to adapt their world to values and cultural and religious norms and customs prevailing in the different reality of the host country. This trend includes the analysis of Halina Grzyma□a-Moszczy□ska, Anna Ochma□ska and Joanna Grzyma□a-Moszczy□ska (2013), which describes the situation of Chechen refugees from the perspective of how they cope with crisis situations, such as the experience of war, the need to escape to another country, and finding oneself in the new reality of the host society in which they were unable to participate fully due to language limitations and ignorance of the principles of the new culture. In addition, they themselves felt misunderstood by the new socio-cultural environment, which caused an identity crisis in this category (Grzyma□a-Moszczy□ska et al., 2013). This was also the nature of the analysis conducted by Katarzyna Gracz (Chrzanowska and Gracz, 2007,pp. 215-325), which was a kind of study of the cultural identity of Chechen refugees in contact with Polish society and showed problems and tensions in the adaptation of this social category in the host country, which were rooted in cultural, religious and social differences.

1.3. THE IDENTITY OF MUSLIM IMMIGRANT WOMEN AS A SUBJECT OF RESEARCH

Most research on the identity of immigrants focuses on its group aspect and analyses it in the socio-cultural dimension, with less attention given to individual identity, although in today's increasingly diverse and complex societies they acquire a significant meaning (Grzyma□a-Kaz□owska, 2013, p. 45, Switat, 2017: 50). The concept of Anselm Strauss (1969) allows a new perspective on identities built by immigrants. It shows the individual identity in relation to the social organisation (Strauss 1995). In this approach, identity is not a structure that determines the individual's direction of action, but a process within which it is subject to constant negotiations and changes under the influence of interaction between the individual and their social environment (Konecki, 2015,p. 17). Identity understood in this way is based on the actor's self-image, which is modified under the influence of the ways other perceive them in a given society. This process takes place under the influence of assessments coming from the environment, and as a result the individual changes the picture of themselves, which leads to a change in their identity (Dolch, 2003,p. 373). The identity changes taking place are the result of critical incidents that become a part of the individual. Anselm Strauss described them as «turning points» that make

individuals aware of the significant changes in their own identity when analysing the history of their lives (Strauss 1969,p 93). In this approach, social life is a process of continuous change, and identity is its part (see: Maines, 1991, p 5). As a result, people constantly compose and revise their autobiographies, and the changes taking place in the images created by social actors and their interpretation constitute «critical points» in the development of their identity (Carr, 1986,pp. 76). This points to the process-like nature of identity, which is constructed and reconstructed throughout the entire life of the individual (Jenkis, 2005,pp. 3-4).

The dynamic aspect of identity is also emphasised in the reflection of Kay Deaux (2001) and Anhold Simon (2004). In their understanding, the identity of the individual is a construct of mutually interacting individual and contextual variables resulting from situations the individual encountered (Simon, 2004). As a result, values, motivations, systems of meanings, attitudes and actions that make up the image of oneself are influenced by the individual's environment (Deaux, 2006). Therefore, they may be subject to certain adaptations and changes in response to situational pressures experienced by individuals (Deaux, 1993; Gergen, 1991; Oyserman, 2004). As a result, even if the concept of oneself is usually stable, because in the absence of significant contextual changes, social actors have a tendency to perceive themselves and others in a permanent way (Swann, 1987). It may change under the influence of events significantly affecting the image of oneself (Hormuth, 1990; Ethier and Deaux, 1994). In critical situations, existing identities can be challenged. As a result, new identities replace them (Deaux, 2001).

The biographical situation of immigrants generates many critical incidents that reflect the impact of these events on their identity (see: Kazmierska, 2003). Hence, the acceptance, for the analysis, of the identity model, which indicates its process-like nature, will allow to show the complexity of self-created images of immigrants and transformations taking place in them under the influence of factors arising from the situations they face in the new reality of the host country.

The experiences of immigrant women are usually not examined separately; rather they are presented in the broad perspective of analyses concerning the entire minority group (Afzal-Khan, 2005). Meanwhile, the research conducted so far show that the experiences of Muslim women who decide to leave their country of origin are different from male immigrants, even within the same ethnic groups. Women see more tension between Islam and Western society than men. In studies conducted in the United States in 2011, 71 percent of the surveyed Muslim immigrants agreed that there was no conflict between the West and Islam; this view was shared by 54 percent of Muslim immigrant women (Pew Research Center 2011). These differences result from different roles and rights that have their source both in the cultural tradition and in the social structure of men and women in their homeland, which after resettlement in the new society are still important for the constructed self-image of the immigrants (Cainkar, 1988). Traditionally shaped definitions of women's roles affect what is possible, acceptable to them in contact with a different culture (Haddad, Moore, and Smith, 2006, pp. 14-16). Tensions in the adaptation process of immigrant women to a new society appear in a situation when they want to fight to maintain values and beliefs in a new society, which they consider to be important to them and impossible to change in new socio-cultural conditions. As a result of the lack of acceptance for their traditions, culture and religion by the host society, Muslim women feel isolated and have a sense of «cultural homelessness» (Garcia 1994). In contact with the reality of the host country,

Muslim immigrant women, attached to traditional culture and religion, see that their previous identity is questioned in the Western society (Ogbu, 1993). As a result, they experience a significant decline in self-esteem, which is an impulse for the reconstruction of their identities (Berger, 2004). Therefore, they create new identities. Stonequist (1961) lists three possible strategies that a person belonging to a minority can adopt in the face of the need to adapt to the dominant culture. The first is oriented towards assimilation to the dominant group, the second to assimilation to a minority group, and the third is an intermediate form that places the individual between the two groups (p. 130). In such a variant, the individual feels partially assimilated and psychologically identifies with the dominant group but does not accept it fully (Stonequist, 1961, p. 211). As a result, they live somewhat between two cultures, having the feeling of being marginalised in each of them in certain dimensions, e.g. in a native country as a divorcee, a woman would have a low social status, whereas in the host country the status is marginal due to her religious/ethnic distinctness (Kazmierska, 2003).

This is the situation for many Muslim immigrants «bombarded» with the dominant norms in Western countries that often conflict with their religion and tradition; they construct identities that will allow them to combine the dominant majority's norms with Muslim/ethnic norms that will allow them to be seen as «normal» in the host society while maintaining cultural or religious standards that are important to them (Mir, 2007, pp. 72-79). Identities constructed in this way will have a hybrid nature, allowing them to combine elements of Western and Muslim culture. Due to their contextual nature, they will change regularly and smoothly depending on the situation (Severson, 2011, p. 12). The decision to leave someone's former place of residence is not easy, especially if it concerns moving to completely different areas, especially in terms of culture. Such an event changes the identity of the people who take part in it. Few studies show the experiences of older Muslim immigrant women in relation to the transformation of their identity in contact with the foreign culture of the host country. In the analyses conducted, whose participants were women over 55, the specificity of their situation due to their age was not taken into account (Wang, 2017). Meanwhile, age plays an important role in the reconstruction of immigrant women's identity in contact with a new culture. It is connected with expected behaviours considered normal in the host society towards certain age categories, e.g. students or young economic migrants (Severson, 2011; Edross, 2011; Kazmierska, 2003).

1.4. OLD AGE IN THE ISLAMIC AND POLISH PERSPECTIVE

In European societies (including Poland), the social position of older people is qualitatively different than young people's. They experience worse treatment much more often due to their age (see Ageism in Europe 2011). This is a manifestation of ageism, understood here as prejudiced and stereotyped worse treatment of seniors in various spheres of life (Palmore, 1990, p. 4; Bytheway, 1995, p. 14), only because of their calendar age, and not individual skills, abilities and level of independence. This makes older people vulnerable to marginalisation in the society (Levy and Banaji 2002, p. 50). Research conducted in Poland shows that seniors have a limited opportunity to participate fully in social life, which affects their activity, self-esteem and assessment formulated by others, and the quality of their lives (Szukalski, 2008; Szukalski, 2015). This also affects the shaping of immigrant women's identity in the new reality. Older Muslim immigrant women, as a result of immigration, are forced to negotiate their identity not only in terms of di-

fferent values and norms arising from ethnic and religious traditions, but also roles and positions attributed to older people in Western societies to which they come. The question of old age and social status looks completely different in the Muslim society. The attitude towards the oldest is combined in a Muslim society with a high position of parents and the duties towards them. This issue also holds an important place in religion itself. Responsibilities towards parents, especially the elderly, were listed together with the most important order in Islam to be a monotheist and with the so-called the pillars of Islam, ie the most important, fundamental forms of practicing Islam, such as prayer, fasting and pilgrimage. The failure in performing them is connected with the category of great sin (Arab al-kaba'ir) which a Muslim must carefully avoid because, in an eschatological perspective, it particularly distances a man from salvation (Stefaniuk, 2015).

In the religious doctrine, references to obedience to parents and treating them in a dignified way can be very often found. In the Koran, it is repeatedly emphasized that obedience to parents results from obedience to God (Stafaniuk, 2015, pp. 119-20). Hadiths command Muslims to show respect not only to their parents, but also to all older Muslims. In addition, the Muslim (Arabic: Adab) etiquette, which is an important element of religion, contains tips on everyday behavior. These indications also apply to older people. There is advice that younger people should let the older speak first or when giving food, drinks, etc., they should start with the oldest. A similar principle applies to the conduct of prayer, i.e. the function of the Imam, namely the one who knows the Koran best. If there are several people who know the Koran as well - then the principles concern the eldest one (Stefaniuk, 2015, p. 124). The special position of parents and older people in Islam is reflected in the social situation of this category. In Muslim countries, the social status of an individual grows with age. Older people are respected only because of their age. The concept of elders, or people in the family, has a decisive voice in matters important to the family, which most family members must submit to. Some social items are related to the fact that the individual is of the right age. Too young people have less chance to be active in public space. Older people, especially those who have a son, enjoy respect. This justifies undertaking research of this age category in the perspective of changes which affect their identity in contact with foreign reality and a different culture of the host country.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this articles is to analyze the process of transform in identity of older woman – from Muslim countries, but currently living in Poland. The authors will discuss the self – image of women, which is constructed through few stages. The identity of women changed because of the influence of the message that surveyed women have got from the community about themselves. Poland has now become a country not very friendly to migrants, especially from Muslim countries, and that is way Muslim women have to struggle with increasing Islamophobia, strongly associated with, for example, reluctance towards hijab. Another important category in this context is age, because both cultures – polish and in Islamic countries - attribute their age to a different place in the social hierarchy. Older women from Muslim countries negotiate their identity not only because of the different values and norms functioning in polish society, but also because of other roles and social positions attributed to people in Poland. The decision to leave their former

place of living was extremely hard, also because they had to move to completely different areas, especially in terms of culture.

3. METODOLOGY

The study was based on autobiographical narrative interviews. This method allowed to reconstruct the trajectory of the respondents' identities, focusing on events recognized by respondents as turning points in their lives showing the process-like nature of them, that have undergone changes under the influence of the need to adapt to the cultural and social conditions prevailing in Poland. Six women aged over 55 were surveyed: Afghan woman: 63 years old, living in Poland for 35 years; Iraqi woman: 61 years old, living in Poland for 20 years; Syrian woman: 60 years old, living in Poland for 25 years; 66 years old woman from the Chechens, living in Poland 26 years; women from Egypt 57 years old, living in Poland 27 years and women from Marocco – 55 years old, 32 years in Poland. The interview was conducted from July 2016 to March 2017. The women are the first generation of migrants – who came to Poland in the first and second of the three waves of migration since the 1970s. The interviewed Muslim women lived in and around: Kraków, Katowice, Kielce, Warszawa, Gdańsk, Poznań.

4. CONTENT

4.1. FIRST STEP - MIGRATION

The reasons why surveyed women migrated to Poland are diverse. The respondents usually come from migration from the 1980s and from the early 1990s, thus from the two main waves of migration from Muslim countries to Poland. These were the times when migrants from the countries friendly in terms of the system came to Poland. Poland was under the communist regime at that time; the majority of migrants were from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Afghanistan and North Africa: Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Egypt. The second wave of migration is associated with the emergence of the Chechen population in connection with ongoing military operations in the country of origin. Six women from Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa took part in the survey.

Therefore, the reasons why these women appeared in Poland are diverse. The structure of families who have arrived is also different. In the first wave, men were over-represented; in the second wave, gender proportions were similar. In the first wave, the women were usually wives of husbands who came here to study or work; in the second wave, there were also lonely women with children. The first women came with their husbands who obtained scholarships (interview 1,2,6). They went to universities less often here. After graduation – most often of the husband – they stayed in Poland. For various reasons. Some remained due to their own initiative, others remained due to the inability to return because of ongoing military operations, e.g. in Afghanistan. The social status of people who came to Poland was diverse. Migrants from the first wave most often came from families privileged in the country of origin; migrants coming to Poland in the second wave were more diverse in this respect. Women who left their countries due to military operations, e.g. Chechen or Afghans, have a completely different approach to the reasons for leaving the country. Although initially the range of military operations did not cover the areas

where the Afghan respondent lived, the unstable situation in the country encouraged her to leave whenever her husband had the opportunity to receive a scholarship at a technical university in Kraków (interview 1). The Chechen women who came to Poland escaped war, which quite quickly embraced entire parts of the country. Women who escaped reached Poland with their husbands and children or alone with children or completely alone. According to surveyed women the beginnings of life of these two categories of women were also different. The first wave of migration was provided with basic care in Poland, often lived in, for example, dormitories or workers' flats, while e.g. migrants from Chechnya were forced to live in refugee centres.

4.2. CLASH OF EXPECTATIONS WITH REALITY

Speaking of their past in the country of origin, women mythologise it. They point to the beauty of the country of origin, the richness of both the country and the region, as well as their own: «I often come back with memories of flavors from my childhood. I remember the taste of cheese and our home. I remember the fruits. These were times when I really felt good. I had so many plans» (interview 1). They often point to innocence and ignorance of the world. They speak about their strength only in the context of change in life, dealing with the war or dealing with a totally new situation in Poland. The women of both waves describe their feelings about the beginnings in Poland differently.

For the first category, it was clear that at that time there were no foreigners in Poland, so everyone observed them. As one surveyed women admitted there was no obvious hostility, but there was interest. Due to their different appearance, fingers were often pointed at them because they were «oriental» (interview 3). Another woman said: «mothers showed me with their fingers to their children. I felt self-conscious» (interview 1). The surveyed women often emphasised that they were «a little foreign here and back home» (interview 1), i.e. they feel foreign where they live, but also in their country of origin: «The feeling of being a stranger, accompanies my whole life. I'm alien here. I'm foreign to the people in my old country» (interview 1). As an example one women emphasised that the assets they had accumulated in the country of origin or which should have belonged to them through inheritance were taken over by their immediate and extended families or were destroyed by military operations. Thus, there is no way back (interview 1). The women recall the beginning as difficult. Some of them never learned the language to the extent that would enable them to fully function in the society: «I prefer to speak in Pashto at home. Here, I feel confident, and Polish is difficult» (interview 1). The surveyed women recall that initially learning was very hard. People who received scholarships and arrived in the 1970s and 1980s had to cope with learning the language themselves. For men attending university or work it was much simpler. For women who, for various reasons, remained at home it was difficult (interview 3, 4, 6). The respondents often emphasised that they were tempted to escape and, regardless of everything, go back (interview 4, 5): «I was torn apart by longing and the pain of life here. I wanted to go back. But I had nothing» (interview 1); «It was bad here, but even worse there…» (interview 3); «There was no going back … a war there… a long way… danger… no money» (interview 2). Most women during interviews stated that the first period of their stay in Poland was a tough school of life. The language situation of people from different regions is varied. For women who are focused on working at home, learning the language is more difficult. When they have contact only with the family, and the main intermediaries are children, learning becomes very

difficult. That is how women described their situation, saying that only after many years from the arrival they began to learn and use the language. There are no broad Muslim communities in Poland, especially those created by broad regional groups.

Thus, the situation of migrants in Poland, e.g. from Muslim countries, is different than in other European countries where diasporas, e.g. Tunisian, Syrian, Turkish or Moroccan, are formed. Therefore, the possibility of social contacts in the native language is rare. The Chechens' situation related to language learning is the best here, since they know Russian, which facilitates learning Polish. The women surveyed admitted that it was a challenge for them, but they took it without major problems.

4.3. TO BE ACTIVE OR PASSIVE?

Some women, especially those from the first wave of emigration, did not take up professional activity. It was associated with the desire to stay at home with children and take care of the home (interview1). This is especially true for women who have already come here as wives (interview 2). They saw their role in the changing reality as the person who cultivates tradition from the area of origin, who nurtures habits and brings up children in the tradition from the area of origin: I was the main link of tradition for the home» (interview 6), «I wanted them (my family) to know how to do it in our tradition» (interview 2). Women focused on passing on the language, customs, rituals and religions to their children. One of the women said that the language prevailing in the house was the dialect of her husband; only after he passed away, did her dialect become dominant. Naturally, the children knew both of them, but at home only the language of the husband was used (interview 1).

On the other hand, women often undertake activities in Poland which in the country of origin belong only to men. Those who are active participants in the social life of the Muslim community are its leaders and they organise the life of the community, assuming the roles attributed in the country of origin only to men. This element has a clear meaning in the context of building one's own identity, indicating that they are not only passive participants of the community, but also the creators and leaders. However, the surveyed women were very different in this respect. Some of them were active and the community was one of the basic elements of identification for them, while some of them did not participate in the community at all, even passively, that is, not even for Friday's prayer (interview 1). Some of the surveyed women, residents of large cities in which there are Muslim Centres, have never visited them. Typically, these women were characterised by a passive attitude and dependence on the family in relation to social contacts. The women's identity was strongly influenced by their activity, both here and back home. The surveyed women differed in at what stage of life they came to Poland. Some of them came here as young women, wives or mothers. Some lost their entire families in the country of origin. Their fates were extremely different. Their activity can be separated into the one led here and in the country of origin. Some women were active in their previous lives, e.g. they would come from the so-called good houses, therefore, they were visible in the public space and took important roles there; their situation often changed during migration and in Poland, due to various factors, there was «only home and zero contacts with people» (interview 1). The fate of some of the women surveyed was the exact opposite. In the countries of origin, their role was limited to the traditional role of

women in the traditional community, while the arrival to Poland, despite the fact that it involved numerous traumas, made them socially active women who actively participate in the activities of the Muslim community; there are also cases of wider activity (interview 6).

4.4. DOUBLE EXCLUSION OF OLDER MUSLIM MIGRANT WOMEN

In today's society, older women from Muslim countries experience the exclusion more harshly. On the one hand, in the Muslim community, due to their age, their social position would increase as the years went by. Being first a mother and then a mother-in-law, a grandmother, a senior would be a determinant of social status for them. Especially in the case of those women, who were the mothers of men. In the Polish society, however, they perceive their age as a negative element. As they assumed age is not a protection for them (interview 1,2,3,4,5,6). Although, as they admit very often, they are much more rarely exposed to a physical attack due to their difference than younger women (interview 1,2,3,6). «I can wear the hijab and no one will touch me, even if they tell me something unpleasant. Others have it worse, because there were attacks» (interview 2).

In Poland, older migrant Muslim women often depend on the help of their children, due to the fact that they did not undertake professional work before. Today, at the age of 60+, if their husbands are already dead or they are alone for a different reason, they have no income at all. As they admit during surveys they cannot take advantage of the support they would have in the society of origin in the case of a large family (interview 1,3,6). In Poland or Europe, there have only a few family members, not broad circles that provide support to a woman: «Now, there is only me and the children; they practically support me (interview 4)» or «I do not have too much of my own money. I am dependent on children. I did not work when I was younger» (interview 2). The surveyed women admit that despite the independence they had to pursue throughout their adult life, they now become dependent on children. The children take care of most matters, like going to the doctor's or shopping (interview 1,2). «I do not have support here today. I built a house in Afghanistan, but everything has been taken over by them (family). They benefited from it.» They and their husbands are not family elders, that is they are not asked for advice or consent for various activities in the region of origin: «no one counts with my opinion. i.e. children yes, but some outside of them (interview 5). They also rarely ask for help with their own problems here (interview 5,6). For women, being part of the elders is associated with obtaining a higher status in society.

When they are talking about current times they admit: «Now I am old and when I look back on my life I think that it was not bad» (interview 1) or «On the one hand it is good because I already have my own rhythm of life, on the other hand I still see that someone nurses a grudge against us (Muslims). Often people ask me what I'm doing here. They are not aggressive, but suddenly they are surprised. After many years, I became different again. For years I was becoming accustomed to it, I blended in a little, and now I draw attention again.» (interview 4). This situation is connected with islamophobia growing now in Poland (interview 3,4). Surveyed women often mention their loneliness associated with being an old women and a stranger. «I spend my main time at home. I do not have a wide family that would participate in my life. Now when children are becoming independent, I am often alone. I often think about my country then. About my

heritage. Everything has been lost somehow. It hurts» (interview 4) or «Now it's harder for me to find myself in the old age. Loneliness is sometimes overwhelming» (interview 5) or «I do not have friends because I have never made them. I do not have neighbors with whom I would be friends. I do not have a cousin here to visit me» (interview 1). The women surveyed identify with the Polish society, they consider their children to be Poles, and their grandchildren are children most often from marriages mixed with Poles. However, they are very much interested in handing over traditions from the country of origin, especially language and rituals, to younger generations

4.5. RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

During the interviews, the women mentioned how the change of place of residence influenced their practicing of Islam. Surveyed women often admit that now that they are older, these issues become more important. «They were always important, but now they are even more important» (interview 3). They tried to convey the kind of Islam they knew from home to their children, even though they often gave up their participation in the community, living somewhat in loneliness. There are only 3 mosques in Poland, and in most major cities there are Muslim Centres, where there are prayer rooms for women and men and imams.

The attitude to participation in the Friday prayer and other activities of the centres was very divisive to women. Some were willing to go there because it was a meeting place for people similar to each other, to talk in their native language (especially Arabic) and it was related to the possibility of playing the role of a mentor or patron teaching other younger women about the principles, especially in the case of converts who often ask various questions, such as whether to paint nails, what to do during menstruation, how to prepare a Ramadan breakfast or what are the rules of contact with men (interview 4, 5, 6). Another category of Muslim women says: «I do not go to the mosque;» «I practice Islam every day, I pray, I observe Ramadan, but I do not go to the mosque. I don't have to, I am a woman;» «I do not participate in the community, I'm not interested in that».

At the time when they came to Poland, the meeting places of the Muslim community in most Polish cities were extremely few, so they did not take on such a habit and never participated in meetings of other Muslims. Holidays are spent only in the company of relatives (interview 1). Sometimes surveyed women admit: «Now, when I'm older, I feel the lack of a religious community more than before» (interview 2)

5. CONCLUSIONS

Life in a new society, using a different language, the need to adapt to a different lifestyle, learning a new culture, learning about different values and issues of political rights restrictions, and the prevailing image of Muslims present in the dominant society are the factors affecting the lives of Muslim immigrant women in the host country. This is conducive to the emergence of crisis situations that contribute to changes in the identity of Muslim immigrant women.

As a result, new identities are formed, which constitute a kind of compromise between traditional values and religious norms and those that are present in the dominant culture in the host countries. The decision to leave one's former place of residence is not easy, especially if it concerns

moving to completely different areas, especially in terms of culture. Such an event changes the identity of the people who take part in it.

In this article we have analyzed the process of changing the identity associated with migration in older women from Muslim countries currently living in Poland. Identity is based on the self-image being constructed. This image goes through different stages because of how the individual is perceived and assessed by the society. Under the influence of the message that an individual gets from the community about himself, the identity changes. Poland has now become a country not very friendly to migrants, especially from Muslim countries, so the next element that women are struggling with is Islamophobia, strongly associated with, for example, reluctance towards hijab. Age is an extremely important category here, if only because the two cultures attribute their age to a different place in the social hierarchy. Older women from Muslim countries are forced to negotiate their identity not only because of the different values and norms functioning in the host society, but also because of other roles and social positions attributed to people in Poland. The decision to leave your former place of residence is not easy, especially if it concerns moving to completely different areas, especially in terms of culture. Such an event changes the identity of the people who take part in it. Identity is based on the self-image being constructed. This image goes through different stages because of how the individual is perceived and assessed by the society. Under the influence of the message that an individual gets from the community about himself, the identity changes. Poland has now become a country not very friendly to migrants, especially from Muslim countries, so the next element that women are struggling with is Islamophobia, strongly associated with, for example, reluctance towards hijab. Age is an extremely important category here, if only because the two cultures attribute their age to a different place in the social hierarchy. Older women from Muslim countries are forced to negotiate their identity not only because of the different values and norms functioning in the host society, but also because of other roles and social positions attributed to people in Poland.

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