

## Stereotypes regarding Muslim men and Muslim women on the Romanian Internet: a qualitative comparative analysis for 2004-2009 and 2010-2015

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**Abstract:** *In the first part of this article I provide a presentation and an analysis of some demographic aspects of the Muslim community in Romania, classifying it according to various criteria. To this end I employ the data provided by the 2002 and 2011 censuses. The data is analyzed in order to obtain a clearer picture of the demographic characteristics of the Muslim community, which in turn is necessary for the qualitative analysis of stereotypes regarding Muslim men and women on the Romanian internet, which is the subject of the second part of the paper. These stereotypes have been aggravated by the January 2015 events in Paris and by the incessant politically-originating conflicts in the Middle East. The purpose is to assess whether we can identify Islamophobic attitudes on the Romanian Internet. The main concern is the gender dimension of Islamophobia, which will be called here Hijabophobia. The relevance of this subject is given by the possibility that these attitudes (should they exist) become more widespread and eventually ingrained through an institutionalization process. The data analysis is based on a comparative assessment of the stereotypes prevalent in two periods, 2004-2009, respectively 2010-2015. Finally, this paper provides a series of recommendations that aim to improve the perception of the Muslim community in the eyes of the majority population and at a better integration of the Muslim population on the labor market.*

**Key words** Hijabophobia • Integration; • Islamophobia • Stereotypes

### **Introduction**

The Muslim community has been living on the territory of today's Romania for over 800 years old. Throughout this period, the Muslims have established good relations with the majority of the population, the latter usually perceiving the Muslim religious minority positively, which also constitutes today a national minority (the ethnical-

religious Turkish-Tatar national minority). This minority represents the bulk of the Muslim community in Romania, though the latter is more encompassing.

### **Methodology**

In the first part of the paper, I employ a deductive and reflexive comparative analysis of the demographic data provided by the 2002 and 2011 censuses. A brief commentary follows the data analyses.

In the second part of the paper, I offer a theoretical analysis of the concepts of Islamophobia and Hijabophobia. This is followed by a qualitative analysis of the stereotypes associated to Muslim women and men on the Romanian internet. These stereotypes cover two periods, 2004-2009 and 2010-2015. The data has been gathered by using the search engines Google and Yahoo. Several key words have been used in order to gather the data, such as : „femeia musulmană”, „bărbatul musulman”, „femeia în Islam”, „bărbatul în Islam”, „musulmance”, „musulmani” [„Muslim woman”, „Muslim man”, „woman in Islam”, „man in Islam”, and two equivalent forms in Romanian for Muslim woman and Muslim man]. The data has been collected from online forums, websites, blogs (with politically extremist, xenophobic or anti-semitic content). The data has been ordered according to some working categories and subsequently analysed in order to understand the magnitude of the phenomena described and in order to identify measures of improving the perception of the Muslim community in the eyes of the majority population.

### **The demographic context of the research – Romania**

#### ***Statistical data regarding the number of Muslims in Romania***

The data gathered from the 2011 Census (official name: Recensământul populației și al locuințelor din România 2011) provides a comprehensive account of the Muslim minority, in relation to the majority population, but also to other formally recognized religions and cults, or according to ethnical, gender, marital status or age criteria. The data is compared in what follows with similar data obtained from the 2002 Census.

Romania has a population of 21,698,181 people, 67,566 of these being Muslims according to the 2002 census.<sup>1</sup> There has been a steady decrease of the total population, the 2011 census giving 20,121,641 inhabitants, whilst the Muslims' number has also decreased to 64,337 (National Institute of Statistics, 2011).<sup>2</sup>

Ethnically, the structure of the Muslim population looks as follows<sup>3</sup> (the first number refers to the 2011 data and the one between parantheses to the 2002 data): 6281 Romanians (3310), 86 Hungarians (56), 3356 Roma (805), 10 Ukrainians (33), 25 Germans (26), 21 Russian-Lipovenians (9), 26903 Turks (31118), 20060 Tatars (23641), 24 Serbs (37), 3 Slovaks (22), 6 Bulgarians (4), 0 Croats (57), 10 Greeks (6), 58 Jews (107), 3 Poles (19), 3 Italians (5), 10 Chinese (14), 3 Armenians (41), 141 Csangos (1), 16 Macedonians (0), 6906 other ethnicity (7705), 417 persons refusing to declare their ethnicity (241)<sup>4</sup> (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Ethnical classification of the Muslim community in Romania*

<i>Ethnic groups</i>	2002	2011
Total	67.566	64.337
Romanians	3.310	6.281
Hungarians	56	86
Roma	805	3.356
Ukrainians	33	10
Germans	26	25
Russian-Lipovenians	9	21
Turks	31.118	26.903
Tatars	23.641	20.060
Serbs	37	24
Slovaks	22	under 3 persons
Bulgarians	4	6
Croats	57	0
Greeks	6	10
Jewish	107	58

<sup>1</sup> The data is taken from the National Institute of Statistics, 2002, "Populația după religie la recensământul din 2002" in *Recensământul populației - 2002*, available online at <http://www.recensamant.ro/datepr/tbl6.html> (accessed on 7th of January 2010).

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Statistics, 2011, "12. Populația pe sexe, după religie - Categoriile de localități și județe" în *Volumul II: Populația stabilă (rezidentă) - Structura etnică și confesională*, România, București, available online at <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/noutati/volumul-ii-populatia-stabila-rezidenta-structura-etnica-si-confesionala/> (accessed on 18th of May 2015).

<sup>3</sup> National Institute of Statistics, 2011, "Populația după etnie și religie- categoriile de localități și județe", in *Volumul II: Populația stabilă (rezidentă)- Structura etnică și confesională*, Romania, Bucharest, available online at <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/noutati/volumul-ii-populatia-stabila-rezidenta-structura-etnica-si-confesionala/> (accessed on 18th of January 2010)

<sup>4</sup> See the website of the Romanian Government, the Inter-Ethnic Department, 2010, *Statistical documents*, p. 1, available online at [http://www.dri.gov.ro/documents/ds\\_etniesirelgiemedii.pdf](http://www.dri.gov.ro/documents/ds_etniesirelgiemedii.pdf) , accessed on 18th of January 2010

Poles	19	Under 3 persons
Italians	5	Under 3 persons
Chinese	14	10
Armenians	41	Under 3 persons
Csangos	1	141
Macedonians	0	16
Other ethnicity	7705	6.906
Unreported ethnicity	241	417

In Table 2 I continue with the demographic data regarding the Muslim community. Here I provide an outlook of the marital status, gender distribution and rural/urban distribution for the years 2002 and 2011.

*Table 2. Distribution of the Muslim community in terms of gender, marital status and rural/urban residence*

Gender and marital status		Not married	Married	Divorced	Widowed
Number of Muslim men (2002/2011)	36.115/ 34,685	17.142/ 17,638	21.864/ 15,642	998/ 706	743/ 699
Number of Muslim men living in an urban environment, 2002	28,772	15,835	11,566	825	546
Number of Muslim men living in an urban environment, 2011	27,021	13,611	12,329	560	521
Number of Muslim men living in a rural environment, 2002	7343	4,336	2,637	173	197
Number of Muslim men living in a rural environment, 2011	7,664	4,027	3,313	146	178
Number of Muslim women (2002/2011)	31.142/ 29,652	14.677/ 12,849	12.007/ 12,34	998/ 900	3.473/ 3563
Number of Muslim women living in an urban environment, 2002	24,178	11,355	9,487	836	2,5
Number of Muslim women living in an urban environment, 2011	22,774	9,917	9,5	752	2,605
Number of Muslim women living in a rural environment, 2002	6,964	3,322	2,52	149	973
Number of Muslim women living in a rural environment, 2011	6,878	2,932	2,84	148	958

It can be noticed that, statistically, women live longer than men, a conclusion that can be reached by looking at the number of widows (3563) and widowers (699) (2011

<sup>1</sup> INSSE, 2010, „Structura etnică și confesională”, Table no.7, „Populația după religie și stare civilă, pe sexe și medii”, in *Recensământul populației și al locuințelor*, vol. IV, available online at <http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/RPL2002INS/vol4/tabele/t7.pdf> (accessed on 24th of January 2010)

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Statistics, 2011, „18. Populația pe sexe, după starea civilă și religie - Categoriile de localități” in *Volumul II: Populația stabilă (rezidentă) - Structura etnică și confesională*, Romania, Bucharest available online at <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/noutati/volumul-ii-populatia-stabila-rezidenta-structura-etnica-si-confesionala/> (accessed on 18th of May 2015).

Census data). Likewise, there are fluctuations in regard to the division of population by age-groups and gender. Thus, for the age group 0-19 years old, there are 300 more men than women. For 20-24 years old, there are 1000 men more than women and for 50-54 years old there are 2495 and 1854 women. However, for 60-64 years old there are 1285 men and 1400 women, and from 64 onwards the number of women is significantly higher than the number of men. This is not something peculiar to the Muslim community, but is tied in the general population trends in Romania, where women live longer than men (National Institute of Statistics, 2011).<sup>1</sup>

I will look next at the education level of the Muslim community, comparing it to the education level of the majority, Orthodox, population. To this end I will analyze the extremes, *i.e.* the rate of illiteracy and the number of M.A. and PhD graduates.<sup>2</sup>

The rate of illiteracy is higher for the Muslim community than for the majority population: 7,47% in comparison to 1,36%. What is worrying about this percentage is that social and economic exclusion has disproportionately affected the Muslim population, concentrated in poor regions such as Dobrogea.<sup>3</sup> Another aspect that has to be factored in is the small number of schools that teach pupils in their mother tongue (for the most part, as the aforementioned statistics show, this refers to schools that teach in Turkish). Communists have been cutting down on such schools because of their assimilation policy of what they called „cohabiting nationalities”. This policy led to two distinct phenomena: on the one hand, there has been an exodus of the Turkish-speaking population; on the other hand, there has been an educational exclusion of Turkish-speaking children, whose families had to send them to low quality schools (and, more importantly, not-Turkish-teaching schools). Lacking educational opportunities, many children have not had a better faith during transition, since their distinct needs have not

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Statistics, 2011, „28. Populația pe grupe de vârstă și sexe, după statutul activității curente și religie - categorii de localități” in *Volumul II: Populația stabilă (rezidentă) - Structura etnică și confesională*, Romania: Bucharest, available online at <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/noutati/volumul-ii-populatia-stabila-rezidenta-structura-etnica-si-confesionala/> (accessed on 18th of May 2015).

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Statistics, 2011, "24. Populația de 10 ani și peste pe sexe, după religie, nivelul de educație al instituției de învățământ absolvite - categorii de localități” in *Volumul II: Populația stabilă (rezidentă) - Structura etnică și confesională*, Romania, Bucharest, available online at <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/noutati/volumul-ii-populatia-stabila-rezidenta-structura-etnica-si-confesionala/> (accessed on 18th of May 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Cupcea, Adriana, 2013, „Construcția identitară la comunitățile turcă și tătară din Dobrogea”, in *Studii de Atelier. Cercetarea Minorităților Naționale din România*, no.49, Institute for National Minorities Studies, Cluj, Romania, available online at <http://ispmn.gov.ro/uploads/WP49-11-10.pdf> (Accessed online on 18th of May 2015)

been accounted for by the educational policies. Today, 6.61% of the Muslims living in the urban environment are illiterate (4.75% of them being men and 8.84% women), whereas the situation is much worse for the rural environment, where the rate of illiteracy is 10.51% (8.03% of the men and 13.3% of the women living in rural areas do not possess basic educational skills).

Switching to the other end, 1.97% of the majority population holds an M.A. degree or a PhD, in comparison to 1.98% of the Muslim population (1.93% men and 2.04% women). However, in the rural areas only 0.49% of the Muslim residents hold MA degrees or PhDs (0.50% male and 0.45% female). A noticeable aspect is the fact that far more Muslim women hold B.A. degrees or PhDs in comparison to Muslim men. One key of interpretation would be that Muslim women are capable of educational progress if they are provided with the means necessary to develop themselves in this respect. Furthermore, the phenomenon of illiteracy is not attributable to religion but is influenced to a certain degree by social and economic exclusion of parts of the minority Muslim community.

The next part of this section is dedicated to the Muslim women over 15 years old and on the natality rate among Muslim women, in comparison with similar data for the majority Orthodox population.<sup>1</sup>

For the population of women over 15 years old and older (8.781.729 of the total population of Romania), there were 1.510,0 children born alive for 1000 women of 15 years and older. The majoritarian orthodox christian female population has a ratio of 1.505,4 children, while the muslim women (23.201 persons) has a 1.551,7 ratio of children born alive. Therefore the ratio between these categories is relatively similar, but significantly different when compared with other religious denominations – for Pentecostal women there are 2.568,6 children for 1.000 women of 15 years and older, for the Evangelical Christians the ratio is 2.294,1, for the Old Rite Christians there are 1.866,4 children, for the 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists the ratio is 1.808,5, for the Jehovah's Witnesses is 1.721,2, 1.769 for the Evangelical Church, and 1.617,9 for the Roman-Catholics.

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<sup>1</sup> For an in-depth presentation, see National Institute of Statistics, 2011, „24.Populația de 15 ani și peste după starea civilă, religie și numărul copiilor născuți vii- categorii de localități”, in *Volumul II: Populația stabilă (rezidentă) – Structura etnică și confesională*, Romania, Bucharest, available online at <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/noutati/volumul-ii-populatia-stabila-rezidenta-structura-etnica-si-confesionala/> (accessed on 18th of May 2015)

The natality rate for the Muslim community is similar to the natality rate of the majority population, in spite of the „concern” of extremist, xenophobic Romanian groups, which most of the times emphasize a purported exaggerated rate of natural increase among Muslims, which would supposedly lead to an „Islamization of Romania”.

To the official number of Muslims there should be added the number of Muslim refugees on the Romanian territory. These refugees do not have permanent residency, but are officially recognized as refugees. Although they are not citizens of Romania, their rights are respected and they obey the Romanian laws. Another group to include here is the individuals who converted to Islam and are wary to declare their religious identity, as well as those individuals who converted after the 2011 Census. It is believed that there are almost 120,000 Muslims in Romania, although no official sources can substantiate this claim (Mohamed-Salih, 2013, p.7). In the last 4-5 years the Middle East conflicts have led to an increase of the number of Muslims in Romania, because of the population exodus that these have sparked and continue to this day to ignite.

### ***1.2 Differences between the members of the Muslim community in Romania***

The Muslim community should not be regarded as a homogenous group. Between the members of the Muslim and of the wider Islamic community prevail ethnical, cultural, social, economical and political differences, both at the individual and at the group level. These differences between the members of the Islamic community entail that legislative measures are distinct.

In Romania, the Muslim community comprises several minorities, each of these benefiting from specific rights, as follows:

- *national minorities*: Turks and Tatars, who benefit from a series of special rights for minorities: they have a representative in the Romanian Parliament, they have a guaranteed right to education in their maternal language, they have their own television shows, they can print journals and magazines in their own language. Furthermore, they have the Muftiate as an institution that can represent their interests on the Romanian territory. The Muftiate has authority over all the mosques on Romanian territories, as well as over the clerk. The funding of the clerical personnel, including the Mufti and the auxiliary personnel

is ensured from the state budget, though donations represent a secondary financing source.

➤ *Ethnical minorities*: Arabs (Syrians, Jordanians, Egyptians, Palestinians, and others), Pakistani, Indians, Moroccans, Algerians, Filipinos, Indonesians, etc. They benefit from the usual national and international rights for ethnical minorities.

➤ *Religious minorities*: here are included Romanian citizens converted to Islam, but also any of the aforementioned categories. Important to note is the fact that this category does not benefit from special rights, but only from national and international rights specific to religious minorities (Mohamed-Salih, 2013, pp.23-24).

Taking into account these socio-demographic aspects of the Muslim community in Romania, there can be identified and analyzed at a micro level some aspects regarding the stereotypical image of the Muslim religious minority, as it is perceived by a xenophobic and simultaneously anti-semitic part of the majority. The analysis will be confined to the Romanian Internet. This analysis will also cover aspects regarding the increasing magnitude of the Islamophobia phenomenon (including here Hijabophobia), after the January 2015 Paris events and in the context of the Middle East conflicts. These latter dimensions are going to be presented in the second part of the paper.

## **II. Stereotypes associated to Muslims on the Romanian Internet**

### ***2.1. Origins of the stereotypical image of Muslims***

Edward Said (1978) considers that Islamophobia has its origins in Orientalism.<sup>1</sup> Ellis Cashmore (2004, p. 215) endorses this argument and provides further details: „[...] aspects of orientalism have been reworked and reinvested with a new meaning at different historical moments, as well as for different functional reasons. Although there are historical continuities with anti-Muslim feelings, Islamophobia is not just an extension of previous forms”.

I consider Islamophobia to be a complex phobia, defined as the fear and aversion to Muslims and to the Islamic religion, a form of social pathology that affects many

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<sup>1</sup> See Zine, Jasmin, 2006, “Unveiled sentiments: gendered islamophobia and experiences of veiling among Muslim girls in a Canadian Islamic school”, in *Equity& Excellence in Education* no. 39 (3), 239-252, Routledge, Taylor& Francis Group, p. 250, note 1, for further details regarding this concept.



members of contemporary society. It springs from a vilification of Islam and of Muslim believers and has at its core negative experiences such as colonialism, decolonization, immigration, racism. Lately, it has embraced a modern form of latent, elitist, secularising and cultural racism. The fight for power and control on resources is one of the causes of anti-Muslim and anti-Islam discrimination.

A gender dimension of Islamophobia is Hijabophobia . Unlike Muslim men and boys, Muslim girls and women can be easily recognized in the public sphere due to their specific garments and to the veil covering their heads. Although not all Muslim women embrace the Islamic „dress code”, a significant part of them choose to cover their heads. Muslim clothing can vary from one country to another, according to specific ethno-cultural conditions. For Muslims who choose to adopt the Islamic „dress code”, especially the *hijab* or the veil, this becomes a source of oppression and discrimination in the public sphere. Muslim girls and women represent a „melange”<sup>1</sup> (Grünberg, 2007, p.10) of „multiple identities [...] based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender”(Zine, 2006, pp.239-240) and this makes them susceptible to diverse forms of oppression such as racism, sexism or xenophobia. Zine Jasmin (2006, p.240) considers that the nature of gendered Islamophobia works at a social and political level, through public discourses and through leading to effective material disadvantages for Muslim women. An example of this recurrent phenomenon is the penetration of gendered Islamophobia, together with a fear of religious fundamentalism, in what are thought to be secular institutions.

Muslim girls and women are more vulnerable than Muslim boys and men because of their clothing, and they have to bear direct or indirect consequences of this in their personal and public lives. Thus, they are the object and not the subject of debates regarding their rights, such as the right of access to resources or the right of access to power. This vulnerability, specific to gender discrimination, is worsened by other dimensions of their identity: religion, culture, ethnicity, social position, skin color, eyes shape, physical condition and so on.

Sometimes Hijabophobia might result in the death of its victims. Such an extreme example of what Helen Cobban (2009) calls „mortal Hjabophobia” or what *The Guardian*

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<sup>1</sup> On the concept of „melange”(of identities) see Grünberg, Laura, 2007, "Cuvânt înainte. Un prim pas către o abordare nediscriminatori a fenomenului discriminării în România" in Grünberg, Laura, (coord.) *Discriminarea multiplă în România*, The Society of Feminist Analyses – AnA, National Research Institute for Labor and Social Protection, Bucharest

(2009) considered to be a case of „veil martyrdom” is the tragedy of Marwei-Sherbini, a young pharmacist who was fatally stabbed in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

The disadvantages accruing to Muslim women are translated into a poor quality of their lives. A main reason for this is their social exclusion from a series of public life spheres: economic, social, political, educational, social services, labor. Albeit their lives are affected by stereotypes, direct or indirect multiple discriminations, Islamophobia, Hijabophobia, Muslim women have made a series of attempts to integrate and even to survive in such patriarchal societies. In their private lives, because of financial instability, some Muslim women become dependent on their life partners or on other members of their families, and even if they are encouraged by these to make efforts to enter the public space, they will never succeed unless the society is more willing to accept them as contributors, alongside the majority population, to the social and national projects.

## ***2.2 Qualitative data analysis on gender stereotypes on the Romanian internet in 2004-2009. A comparison with the evolution of these stereotypes between 2010-2015***

The internet can represent a space where Islamophobic messages are disseminated, but it cannot be ascertained whether the percentage of Islamophobic messages is higher than those of neutral messages. Such an indeterminacy is unavoidable in the absence of more advanced technology and in the presence of a certain inadequacy of research methods (in the sense of not keeping up with the technological advances).

Using the method of grounded theory, I sought Muslim-related stereotypes on the Romanian Internet through qualitative data analysis. I identified several different categories of stereotypes:

- Stereotypes on the Muslim minority: „the Muslims’ stigma is their religion”, „they are bigots in regard to clothing and accessories”<sup>2</sup>, „they are more bigot than our bigots”, „the negative parts of Muslims’; lives are attributed to

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<sup>1</sup> The way the aggressor wanted to exercise his control on Marwei, perceived as an inferior woman, is „sexism in its patriarchal form”, a concept explored in Miroiu (1996, p. 174; 1997, p. 94) and Grünberg (1997, pp.95-96).

<sup>2</sup> Author’s note: this is a reference to traditional accessories such as turbans, shawls, caps, scarfs

their religion”, „they are slaves”, „the Muslim husband has absolute power”, „they are protected by politicians and lawyers”;

➤ Stereotypes on the Muslim women: „she is mentally challenged”, „her knowledge is false”, „she is extremely conservative”, „she is narrow minded”, „inferior”, „secluded”, „obsolete”, „they are obedient”, „slaves”, „I am tired of Muslim women”-„they walk the streets with their popped, black eyes”, „her world is limited to her kerchief”, „she is like an unsolved riddle”, „she is looking for a master”, „she is not keeping the pace with the real world”, „she is vulnerable to male oppression and dominance”, regarding her „rights”- „the right to be stoned”, „the right to dress like a mummy”, „the right to be beaten if Mustafa comes home angry from the mosque”, she is considered to be „poor”, „uneducated”, „slave”, „rude”, „she is of Muhammad’s faith”, „her stigma is her religion”;

➤ Positive stereotypes on Muslim men: „they are wealthy and resourceful”, „Muslim men respect women”, „whatever woman they might see, they treat her well and respect her”;

➤ Stereotypes on Muslim women in the public sphere and reproduced by them on the internet: „that we have no freedom of choice”, „that we hve no rights”, „that we are not allowed to leave our houses”, „that our husbands are our masters”, „that we are made to do things we do not want to do”, „that wearing a veil is made compulsory by our jealous husbands”, „that we are terrorists”, „that our husbands have absolute power”, „that we are obedient”, „that we must stand behind our men at all times” (Mohamed-Salih, 2013, pp.40-43).

What we can infer from this analysis is that the Muslim men are less susceptible to stereotypes than Muslim women. Most of the stereotypes concern religion, although commonplace are also cultural racism or gender. The Muslim woman is the favorite target of those willing to attach labels. The most affected are those women who choose to express their religious identity, by wearing a hijab for instance. The Muslim men are frequently stereotyped on cultural racist grounds. Other criteria employed in stereotyping Muslims are gender or religious-related. The number of stereotypes regarding Muslim women is superior on each criterion in comparison with the number of stereotypes associated with Muslim men. Ethnical stereotypes could not be identified.

This can be explained as follows: a) a consequence of the fact that the Turkish-Tatar national minority in Romania is historically and ethno-culturally entrenched, having resided on what today is the Romanian state for over 800 years and also having contributed to the edification of the Romanian state (hence the privilege of being a national minority); this minority benefits from special rights and measures, as well as from a good cohabitation with the other ethnical groups in Romania; b) the most stereotyped Muslims are those that can be classified as ethnical minorities, *i.e.* considered to be outsiders. This leads to the multitude of cultural racist or religious stereotypes; c) gender stereotypes are frequent, these being commonplace in a patriarchal society (Mohamed-Salih, 2013, pp. 77-78).

Next I will offer an overview of the evolution of these stereotypes during the first half of this decade (2010-2015), employing a gender perspective on the image of the Muslim men and women on the Romanian internet:

➤ Stereotypes regarding Muslim men: „it is a men’s World, and men can do whatever they want”, „men have all the rights”, „men respect women”, „Muslim men will treat you as if you were princesses until they get what they want” (in regard to women); „only the ultra-conservative tradition is to blame for the way Muslim men act”, „it is about despise”, „self-abandonment”, „indoctrination since birth”, „if you are in their country they have the right to kill you”, [but] if you are in Romania and Europe they act meek as a lamb”;

➤ Stereotypes regarding Muslim women: „the wife does not have the right to comment”, „if he breaks up with her she does not get the children”, „pushovers”, „Muslim women have no rights”, „the lack their freedom even if they do not realize this”, „they know no other way of living”, „this is why they yield in to the treatment they receive”, „they are not allowed to know too much”, „their countries are men’s worlds”, „their women are fooled”, „they are savage”, „they lack social skills”, „they are not talkative”, „they act as if they had lived isolated all their lives”, „this is a strategy” – „stay at home”, - „you don’t have to work”, „wash”, „iron”, „clean up”, „raise the kids”, „you are like a slave with contract (the marital contract)”, „there is not one of them that is not her husband’s slave”, „too few of them are willing to work because this is how they have been educated”, „she can live her home under no circumstances”, „if she suffers an accident, who finds her must ask for her husband’s permission in order to take

her to the hospital”, „she is a second class citizen”, „she has to be modest”, „she has to give birth to lots of children”, „she has to respond to her husband’s interests”, „this is her purpose”, „she has to shut up and to take care of the household”, „I believe that those women who willingly embrace Islam are masochists”, „Muslim women, as women, hate us, European women and „they are trying to mimic us”, „most of them, though not all”, „are filled with hatred”, „this is how they are born”, „mischievous”, „wicked”, „rumbustious”, „many of them finish 2-3 colleges”, „whether they work or not is their husbands’ choice”.

This analysis shows us that the number of stereotypes regarding Muslim men has been increasing since 2004-2009. A constant from that period is the fact that most of these stereotypes have as a criterion religion, followed by stereotypes based on cultural racism and gender. In regard to Muslim women, most of the stereotypes concern the cultural racist criterion, followed by gender, religious criteria. No ethnical criterion can be identified in this period, which is an endorsement of the previous assessment according to which the Turkish-Tatar national minority cohabits peacefully and harmoniously with the majority population and thus benefits from a positive portrayal. Once again, the most frequent stereotypes on the Romanian internet concerning Muslims are related to those categories of Muslims which are classified as ethnical minorities, perceived as „the Others”, coming from outside the Romanian space. These are followed by those stereotypes applied to Muslim women, where a religious criterion is employed, most of these being Muslim women converted to Islam.

The Muslim community is concerned with maintaining a positive image on its members, at an individual level or at a non-governmental organizational level. There can also be identified a will to act in order to make this happen in the Romanian society, where representatives of the non-Muslim civil society endeavor to maintain and promote such a peaceful coexistence, together with the embracing of multicultural values.

Such civic acts on the part of non-Muslim activists in the Romanian society are the following: on the 23rd of April 2015, FILIA Center, a nonprofit organization, organized the Workshop on hatespeech against women, sexual minorities and religious minorities<sup>1</sup>; on 6th of May 2015, Civic Education and Academic Development

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<sup>1</sup> More details can be found at the following link (of FILIA Center Facebook profile), "Workshop 1: On hatespeech in Romania" available online at

Foundation organized a public debate on the topic of „Freedom of speech against hatespeech? Europe/Romania after Charlie Hebdo”<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, one example of such a civic act meant to improve the image of Muslims in Romania has been the international conference „The Muslim woman in Romanian and European societies”, organized on 19th of May 2013 by the Association of the Muslim Sisters in Bucharest.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusions

An analysis of social-demographic data regarding the Muslim minority in Romania shows us that the number of Muslims has been decreasing, having been more Muslims at the 2002 census in comparison with the 2011 census. Muslim women have longer lives than Muslim men, a feature which is common also to the majority population. Lack of education has taken its toll on Muslim women, especially in rural environments. This is mainly a consequence of the communist policies on „co-inhabiting nationalities”, *i.e.* the ethnic and religious Turkish-Tatar minority. Nonetheless, the first years of transition to democracy have not been more propitious to Muslim women, when policies targeted at developing the social, economic and educational state of this category of population were mainly absent, or deficient. The data presented above shows us that the percentage of Muslim Women which in 2011 had a M.A.’s degree or a PhD is higher than the percentage of Muslim men, especially in the cities. One possible interpretation of this phenomenon is that there are some programs that aim at developing women’s capabilities and that have eased their access to the work market. Such statistical data defy those stereotypes that originate in the belief that Muslim women are uneducated, providing a powerful counterargument to such flawed beliefs.

The comparative analysis of Islamophobia or Hijabophobia, but also of stereotypes on Muslim men and women on the Romanian Internet in two periods (2004-2009 and 2010-2015) substantiate the claim that one explanation for their worsening is the increasing insecurity in parts of the Middle East, but also a consequence of the tragic

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[https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1598048530475250.1073741843.1411140385832733&type=3&\\_mref=message\\_bubble](https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1598048530475250.1073741843.1411140385832733&type=3&_mref=message_bubble) (accessed on 18th of May 2015).

<sup>1</sup> This has been a part of a project coordinated by the Foundation and entitled „Youngsters build a Civic Romania”. Details regarding the project can be found on <http://tinerii-civici.ro/dezbatere-pe-tema-libertate-de-exprsie-vs-discurs-instigator-la-ura-europa-romania-dupa-charlie-hebdo/> (accessed on the 18th of May 2015)

<sup>2</sup>See

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151615596919771.1073741828.176003094770&type=3> (accessed on 18th of May 2015)

events in Paris in January 2015. Thus, it could be argued that stereotypes of Muslims are forged on cultural-racist grounds, when Muslims are no longer seen as financially independent citizens, but are perceived instead as threats to national security. The Muslim minority is perceived as representing the Other, the Oriental, the fanatic. This is different from when Muslims are perceived as a national minority, since then the assumption is that they are integrated and assimilated, and thus that cultural differences have been blurred. The cultural assimilation is thought to lead to the withering away of threats. On the other hand, the Muslim woman is thought to be an object, instead of a subject, and thus she is perceived as completely separated from public life, leading to a phenomenon of dehumanization. Moreover, she is considered to represent an alternate model to the European woman.

Some of the recommendations that I put forward in order to improve upon the image of the Muslim minority are: elaborating and implementing public policies aiming at integrating poor Muslims on the labor market, taking into account the gender dimension and the need for education. Likewise, a beneficial measure would be to continue public debates, especially at a national level, regarding the fight against various forms of hatespeech.

Muslim women, although they represent the category most affected by Islamophobia, have the capacity and the willingness to learn. Helping them do that might transform the Muslim community in Romania into a factor of progress that could have positive spillover effects in the entire Romanian society.

The representatives of the Muslim community in Romania, together with the representatives of Romanian public institutions must take much needed measures, such as launching programs and campaigns of integrating children in the national education system. This could ensure that in the future the level of children unable to read and write is kept at a minimum at the level of the Muslim community.

On the other hand, representatives of the Muslim community should take up the responsibility to contribute to the integration of Muslim women on the labor market. We have to emphasize the exclusion of Muslim women from the labor market because, most of the times, men are able to manage themselves even when they lack a workplace through entrepreneurial activities. However, women have to choose between raising their children and becoming active on the labor market, whilst financial self-supporting

becomes an uncertain variable. Thus, having a job can be for them a capability-enhancing and empowerment factor (Mohamed-Salih, 2015).<sup>1</sup>

Muslim women's inclusion on the labor market is hindered by several factors. On the one hand, there are what we might call outside factors. For instance, stereotypes play a role in precluding Muslim women to be regarded as equally endowed candidates for various jobs. On the other hand, there are inside factors. Here we can include: 1. The stereotyped view of the community that women that wear hijab are unable to get a job in spite of their good qualifications and because of the majority population's reluctance to accept them; 2. The refusal of men within the Muslim community to employ women in their firms, because of a certain bias for non-wearing hijab women. 3. The lack of hijab-wearing models who are already renowned in the public sphere or in the public institutions and which might constitute a beacon for young women trying to build a career.

Although there is no visible institutional Islamophobia or Hijabophobia, a good practice example which is employed on a large scale globally by public authorities is to integrate *hijab*-wearing Muslim women in public institutions. This formal act, of including in public institutions *hijab*-wearing women, transcends the religious discrimination criterion and emphasizes the gender criterion. Their identity is thus highlighted, since a sole accessory – the *hijab* – becomes a criterion of judging them and of dividing Muslim women in two categories – those who wear *hijab* and those who do not, with the former being perceived as uneducated and backwards-looking and with the latter considered educated, progressive and forward-looking. This is a social discrimination because it disregards Muslim women's professional competences and takes into account only their physical appearance.

Some European institutions provide us with good practice examples. Muslim women could be integrated in the political, decision-making processes and in the and public life by allowing them to have access to the Romanian academic sphere, which would improve their education, would allow them to communicate with important agents and would become models for other women, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

A society can be considered democratic if its citizens have access to important resources and their rights and freedoms are equally guaranteed.

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<sup>1</sup> See my PhD thesis, Mohamed-Salih, Veronica, 2015, *Microcreditul echitabil: soluție de politici publice pentru persoanele defavorizate*, National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest



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