The 'split habitus' phenomenon in Muslim teachers in Israel as expressed in their 'presentation of self' in everyday life

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to investigate the phenomenon of 'split habitus' (Bourdieu, 2007A(Heb)) among Muslim Arab women in Israel by means of the Presentation of Self in Everyday Life model (Goffman, 2003(Heb)), and on the basis of the Theory of Multiple Modernities (Eisenstadt, 2010(Heb)), which indicates development of multiple forms of modernity to explain the women's split habitus. It is manifested in the way Muslim women in Israel contend simultaneously with multiple and complex social fields, including, among others, the patriarchal setting in which they live (the patriarchal field), belonging to a national minority, and exposure to Israeli-Western cultural spaces (the public field). As a result of this complexity, Muslim women constantly negotiate with these fields to render and reshape the boundaries of their cultural freedom to be more flexible. Within this complexity they also experience internal self-coping (the 'self' field).

The women chosen to participate in the study are educated professionals: Muslim teachers living in the area known as 'The Triangle', consisting of Israeli-Arab towns and villages. The Triangle is also close to Israeli towns, and it constitutes a cultural intersection of multiple modernities.

The study also engages with body perception and its place in Arab society in the context of wearing the veil (head covering). It examined what the choice of some women to wear the veil indicates in contrast with the choice of other women not to.

A review of the existing theoretical literature on the split habitus of Arab women in Israel primarily engages with the dichotomy experienced by Muslim women in Israel, who exist on the cusp between modernity and tradition. The findings of the present study concerning the Muslim women's social fields, as well as theories in this area, indicate that Muslim Arab women in Israel exist simultaneously in new patterns of modernity combined with traditional patterns, i.e., in multiple modernities (Eisenstadt, 2010(Heb)). Consequently, this is a habitus of splits and contradictions, and is typified by a dynamic interaction between Muslim tradition and modernity, and by an understanding that there is no dichotomy between tradition and modernity, between Islamic and secular or Western (Dildorbekova, 2014).

The studied phenomenon was investigated in accordance with a qualitative methodology approach and by means of grounded theory. This method was chosen since it enables the research to be constructed in a process based on materials pertaining to the studied phenomenon obtained from the field. This research approach provides an opportunity to learn directly about the life patterns of Muslim women in The Triangle, and to conduct an unmediated exploration of their coping strategies in the various social

fields in their life: the traditional patriarchal field, the public Israeli and Western field, and the self field.

The findings of the study present a new theoretical mapping of the patterns of multiple modernities adopted by Muslim Arab women in Israel. This mapping presents the patterns of multiple modernities that signify the opposing forces in play in their lives, forces that combine tradition and a patriarchal family, personal, social, and national awareness, higher education, and Islamic appearance.

The innovation of the study is that the Muslim women's split habitus is characterized by patterns of multiple modernities, wherein new patterns of modernity are interwoven with traditional and cultural elements typifying their society. The Theory of Multiple Modernities (Eisenstadt, 2010(Heb)) may be applied to the life of Muslim women, and explains their split habitus, which describes a state of apparent contradiction and complex relationships in their social fields. Relationships in their social fields are complex since they combine new patterns of modernity while also preserving traditional elements in their lives. The boundaries constantly change, and the women conduct constant, solidary negotiations in order to lead social changes, which often progress slowly and out of sight.

The study also illuminates the social, cultural, and political implications of the issue from the perspective of Muslim Arab women in Israel who have chosen to wear the veil, and of women who have chosen not to. The findings show differences between the former and the latter. The most striking differences in patterns of modernity between women who wear the veil and women who do not were found in public appearance, the nature of the negotiations they conduct (or not) with the patriarchal structures in which they live, and in their presentation of self.

Women who wear the veil assume a public identity with an Islamic appearance, while women who do not wear the veil attempt to maintain Western modernity in their appearance. The women negotiate in different ways, and the most striking difference between them is that those who wear the veil conduct negotiations in their patriarchal society within the accepted framework with an awareness of the limitations, and maintain balance and congruence with the patriarchal constructs in which they live. In contrast, some women who do not wear the veil test, and sometimes cross, boundaries, they challenge the existing gender order, and at times they pay a price in their personal or professional life.

Differences were also found between women who wear the veil and women who do not in the their presentation of self: the former present themselves first and foremost in the home/family dimension as "mothers", whereas the latter present themselves first and foremost in the national dimension as Palestinian.

The present study found that Muslim women in Israel combine patterns of multiple modernities, and exist simultaneously both in modernity and tradition, and there is no

dichotomy between them. Consequently, this is a habitus of splits and contradictions, and by understanding that there is a dynamic and interaction between Muslim tradition and modernity it is possible to understand Muslim women's patterns of multiple modernities.

The present study's contribution to theoretical knowledge is the new perspective for explaining the split habitus of Muslim women in Israel by means of the Theory of Multiple Modernities, a theory that facilitates a reformulation of Muslim women's identity that combines tradition, Islam, and patterns of modernity. Muslim women reinterpret and reformulate a split habitus possessing a traditional-modern character, and redefine the modernity discourse in their own terms. This discourse provides an interval to choose a way of life, marriage and motherhood, diverse educational channels, while concurrently employing negotiation strategies in order to progress and change the patriarchal power relations in their society, and assimilate alternatives and gender changes by rendering the boundaries more flexible.

The difference in the patterns of modernity adopted by women who wear the veil and those who do not presents the former, who adopt an Islamic appearance, as women who negotiate in accordance with their society's accepted norms, and gain their community's support, possess social power, legitimacy, and acceptance, successfully advance in their society, and are capable of introducing change into it.

From a methodological aspect, testing the methodological tools and adapting them to the studied population can serve as a means for understanding the discourse of unique, closed, traditional populations such as national minority women.