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## Multiculturalism, Feminism and Minority Rights in Europe

### Introduction

In my paper I want to problematize the assumption, that the position of women in minority groups is detrimental when compared to women of the majority groups of European countries, the assumption that women in minority cultures are more subordinated than women of European/Western cultures. I will focus on religious minorities as non-Western religious practices are the most debated cultural frame of subordination of women in Europe and elsewhere.

I will base my explanation on a theoretical framework of three theses to then come to the analysis of feminist discourses on minority cultures. First of all I will focus on the thesis that Europe has a strong Christian imaginary within which it developed a negative inclination towards »the Other«, which has in contrast always been present on the so called European soil, what Europe still fails to admit. In Europe »The Other« was always represented as »different« from European religion, which is perceived to be Christianity, and different from any of the so called constitutive nations of Europe. As Braidotti (2002) states, the notion of »difference« is central in European culture, history and philosophy but in the way that »difference« has become a built-in standard of reference that, in European history, produced »lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications«, which in postmodern Europe have become even more antagonistic (Braidotti 2002: 159).

Furthermore I will try to explain my point by asserting that European colonial history and orientalism have shaped significantly European discourses of feminism, gender equality and universal human rights of today. On the basis of colonialism Europe and European scientific discourses (including feminism) have developed the notion of »European culture«, which was seen as superior to »the Other« on the economic, political, social and epistemological level. But although we have been able to recognise these European features as essentially eurocentric through postmodern and postcolonial theory, the question is, whether we think of these features as being overcome or whether, as in the text I will try to show, they still persist in nowadays political, social and economic discourses in the Western world. As Rosi Braidotti puts it, we are witnessing a renewal of new master narratives, which are based on differential determinism that establishes new differences based on identity, culture, ethnicity and civilisation (Braidotti 2005).

I will problematize in detail the assumption that gender subordination is integral only to certain cultures/religions, which first of all imposes the assumption that subordination and violence against (non-Western, immigrant, minority) women are integral to some cultures/religions and that subordination and acts of violence in the West are motivated by »rational choice«. This assumption, as Leti Volpp (2001) has shown, hides the forces beyond culture that cause violence against or subordination of women in general (included Western women). I will base my critique on the concept of cultural racism.

## Christian identity

To understand why Europe has a strong Christian, national and colonial imaginary that constructed the idea of »the Other« as inferior we have to make a short historical analysis. Tomaz Mastnak, a Slovenian scholar, has conducted a historical review of the establishment or the birth of the idea of Europe. I will enlist some important turning points within the period from the 11th century till the end of 19th century, although the symbolical origins of Europe can be traced back in the period of the antique Greece (although these assumptions are disputable too). Through his analysis we can clearly see how the idea of Europe was established through the process of unification of Christianity on the European soil<sup>1</sup> and the beginning of the Crusades, which according to Mastnak were not set out as a defensive war, but as an offensive attack against the lands of the Middle East. His thesis states that because of the necessity for peace on the soil of Europe, which at that time was undergoing hard times and wars, the Christian community established a so called peace movement in the name of God (Pax Dei), which aim was to pacify the belligerent peoples and to reassure the Church's position in these lands. The outcome of this movement was the control of the belligerent powers and the army by the Church as an Institution. Furthermore, this repacification within Europe in practice led to the beginning of the Crusades with which the Church wanted to »reappropriate« the lands which it thought belonged to it, e.g. to Christianity. That was the Sacred land of Jerusalem and the Middle East, which were inhabited by »nonbelievers«. In fact European Christianity did not see Muslims and Jews as believers, other Christian denominations on that soil were not regarded as equal to them either. Indeed, it did not prevent the Crusaders to exterminate a marked number of Christians as well. Christianity or Christendom so became the first mobilising factor in uniting and pacifying Europe against »the Other« (Mastnak, 1996: 11 – 36, 74 – 76). The idea of the Crusades according to Mastnak did not flare up with the decline of the rule of papacy, but it was bred by many European kings and governors since the 15th century on. In the course of time »the Other« became particularly the Muslim, mostly because of the growing power of the Ottoman Turks, who represented for Europe and Christianity the greatest danger and enemy. In the 15th century Pope Pius II. warned Europe and the Christian community against the danger of the Turks and explicitly connected the term Europe with Christianity. Pope Pius II. called the European community to keep peace among European peoples and to fight against the Turk to finally expel from Europe the Turkish, i.e. Muslim enemy, because the Turkish presence on this territory was, according to him, a danger to Christianity itself. At that time Europe mobilised and defined its »European« identity as opposed to the Muslim enemy, who since then has become the absolute incompatible element with European identity and values. This still is a present discourse of power which has to be challenged, exactly because it is still deep and alive in our consciousness and imaginary (Mastnak 1996).

The time of 15th century is of course the period of the so called European Exploring of the Rest of the World, through a discourse and practice called Colonialism or Imperialism, or in the scientific knowledge referred to as Orientalism. According to Said the Orientalist and colonialist discourse is a deeply expanded net which is sometimes even difficult to recognise or detect. And although we may think that the period of colonialism and imperialism or Orientalism is well over, we can rely on some important scholars of today (within the postcolonial theory Gayatri C. Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha,

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<sup>1</sup> Europe e.g. European territory has been always defined by comparison with the enemy, which in different times assumed different images, mainly communism and islam.

Edward Said and within the theory of world systems Immanuel Wallerstein, Johan Galtung and Etienne Balibar) that this is not yet the case.

## The heritage of Colonialism

In his book Edward Said has well shown how the logic of Orientalist discourse and science works. The Orientalist discourse through its studies and classifications of indigenous peoples distinguished two main entities. One was (is) European, which was (is) the neutral nomos with which all »the Rest« or »the Other« was (is) compared and of course, on the other hand »the Other« itself. The binary oppositions which Orientalism established can be represented as follows: »European, rational, civilised, human, emancipated, free« against the »Asian, Oriental, irrational, sensual, uncivilised, unemancipated and despotic«. This meant that Orientalism made a binary distinction or antagonisms between Europe or the West and the Orient or the East on geographical, ethnical, racial, psychologic, linguistic ecc. levels (for more classifications see Said, 1978/1996: 11 – 43, 90, 154 – 155, 174 – 199, 259 – 260, 287 – 292, 298, 371, 378 – 379). This imaginative geography has been a substitute for the lack of natural borders and these fictive borders in our(!) minds helped Europe(ans) to build their (our) identity (Said, 1978/1996: 75 - 76, 173 – 192).

Orientalism and Colonialism worked hand in hand, because the colonialist enterprise which comprised of exploiting the land and human resources of the occupied lands established a system of domination over the colonised people, which in the Orientalist discourse took the image of superiority of one culture or people over another. These two enterprises are of course interconnected and interdependent. Indeed it shows us how the scientific interpretations or scientific knowledge are dependent upon the relations of power. In fact, the mere act of classification itself is the enterprise of those who are in the position of power and the classification is therefore filled with oppression as well. Being able to make classification means to be in the position of the speaker, of the subject who is analysing the object (Guillaumin in Balibar 1988/1991: 27). And »difference« (as a function of categorisation) relies on relations of domination and exclusion, in fact to be »different from« came to mean to be »less than« (Braidotti 2002).

Said has shown how European hegemony established a knowledge based on cultural and economic domination over the Orient, which is, according to Orientalism, inferior and has therefore to be saved, educated and emancipated. And most important, as noted by Said, the perception of Orient and within it the perception of Arabs, Turks and Muslims elsewhere, is still based or relies mostly on religious account, neglecting the manifold social, political and economic characteristics of Arabs, Turks, and Muslims in general (Said, 1978/1996: 18 – 19, 314, 376, 381, 398 – 399).

The notions of cultural hegemony and superiority leads us to my third point to then come to the analysis of contemporary issues for which I have made this introduction of persisting discourses.

## Differentialist neoracism – cultural racism

Étienne Balibar in his text (1988/1991): Is there a »Neo-Racism?« states that although the term and practice of racism nowadays has become unacceptable, its influence did not vanish at all but just took another form in the term of culture, or different cultures, which implies that differences among cultures are incompatible and insurmountable. Balibar calls this form of neoracism, after P.A. Taguieff, a **differentialist racism**. This is a form of racism which does not imply differences within biology but

within unbridgeable cultural differences. This kind of racism does not imply the superiority of one race over another but implies »only« the noxiousness of mixing of different cultures, the harmfulness of abolishment of bridges among cultures and the incompatibility of different lifestyles and traditions (Balibar, 1988/1991: 17 – 28). Racism therefore does not need race to operate and can on the surface claim equality of cultures but in fact can, in other modes of operation, perform and convey the conviction of inferiority of some cultures. Because the social phenomena of racism is not inscribed only into the practice of violence, intolerance, humiliation and exploitation but in the discourses and representations of national, cultural and religious purity as well. That is, through the preservation of »our« or a pure identity, preventing any outer influences, and through the stigma of difference (e.g. complexion, religious practices etc.). According to Balibar neoracism has its prototype in antisemitism (both against Jews and Arabs) and nowadays racism can be understood in the form of antisemitism or arabophobia (islamophobia), because Islam is understood as incompatible with Europe and its values (Balibar 1988/1991: 17 – 28).

Now I would like to show how the presented discourses can work through different representations and appropriations in nowadays feminist and political discourses that we have to be aware of.

### **The persistence of colonialist and Orientalist discourse in feminism**

I am not going to generalise and criticize all the feminist studies or feminisms that were and still are active in Europe and America. I am not going to give an account and historical review of them, but I will expose one main idea that Western feminisms should be aware of but they are not. In words of Chandra T. Mohanty (1991); Western feminisms lack a self-consciousness of the effects that their texts and assumptions are producing.

According to Meyda Yeğenoğlu we have to be attentive to the assumption that feminism is working for the sake of every woman's emancipation. We cannot neglect the terms within which some Western feminisms dealt with the »Other woman«. <sup>2</sup> When engaging with the Third World woman Western Feminisms took upon such a discursive presumptions of the Third world woman as oppressed in patriarchal and backward Third world societies, with no means of individual action and sovereignty as Western women, supposedly, enjoyed. That means that Western feminisms in its knowledge and methodology applied such discourses that included the opposition between developed and undeveloped parts of the world, namely between the West and the East. Therefore the sovereign and free woman of the West has the privileges and the power to intervene and help the helpless subject of the Third world. In this terms we can recognise the logic of the Colonialist and Orientalist discourse (Erdogan, 2000). Yeğenoğlu is posing a question how can therefore a Western subject make an analysis of »another« subject without falling into the »white man's (or woman's) burden« which always operates from the position of power. The same question was raised by Said. Yeğenoğlu therefore does not make any assumption of the »Other« as a subject or object but only gives us an analysis of how the interpretations of »the Other«, in this case the 'Other Woman', are constructed within the colonialist discourse (Erdogan, 2000). Yeğenoğlu warns us to pay attention to how Colonialist or Orientalist discourses can be difficult to detect and recognise. Her example takes into account what Spivak calls benevolent imperialism and shows how also positive and good

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<sup>2</sup> In the analysis we do not claim that all feminisms undertook such an interpretation. Yeğenoğlu in her texts uses the term liberal feminism, within which she has in mind all those feminist interpretations which reproduced in one way or another Colonialist or Orientalist discourses.

interpretations of the Orient can in fact operate within the Colonialist or Orientalist discourse. She quotes Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who was the wife of the British ambassador to Turkey in the beginning of 18th century:

»tis very easy to see that they have more liberty than we have, ...the perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery« (Yeğenoğlu, 1992).

Yeğenoğlu gives more quotations of Lady Montagu's letters and texts but due to space limits I haven't included them in the text. Yeğenoğlu interprets the texts of Lady Montagu as the extension and not as a contradiction to previous, male interpretation of Turkish woman. Although Montagu apparently opposes to previous texts by stating positive affirmations on Turkish women, about their veiling and the liberty it conveys, and therefore claims to know the truth of Turkish women, this does not change the logic of the Colonialist and Orientalistic discourse. In fact a so called positive picture (more liberty compared with British women) has no other meaning than being an evaluation or comparison in a binaristic and/or antagonistic system according to some neutral criteria. Furthermore claiming to know the truth of Turkish women is a pretentious statement of (and in accordance with) the Orientalistic discourse, which claims to know the truth of »the Other« (Yeğenoğlu, 1992).

Moreover Lady Montagu interprets the veiling of women as a »masquerade« allowing Turkish women freedom of movement. Though it is an interesting interpretation, opposed to more common Western feminist interpretations of the veil as a means of oppression of women and the unveiling as a necessity for the emancipation of women, here feminisms failed to take into account many other reasons and situations of unequal status and real oppression of women that have nothing to do with the veil. For example little possibilities of education, domestic violence, sexual violence, prostitution and so on, that are not necessarily connected with religion/culture. In fact the societies and the circumstances under which non-Western women experience oppression may be different from the kind of suppression or inequalities that white, Western, secular or Christian woman may have been experiencing. The point here is that we have to pay attention to the complicity of Western feminist discourses with Colonialist and Orientalist discourses, because a feminist discourse that analyses the Other woman from a position of power only reproduces Colonialist and Orientalist discourses. Feminism(s), as many other scientific knowledges, was and still is, under the influence of colonial and imperial heritage that constructed human history. It is through these relations of power that the discourses of emancipation, human rights, freedom and modernisation were spread and many times forced upon »the Other« (Yeğenoğlu, 2005).

Indeed, as Volpp (2001) states, the presumption of western women's liberation depended upon the notion that Third world communities are sites of aberrant violence. (e.g. the Orient became the crucial symbol in British feminists struggle for suffrage). Western women liberation has been initiated only in confront with the Oriental women, represented as unliberated. Feminism needed »the Other«, as the subordinated, for its definition of self. Indeed, the idea that »the Other« women are subjected to extreme patriarchy is developed in relation to the vision of Western women as secular, liberated and in control of their lives.

We will now analyse what consequences does such a position have in nowadays Europe.

## The persistence of Colonialist and Orientalist discourses in the enlargement process of EU and within Europe (religious symbols, minority rights – veiling and secularism)

Neoracism or differential racism can be well seen in contemporary discourses of dominant nationalistic majorities and secular systems within which the differentiation, assimilation and segregation of »the Other« is seen on the European soil itself. And an outstanding figure of these discourses is »the Other woman«, which the post-feminist liberal individualism analyses in Colonialistic terms. But in fact it is still Eurocentric (Braidotti 2005). It is of my interest to show how the differentiation of »the Other woman« today, in Europe, is formed and how the post-feminist liberal discourses and secular discourses of some European countries still claim the authentic and »true« representation of »the Other woman«. In fact they claim to be the only entity entitled for their salvation and liberation. Within this issue I would like to focus on the issue of religion. My thesis is that Christian religion and practices are far more acceptable and undisputable on European soil than other religions, the most outstanding example of which is Islam, that is not »compatible« with the vision that Western, Christian or secular subjects have and are. In fact many authors have noted (R. Braidotti 2005: 171; A. Lorde 1984: 116; G. Wekker and H. Lutz 2001: 4, C. T. Mohanty 1991: 69, Yeğenoğlu 1998) that the Western Self or subject, that positions itself as a norm, as a neutral nomos that is unmarked, non-gendered, non-ethnicised, non-religious, is in fact characterised as Western, white, Christian or secular (and of course man, but here we would like to discuss the colonialist standpoint of western woman (western feminist) against non-Western woman, therefore we take the positional norm of Western, white, Christian or secular woman, that has presumably taken control over her body).

In fact when white western post-modern women, after achieving their rights, have turned to the non-Western woman for her »liberation«,<sup>3</sup> they have focused on their kind of oppression and ignored the structural influences that can contribute to discrimination of non-Western women. Therefore the Western female subject has turned to the »Other woman« for liberating her assuming a »sisterhood« (Lorde 1984) based on sameness of problems and oppressions based on gender. And although it is true that women on this world share many of the same problems and oppressions, still »some problems we share as women, some we do not« (Lorde 1984).

White women many times have ignored the built-in privileges of whiteness and therefore have not taken into account the manifold problems and connections between sex, gender and ethnicity, age, class, nationality, culture and religion (theory of intersectionality) (Wekker 2001, Zine 2001). In fact differences based on sex or gender were privileged over other form of oppression, such as poverty and racism (which indeed the colonial rule helped to construct and maintain) ignoring the contexts that differentially shape a woman's experience.<sup>4</sup> Indeed colonial and nowadays immigrant identity have affected women's access to resources (e.g. services for battered women like women's shelters, which refuse to house women with various immigration statuses, or will not serve women who do not speak English language (Crenshaw 1991). The failure to see the specific intersectional situation of

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<sup>3</sup> It is ironic that British feminists expected from non-Western feminists not to achieve rights first (before them) because they should be the first entitled to women rights (see below).

<sup>4</sup> As Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) has shown in her article on Latino and black minority women in America.

these women is just a symptom of racism based on culture, by defining that non-Western women are being oppressed by their cultures/religions.

This bias against culture masks other important social, political and economic issues affecting immigrant and/or non-Western women's lives (such as issues of race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion or belief, disability, citizenship status, marital status, regional and material position and age) and masks the fact that white, Western women can be subordinated by culture as well (Volpp 2001). Let us see how cultural racism shapes discrimination based on non-Western culture/religion.

## Europe and its borders of differentiations

The notion and meaning of the border, the colonial border between the West and the East has, as to Balibar, moved from the periphery to the center of the political and social life in Europe itself (Balibar refers to these borders as represented by immigration centers, detention centers ecc.) Within these borders we can witness the rising xenophobia, mostly in terms of islamofobia (especially after the »September 11th« events). Diferencialist racism here is at work under the cloak of defending European culture, lifestyles and values against the growing influence and presence of »foreigners« (Balibar, 1988/1991: 17 – 28). Europe is eager to call these foreigners with terms as minority or diaspora vs. majority, auslander vs. hauslander or autochtonen vs. allochtonen and at the last stance citizens vs. non–citizens. These are terms of a new terminology, a new social construction that serves to differentiate and discriminate the »Other«, that has now moved to the center of the old colonial machinery – Europe. But these terms are built-in a longlasting discourse of Orientalist and Colonialist knowledge, which we do not challenge, because they represent a »pre–constructed knowldege, which relies on sexist and racist prejudices which have been developed into a descriptive logic, which exists by the grace of continuous repetition« and therefore any explanation is unnecessary, because these concepts rely on knowledge, which through the years has aquired confirmation (Wekker, Lutz 2001). We can see the discourses of assimilation, discrimination and differentiation within the public institutions (schools, governments, parliaments) where religious symbols which pertain to different religions are prohibited. Although the general claim is that all religious symbols are prohibited in the same extent (for example in France and some local states in Germany) we can clearly see from the context and in some cases from legal resolutions as well (German states of Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg) that explicitly bans on islamic religious symbols are applied. And again the target is of course the Muslim woman, whose veiling has to be ommited for her emancipation that is in accordance with European values of freedom, human rights and modernisation or, should I dare to say, civilisation. Therefore we are witnessing a new wave of antisemitism in the form of islamophobia, that reminds us of historical antagonisms.<sup>5</sup> We can clearly see this islamophobia within the issue of the ban of religios symbols at schools, where we are led to think that not all the religions and religious symbols are acceptable as it is Christianity and its symbols and that there is established a border between the religious symbols that are acceptable and those which are not. Here my question would be what is secularism then about and how do we apply the 9th article of the

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<sup>5</sup> The discourse of historical antagonisms can be clearly detected within the European integration process through the rhetoric of some influential political and religious man. They see the Turkish accesion into EU in the historical terms, in fact in terms of incompatibility of Islam with the »Christian« Europe. Valéry Giscard d'Estang, ex french president, in the year 2002 stated that the heritage of European Christian identity, as part of European identity, should be inscribed into the European constitution and that Turkey therefore as a »muslim« country cannot be part of the European union (Balibar, 2004: 278).

European convention of human rights, which states freedom of religious expression. In fact we are led to think that secularisation does not stand its own definition, because the established undisputable relationship between Europe and Christianity becomes disturbed when the religion of »the Other« is present. Balibar states that Europe in fact did establish a secular system in society and state governance (each state with its respective differences) but secularism in Europe was established within a society where Christianity has always had a dominant role. According to Balibar some historians (T. Mastnak as well) even state, that it was Christianity itself that contributed to the process of secularisation. In this context we can understand secularisation as a defense against other forms of religious universalism, among them mostly against Islam, which are antagonistic with Christianity. Secularism therefore becomes an instrument of protection of »our« cults/worships.<sup>6</sup> So a dominant form of European secularism, within which the French *laïcité* is an example par excellence, is a resistance against multiculturalism, because many religions are assumed to be »too religious« to be included and accepted in Europe where, on the other hand, the same statement does not pertain to Christianity. According to Balibar this is not far from transforming the Western culture into a secular form of religion (Balibar, 2004: 225) where we can clearly see the privileged status of Christianity.

This new European secularism, that is forced on some communities more than others (and not forced on Christianity in the same manner), especially in schools with the ban on religious symbols (read Muslim religious symbols) contributes to a new form of assimilation or segregation of minority (Islamic) communities. Or as Balibar calls it within a bit different context but within similar discussions »European apartheid«. Members of these communities are therefore »forced« to search for alternatives, for example establishing private schools where they can express and practice their faith freely. I would say that a true secular state can be established only when all religious denominations will have equal rights and possibilities of expression. Interesting enough is to see, again, how especially women and women's bodies are used as objects for interpretation and representation of »the Other« by different discourses. And we can see how the differentiation is now based no more on race distinctions but on cultural distinctions within which religion plays an important role (besides ethnicity).

The discourse of »racism« has therefore moved away (or beyond) race, as an unacceptable category, but we can see how it has acquired new forms. We can see for example how left-wing movements in France, that claim to espouse anti-racist and social justice ideals, have shown islamophobic attitudes when they supported the ban on religious veiling. The rhetoric of ban on Muslim religious symbols in Europe is based on the assumption that Islam/culture subordinates women and positions the unveiled women as a norm. But in words of Meyda Yeğenoğlu:

*»if veiling can be seen as a specific practice of marking and disciplining the body in accordance with »cultural« requirements, so can unveiling. /.../ In practice both veiling and unveiling are culturally specific procedures of corporeal inscriptions, conditioned by specific cultural histories. What needs to be examined here is the presumption of the truth and naturalness of the unveiled body. Not-to-veil is also another way of turning the flesh into a particular type of body. However, the body that is not veiled is taken as the norm for specifying a general, cross-culturally valid notion of what a feminine body is and must be (Yeğenoğlu 1998: 115, emphasis added).*

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<sup>6</sup> Here the attitude towards Judaism is ambivalent. From antisemitism to acceptance of Jews because of the holocaust and the feeling of guilt.

Religion (Islam) and particularly veiling are therefore seen as unacceptable cultural practices and are represented as oppressive to Muslim women. Therefore they have to be unveiled for their real emancipation and liberation. Jasemin Zine has stated that religion (especially Islam, because we have seen that Christianity is a part of the undisputable norm) is not accepted as a legitimate epistemology neither within anti-racist (woman's) movements or feminisms, and Muslim women are therefore again dismissed and silenced in their attempts to present »another mode of being female« and to take into their hands the possibilities to make representations of their own bodies and subjectivities (Zine 2004). Although it is understandable a scepticism and criticism towards religious fundamentalisms and radical religious interpretations, that do really oppress women in some societies, it is again wrong, as Mohanty stated, to take a specific version of Islam and making it THE Islam, as THE source of oppression of women (Mohanty 1991). While certain practices within a specific community or culture or religion (like veiling) are identified as women-subordinating, the perspective of women within that community who would reject such a claim is generally ignored (Volpp 2001).

Furthermore it is problematic to see only non-Western cultures as subordinating women or subordinating them as such.<sup>7</sup> Leti Volpp has shown how incidents of subordination of women in the Third World or immigrant communities are thought to characterize the cultures of entire nations and are based on assumptions that immigrants import wholesale their cultures from their countries of origin, on the other hand incidents of subordination of women in the West are thought of to reflect the behaviour of a few deviants rather than as part of culture. Culture is invoked to explain violence against Third world or immigrant women while it is not similarly invoked to explain violence that affect Western women<sup>8</sup> (Volpp 2001).

Indeed we can see that Western »culture« is as much oppressive to women that other cultures can be. In fact, as Volpp (2001) states, the assumption that Western women enjoy complete liberation is not grounded in material reality. As Volpp puts it: »Rather, Western women 's liberation is a product of discursive self-representation, which contrasts Western women's enlightenment with the suffering of the Third world woman« (Volpp 2001). Comparisons between (Western and Eastern) women as opposed to Western women's comparisons with Western men, become the relevant frame of reference for the discussion of universal human rights. This way, as Volpp states, the attention of many women is diverted from the fact that they continue to be subordinated within their own (Western) culture (Volpp 2001).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> **We may think that culture subordinates per se. But generally, as Volpp (2001) states, women's problems are rooted in forces beyond one's individual community or culture, so that structural forces shaping cultural practices are hidden from view. Specific structural practices are connected to forces that indeed help shape culture and cultural practices that then deny women economic and political agency** (Lata Mani – examines how the tradition of sati was constructed through the collaboration of British colonial officials, how Taliban in Afganistan were established with the previous help of USA for fighting against the communist regime, how USA supported Pakistan etc. (Volpp 2001), but we could think of suicide terrorism, discourses of nationalisms etc. too).

<sup>8</sup> Similarly it is not invoked as the source of cultural practice when a white woman who is Muslim wears a veil, as it is perceived as fashion, but when an Iranian-Canadian woman wears a scarf as fashion it is perceived as a veil (see Volpp 2001).

<sup>9</sup> For example Uma Narayan (in Volpp 2001) analysed women's deaths by the practice of sati in India (roughly 5000 per year) and women's deaths by shooting in USA (approx. 1400 per year). Due to the fact that India's population is 4 times that of USA violence murders in USA are just as much numerically significant and a part of

## Questions of agency in multiculturalism

Spivak (in Shohat; Stam, 1994: 343) is asking if the »subaltern« can speak. We have seen that agency is denied to non-Western women. In this aspect it is interesting Zine's suggestion of a spiritual (religious) feminist epistemology, which is still rejected in post-modern feminism, as a legitimate knowledge within which Muslim women could be able to expose their own Quranic hermeneutics and therefore pursue for a new representation of themselves. Zine has furthermore reminded us, that Muslim women stand in between two different discourses with which they have to fight to acquire power for a new Muslim feminist epistemology and representation of a faithful Muslim woman. Secular and radical (also orthodox, but always mostly male, patriarchal) religious discourses have in fact taken from the »Other (Muslim) woman« the possibilities of becoming and being a subject. Therefore we should take into account the possibility and need that religious Muslim women make representations of their own bodies and Self. Furthermore we should question ourselves: Was it the »objective« and »rational« Enlightenment knowledge, in any way more »objective« and »rational« than spiritual (religious) epistemology can be? Wasn't it racism based on »objective and rational« biological knowledge? Was it not orientalist knowledge (Orientalism) and its »classifications« that produced discrimination and injustices among people, based on an »objective« and »rational«, »secular« and even sometimes »Christian« knowledge? Being able to produce discourses, as sources of power, is the way within which silenced subjects can challenge and change the established relations of power, because there is power, as according to Foucault, emanating from the microlevels of society and according to George Dei, it is the spirituality that can enforce the Self (Zine 2004). The epistemology of Western Enlightenment »colonised« all ways of being human, of being different, of speaking. And many are claiming them back.

Western feminist discourses, which many times have lacked self-consciousness will therefore have to acknowledge the effects of imperial and colonial discourses within which they have cooperated (Mohanty 1991) and which amazing hypocrisy has gone even so far so as to demand from the »Other woman« to not expect any political rights and equality until the Western sister achieves them first. Burton (1990) notes a British feminist, Christabel Pankhurst, who claimed that the British invented the idea of equality and therefore should be the British woman the first to achieve it and not the »Eastern woman«.

## Conclusion

As Volpp (2001) legitimately states, we don't have to prioritize culture merely because we respect group rights, but we should look to particular contexts in order to determine whether justifications of practices based on culture should be supported or not. In general, feminist values are supposed to be alien to multiculturalism (feminism stands for rights, western, liberal and rational while multiculturalism stands for culture) but this position negates the possibility of feminist action within minority cultures.

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American culture than is sati a part of Indian culture. We could think of honour killings vs. passion killings as well. Lama Abu-Odeh (in Volpp 2001) examined both phenomena that revealed the fallacy of the orientalist construction of East as different from West. In the case of un-veiling as a norm, we can think of violence against Western women in the name of beauty (esthetic surgeries, diets that lead to anorexia and bulimia etc.) see (Kuhar 2004).

We have to open space for **new feminine ways of interpreting culture. And we have to admit that European colonialism/orientalism and divisions along the lines of East and West, together with the modern nation state that produce borders, produce(d) intersectionalities of inequality, and that discourses like »culture subordinates women« obscures them.**

Europe will have to make a deep selfreflection, to rethink it's concepts and their effects on history. Indeed it has to rethink the ideas of »universal human rights, democracy, citizenship, secularisation, multiculturalism, emancipation, history, culture and humanity«. For that until the West will not learn that all that is East from it, is East or »the Other« world only from its perspective, there will be no peace. Western feminisms as well have to apply an ethics of responsibility because it is not about recognising this world but about its acknowledgement, it is, as Lazreg (in Mohanty, 1991) puts it, to **allow them to be** (although I would prefer another term, for example letting them to be, because »allowing« someone to something reminds me of relations of power, when one entity has the power to exercise »permissions« or »allowance«).<sup>10</sup> Therefore we have to acknowledge as legitimate knowledges and ways of »being« that have been till now perceived as »different«. It is not different. IT IS.

We can ask ourselves at this point, how can we be able to do a research on this »Other world«, as Shohat is asking, can the »non-subaltern« speak without falling prey to the white man's or woman's burden, that since long time has been setting up scientific, emancipatory, political, economic and cultural standards? Can we speak in the name of »The Other«, colonised, suppressed people without experiencing it and being »the Other« by ourselves? (Shohat; Stam, 1994: 343) How can we make some changes? Changes in our way of thinking and changes in power and discourse will be possible only by establishing and empowering changes not upwards down or from the West to the East or from the North to the South or from European universalism to worlds particularism, but the other way round, because in these changes have to be included and have to have a voice all those who were »historically« silenced. Europe has to include in its selfreflection the »*lesson of the other*« (Balibar 2004: 223) and acknowledge the realities that are the outcome of colonial history, that radically changed the structure of the world.

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<sup>10</sup> Problems that we have with using agreeable and appropriate terms show us that we are in need of new terminology with which we could establish a new epistemology of sociological sciences)

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