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ON RIGHTS AND DIALOGUE: MINORITY CULTURE WOMEN'S LIVES IN DIASPORA

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ABSTRACT:

Recent tragic events such as the terrorist siege in Sydney and the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris reignited the questioning of efficacy of multiculturalist policies in the West. Questions about compatibility of *other* cultural values with those of *our* (Western) ways of life are once again put to scrutiny. At the centre of these debates is the claim that cultural (and religious) groups that 'subjugate women' are incompatible with *our* ways of life. In this paper, due to space-constraints, I will address the concerns with women's rights violations stemming from tolerance of multiculturalism.

Instead of considering multiculturalism and cultural rights as problematic and detrimental to minority culture women, I advocate the need for inclusive multiculturalism. I argue that we need to retain but re-define multiculturalism so it includes greater participation of women at all levels and promote that this can be done via a dialogic approach. I promote dialogic approach for two main reasons. Firstly, because one of the dangers of 'speaking on behalf of the other' (Devlin, 1996: 125) is that it often results in the essentialist theorising about minority culture women. Secondly, advocating dialogue amongst women is a part of my stance as a multicultural feminist. Multicultural feminism promotes a dialogical approach, which is a recognition that from each positioning the world is seen differently and thus, any knowledge based on just one positioning is unfinished (Shohat, 2001).

Classifications:

Keywords: women's rights, dialogic approach, multicultural feminism

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of conflicting values between cultural rights and women's rights is at the centre of the theoretical and societal debates in the West. The debates have recently been reignited with the occurrence of tragic events such as the terrorist siege in Sydney in December 2014 and the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris in January 2015. These events are referred to as evidence that multiculturalism in the West has failed. At the centre of these debates is the claim that cultural (and religious) groups that 'subjugate women' are incompatible with *our* ways of life.[1] The protagonists cite number of factors that make multiculturalism incompatible with liberal polity,[2] however in this paper, due to space-constraints, I will only focus on discussing the concerns with women's rights violations stemming from tolerance of multiculturalism. I argue that current stereotypical assumptions about 'cultural practices' that violate women's rights are part of the discourse that only serves to further demonise minority cultural groups. These essentialist assumptions also fail to acknowledge that minority culture women's lives are made up of often conflicting gender, race, or culture-based claims. In order to understand women's situations and test assumptions about the oppressions they face, the discourse must be inclusive of a dialogic approach with minority culture women in which listening to their voices is imperative.

I also advocate that instead of considering multiculturalism and cultural rights as problematic and detrimental to minority culture women, we need more inclusive multiculturalist policies. I argue that we need to retain but re-define multiculturalism so it includes greater participation of women at all levels and promote that this can be done via a dialogic approach.

A dialogue with women is an essential philosophical precondition of multiculturalism to rights' claims. I endorse a dialogue amongst women as a part of my stance as a multicultural feminist. Multicultural feminism promotes a dialogical approach, which is a recognition that from each positioning the world is seen differently and thus, any knowledge based on just one positioning is unfinished (Shohat, 2001). My research findings – some of which I include here – highlight that women do make autonomous choices about their rights entitlements but they also value their culture. Culture plays a vital part in women's lives.

ON ESSENCE OF DIALOGUE AND RECONCIABILITY BETWEEN FEMINISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

The essentialist and stereotypical image of the 'immigrant' or 'refugee woman' in the public sphere is that they are disadvantaged, powerless and subordinate, both at home and in their work. Particular groups of women are even more misrepresented. The debates about Australian Muslim women wearing a burqa in recent years highlight this further.[3] The rhetoric from these arguments is resonant of debates that have been occurring for decades (see Spivak, 1988) but have certainly been amplified with the increase in movement of peoples, commodities and ideas at the global level resulting in cultural, ethnic and religious diversity within contemporary societies. Since multiculturalism emerged in many countries as a tool to manage the increasing cultural diversity of society, any events that involve a clash between the aforementioned cultural, ethnic and religious identities result in such multiculturalist polices being questioned and debated.[4]

With regards to theoretical debates, an extensive literature from late 1990s and early 2000 from the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States warned about the tensions between women's rights and cultural rights amongst minority cultural groups in multicultural contexts. A feminist concern in these debates is that the preservation of cultural laws and traditions accommodated under cultural rights impacts mainly, but not solely, on the female members of the cultural groups in question. Women are the most affected by the preservation of traditional laws, particularly those who are mothers and wives, as they are considered to be bearers of culture. In my research I explored the main arguments that emerged at an early stage of the debates which involved theoretical arguments between the mainly liberal feminist Susan Moller Okin (1999) and the liberal culturalist Will Kymlicka (1999). The debates have since involved feminist theorists like Ayelet Shachar (2001) and (briefly) Martha Nussbaum (1999) and liberal culturalists Jeff Spinner-Halev (2001) and Chandran Kukathas (2001). Public debates on the themes of 'cultural practices oppressive to immigrant women' are often perceived with hostility and condemnation of the cultures that the women come from and any attempts to argue for contextual analyses to these issues and for cultural sensitivity are seen as arising from 'the cult of multiculturalism, which would rather tolerate egregious crimes against women than offend Third World sensibilities' (Charen, 2010: n.p.).

In the light of my research findings and the current exclusivist anti-multiculturalist political climate, [5] I promote that we need to preserve 'the language of multiculturalism' and we need to do this for 'pragmatic and strategic reasons' (see also Phillips, 2006: 5). The pragmatic reasons for the maintenance of multiculturalism reside in a simple observation that Australia consists of diverse and different cultural groups. These groups have for over four decades advocated their claims for cultural rights, emphasising the significance of cultural and philosophical preconditions of multiculturalism to rights' claims. It is also imperative to retain the language and policies of multiculturalism to deconstruct this myth of culture 'now widely employed in a discourse that denies human agency, defining individuals through their culture as the explanation of virtually everything they say or do' (Phillips, 2006: 3). In this climate, minority culture women face double-bind.

The rhetoric of women's rights is obviously hypocritical when deployed by anti-multiculturalism-advocates in their attempts to further demonise other cultures, but an equally detrimental outcome of this discourse is that it can undermine opportunities for women to contribute to political and community debates. This, in turn, has serious implications for addressing how gender inequality functions within specific cultural contexts. When the defence of women's rights is bound with racism, minority culture women are not at liberty to express their own concerns with patriarchal practices in order to avoid fuelling further racism. As a result, minority culture women are in a double-bind. They do not expose the violence or controversial practice to the authorities or the media so that, on the one hand, their own communities do not perceive them as disloyal or traitors (Erez, 2000) and on the other hand, to avoid further increase of racism directed at their community (Zannettino, 2009; Adelman at al., 2001).

I promote that we re-define multiculturalism so it includes a dialogue and greater participation of minority culture women at all levels in consideration of research findings that suggest the impact of racial and religious discrimination against minority groups is most detrimentally experienced by women, yet women's voices are the least ones heard in this discourse. According to the Isma Report 2004 (cited in HREOC, 2006) the impact of racial and religious discrimination against Arab and Muslim Australians was most acutely felt by women. Similar is conveyed by African Australian women who report being more racially targeted after negative media coverage of their cultural group and whilst this may result in social services shifting their 'focus on young men', women's experiences tend to be ignored (see also HREOC, 2011).[6] As Nyadol Nyuon (cited in Alizi, 2012) argues 'when it comes to African Australian women, they tend to be one of the more neglected voices in the social services'.

Many women's NGOs continue to point out that minority culture women are trapped at the intersections of various discourses, including those of race, gender and religion (Patel, 2004). Although there exists an increased awareness of and research on some of the complexities concerning various issues (e.g., female genital cutting (FGC), forced marriages and honour killings, and the complexity of topics like hijab) these are still routinely referred to in public debates and media reports as 'cultural practices', as though these reflect normal and widely endorsed behaviour in minority communities and are 'a mistake of multiculturalism' (Dustin and Phillips, 2008: 417). Undoing such mythologies requires public attention to minority women's unhindered opinions.

Whilst a critique of practices grounded in cultural fundamentalism is a valid one, the problem with anti-multiculturalist perspectives that rely on this *gender rhetoric* is that they treat minority culture women as homogenous[7] and as equally oppressed by their culture thus, not recognising of 'the multiple social and cultural contexts and positionalities raising contradictory issues for individuals' (Anthias, 2002: 276). The *framing* of the arguments about minority culture women in these public debates on the tensions between feminism and multiculturalism is reflective of the 'saving missions' rhetoric and this serves as a further obstacle to the achievement of gender equality for minority culture women. In order to understand the women's situations and test assumptions about the oppressions that minority culture women face, the discourse must be inclusive of a dialogic approach with minority culture women in which listening to women's voices is central.

Advocating dialogue amongst women is a part of my stance as a multicultural feminist. Multicultural feminism sees 'genders, sexualities, races, classes, nations' existing 'not as hermetically sealed entities but rather as parts of a permeable interwoven relationality' (Shohat, 2001: 1). Relationality in the context that I utilise it here relies on dialogic and historical analyses. My research analyses reveal that minority culture women's lives are made up of often conflicting gender, race, or culture-based claims.

I argue that the conflict between feminism and multiculturalism[8] is reconcilable. I align with multicultural feminist perspectives that highlight and reinforce 'the mutual embeddedness' between multiculturalism and feminism (Shohat, 2001: 1). Although some traditions reinforcing patriarchal relations can, and often do, have a detrimental influence on minority culture women, cultural membership and its positive aspects (providing a sense of identity and belonging) play an important role in women's lives. The biggest difference in considering multiculturalism and cultural rights as detrimental to women's rights comes with the issue that is often undermined in some arguments on the tensions between feminism and multiculturalism, which is that *it is the women themselves who also claim the multicultural accommodation*. Representing minority culture women simply as constrained by their culture does not begin to capture the complexity of their choice (Phillips and Saharso, 2008). Thus, pursuits of gender equality need to include engaging in dialogue with and listening to the voices of minority culture women.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

Who are minority culture women?

My research findings included perspectives of seventeen Afghani and twenty six Liberian women. It was a qualitative study examining how women negotiate the multiplicity of rights experiences in the areas of education, work and family in their countries of origin and in Australia. I placed women as the subject of inquiry, adopting a women's standpoint which starts 'from where women as … knowers … are located in their actual everyday worlds' (Smith 1987: 153). Rather than start with previously mentioned preconceived assumptions or theories originating in the discourse of multiculturalism *versus* feminism, relying on women's experiences of rights has enabled me to investigate how women as subjects account for their situations and to demonstrate how their subjective experience articulates with larger social and political relations.[9]

In the study Afghani and Liberian women were taken as examples of minority culture women in Australia. In terms of similarities and broad categorisation, Liberian women, as black Africans, and Afghani women, as Muslim Middle-Eastern people, share parallels with women from other minority culture groups in Australia. Liberian and Afghani communities are small and, broadly speaking, the black African Australians[7] and Australian Muslims[9] are on an unequal level with the majority groups in Australia, due to exclusion and racialisation (Australian Human Rights Commission 2010; Dreher and Ho, 2009; Hussein and Imtoual, 2009; Ho, 2007). Liberian and Afghani women, participants in my research, are also women of refugee background. Women of refugee background, broadly defined, include all those who have escaped situations of war, persecution and human rights violations (Taylor, 2004: 16), thus, their experiences are significantly different from those in their communities who emigrated voluntarily.

ON THE DIALOGUE WITH WOMEN AND LISTENING TO WOMEN'S VOICES

Statements such as those of the biologist Jery Coyne after the Paris attack suggest that all Muslims 'beat their wives, kill their daughters' (cited in Firma, 2015). The issue with such arguments from feminism *versus* multiculturalism debates is that they suppose – or in the case of Coyne directly claim – that Muslims (or minority cultures) are more patriarchal than Western liberal cultures. Similar rhetoric is often central in debates about the tensions between women's rights and cultural rights. Culture is cited in explanations of the forms of violence against 'Third World' or immigrant women while such cultural references are absent in explanations about forms of violence that affect mainstream Western women. For example, as Narayan's analysis of the cultural comparison of dowry murders and domestic violence shows, only in the Third World are 'cultural explanations' given for fatal forms of violence, inferring that Third world women suffer 'death by culture' (1997: 95).[10] Phillips and Saharso (2008: 295) term this process 'a kind of falsification or reification of tradition'.

Attempts at cultural reification occur in Western settings 'when those in an ethnocultural majority debate about the protection girls and women from the harmful practices of "their" culture, and accept without question if the practice at issue is indeed a custom of the minority group' (Phillips and Saharso, 2008: 295). Through the use of the term *practice,* descriptions of a forced marriage or an honour killing imply behaviour that may be rejected by most members of the cultural group and is not supported by cultural and religious leaders of that group. The concern with women's rights and protections can then become an alternative for assaults on minority groups, resulting in demonising of minority cultural groups rather than achieving gender equality for women within them (Phillips and Saharso, 2008: 295).

I advocate for a dialogic approach with minority culture women in which listening to women's voices is essential. I do this for two reasons. Firstly, because 'speaking on behalf of the other' (Devlin, 1996: 125) is an antithesis of the dialogic approach and one of the risks of this is that it often results in the essentialist theorising about minority culture women. Essentialist theorising that does not account for differences between women contributes to further *othering* and thus, the silencing of some minority culture women. Secondly, I promote the dialogue between multiple and often contradicting women's positions because there are 'no easy answers that can be captured by unidimensional appeals to ... universal principles' (Devlin, 1996: 134).

In seeking the dialogue with women, I advocate a dialogical approach. The dialogical approach involves:

> all feminist (and other forms of democratic) politics (being) viewed as a form of coalition politics in which differences among women are recognized and given a voice, without fixating the boundaries of this coalition in terms of 'who' we are but in terms of what we want to achieve (Yuval-Davis, 1994: 188-9)

Advocating dialogue amongst women is a part of my stance as a multicultural feminist. Multicultural feminism promotes a dialogical approach which recognises that one of the means for a more comprehensive approaches of women's lives and issues affecting them is by dialogue between them, and the wider the better (Yuval-Davis, 2002). As Phillips (2001: iii) argues: 'Criticism will certainly be better informed when there are internal as well as external critics, and the resulting dialogue may well lead to a different understanding of values and rights'. An essential part of this process then, is the recognition of these differences.

The recognition of difference between and within cultures and between and amongst women is imperative. I do not advocate for considerations of difference under the culturally relativist premise according to which one culture's traditions and values are relative to any other and thus, no common values exist. Instead, the view I maintain is that cultures and people are different but different people *can* live together 'according to rules agreed upon by all, through free and egalitarian dialogue' (Flecha, 1999: 151). Cultural relativists argue that a free and egalitarian dialogue is not possible; they argue that proponents of this type of dialogue are in danger of impeding the identities and oppressed people. Having a free and equal dialogue with the marginalised is complex; I address some of these complexities in the following paragraphs. Nevertheless, I advocate for a dialogical approach since it endeavours to transform the principles such as equality and freedom given that 'difference is part of equality – the right of everyone to live differently' (Flecha, 1999: 164).

The recognition of difference is essential in order to advance claims about maintaining and developing one's own culture and identity. In this process, human rights standards for all aid in preventing marginalisation and exclusion. Cultural dialogues are important in all multicultural settings since no culture can survive without communicating with other cultures; 'taking elements from them, and developing new cultural components from this exchange' (Flecha, 1999: 164). Listening to women's voices in such dialogues is crucial.

I promote dialogic approach, highlighting the effectiveness of the dialogue (as a way of restorative action for the marginalised) in previous instances of exclusivist climate in multiculturalist societies such as Australia. Since 9/11, the dialogues about racism towards Muslim communities in Australia have resulted in a number of successful safe spaces for women's engagement (Dreher and Ho, 2006; Dreher, 2006; Ho, 2006). For instance, conferences like 'Not another hijab row' have created safe spaces for Muslim women to discuss issues affecting them (Dreher and Ho, 2007).[11] Furthermore, public forums like that of 'Women Report Violence in a Time of War' held during the 2001 election campaign also underlined intersectional analyses and coalition strategies which, by including the 'silenced voices of the election campaign … have proved valuable in various attempts to intervene in the "race debates" of Howard-era Australian politics' (Dreher, 2009: 7). This event as well as the 'Gender, Violence, Protection workshop' series, highlighted that 'resisting to the gendered protectionism rather than a universalising category of gender provided the most productive starting point for shared conversations' (Dreher, 2009: 7).[12] These two events were particularly successful in bringing to the fore similarities between Muslim and Indigenous Australian women but also differences in 'colonial histories and contemporary experiences of violence impacting on women in racialised communities' (Dreher, 2009: 7). This shows that the task of alliance building amongst diverse women is complex yet necessary for recognition of pressing issues and effective action in endeavouring to attend to these issues.

I promote listening to women's voices in the dialogue, being wary of representational issues that have been thus far inherent to the identity politics model. For example, the Australian public discourse contains structures[13] that 'work against a diversity of voices and feminist arguments' (Dreher and Ho, 2009: 7) and these, accompanied by the state or statutory agents that listen to authoritative voices of community leaders, result in the essentialist and homogenising views of women. For instance, in respect to the Muslim community, Shakira Hussein and Alia Imtoual (2009: 8) point out that some 'socially conservative' figures and organisations are often perceived to be authentic players 'who are able to "speak on behalf of"' the community.[13] In Australia there are a number of Muslim women's organisations[14] that frequently have spokeswomen in place to provide public statements on a series of matters affecting Muslim women. However, such efforts 'are not seen as representative of "the" Muslim community, nor indeed of the particular Muslim community the organization serves, but as a corollary perspective' (Hussein and Imtoual, 2009: 8). The traditional notions of community and community representation require further developing. We need dialogue with women 'in order to counter the false universalisms that have so dogged previous practice, as well as the "substitutionism" that has allowed certain groups to present themselves as spokespersons for the rest' (Phillips, 2001: iii).

Via the dialogical approach, we can pursue the much needed unpacking of the traditional definitions of community to include more nuanced, incomplete and interweaved perspectives of community (Taylor, 1994). Given that we exist in a world of plural identities as a result of being a part of social collectivities (Taylor, 1994), future representations, including women's voices, must consider these multiple identities of women from minority cultures. Theoretical or public debates about the lives of minority culture women also need to take into account that such lives are intersectional and thus these women are in a paradoxical position since whilst they may want to promote their women's rights in a struggle for emancipation, they may also want to avoid adding to the negative stereotyping of their communities (Saharso, 2008: 11). My research confirms this to be the case for Afghani and Liberian women and further supports my argument that considerations for reconciling feminism and multiculturalism are essential if we are to provide a more inclusive platform for minority culture women to participate in the multicultural dialogue. I urge for a *more inclusive platform* in the light of the research according to which in the public debates on the previous instances of Islamophobia during war on terror Muslim women *were* invited to speak but they expressed finding it extremely difficult 'to shift news agendas and to be heard on their own terms instead being asked constantly to respond to the concerns and stereotypes of "mainstream" audiences' (Dreher and Simmons 2006; cited in Dreher and Ho, 2009: 7). In the same way, the continuous scrutiny on violence within Indigenous communities and the demand for Indigenous Australians to justify and explain themselves is described by some as analogous to being hunted.

Currently in Australia in the dialogues about either rights of the women from minority communities or the exclusivist politics (racism, Islamophobia) towards these communities, the women are positioned unequally (see HREOC, 2006). Talking with those who are substantively unequal in power is problematic. Dialogue that does not recognise situational inequalities and the (related) hegemonic power embedded in institutions is just as likely to increase the already existing power inequalities (Delgado, 1990: 1939). Some Muslim, Indigenous and African women, amongst others marginalised from minority cultures, are not equally placed to enter the dialogue with the majority culture. An effective dialogue requires not only mutual respect and a common communication language but also a common starting point in terms of power (Anthias, 2002: 282).

Through the use of a dialogic approach we can create conditions for a more equal society and for people from different cultures and ethnicities to coexist together. These conditions are not pre-determined but must be continually negotiated and consented to between those participating in a dialogue (Flecha, 1999: 165). As bell hooks (1989: 131) argues, 'the essential quality of a dialogue implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is humanising speech, one that challenges and resists domination'.

Dialogue cannot always lead to easily reached consensus; it can be messy, contradictory and fraught with difficulty especially on themes of practices such as FGC and arranged marriages. The establishment of the dialogue must not presume inertia or unchanging nature of cultures, customs or people. Instead, it 'has to begin from the premise that genders, sexualities, races, classes, nations and even continents exist not as hermetically sealed entities but rather part of permeable interwoven relationality' (Shohat, 2002: 68). Differences in lived experience preconceive relationality. This highlights 'that if persons are socially constituted over time, space, and through relationality, then others are constitutive rather than external to identity' (Somers, 1994: 629). All identities (women's and men's) must be analysed in the context of relationality and cultural environments since they do not 'exist' outside of those complexes (Somers, 1994: 622).

The significance of dialogue amongst women was highlighted throughout my research, as talk with women revealed stories that challenge some assumptions inherent in the debates on the tensions between feminism and multiculturalism about gender being the primary attribute in women's identity and about agency of minority culture women. Women's stories depict women's identities, gender roles and lives as a result of relationality between historical routes, societal and social relations, structures and institutions.

Gender is an invaluable category which aids in formulating agendas for advancement of men's and women's lives, but why premise or limit our understanding of people on the basis of only gender as a category? Assumptions that an individual or a collectivity has a particular set of interests simply because one aspect of an identity fits into one social category, lead to partial and limited accounts about the groups or individuals in question. When women demand rights, they do this on the basis of their gender but also in relation to their cultural identity and community solidarity. In my research, Afghani women demonstrated that they are re-negotiating and re-constructing their identities in accordance with the Australian context, norms and values. They value their communal membership but also exercise their individual rights (Afghani women's focus group interview, 18/02/08). All of the women individually interviewed reported that they are acting upon their rights. For Liberian women, the sense of female solidarity, and also of status as new female arrivals, combined with racist and discriminatory attitudes fuelling the sense of exclusion from the mainstream society, all contributed to a sense of local community that was felt amongst and reported by Liberian women. For instance, 'stricter upbringing of children', deemed culturally appropriate within their community, is mentioned by several younger Liberian women who discussed some of the 'Liberian values' that they would like to uphold in the Australian setting. These expressions appear to help women define the boundaries between their desire to uphold an African or Liberian identity and the potential threats to that identity posed by, what one of the participants in the focus group interviews called, the 'too liberal' Australian society (Liberian women focus group interview, 10/02/07). Some informants in my research said that they may seek advice (on raising children, for instance) from the well-respected tribal elders from the ethnic group, but they also conveyed that it is up to the women to make the choice and pursue their own decisions (Liberian women focus group interviews, 10/02/07).[15] This further highlights that we need a *relational approach* in which the meanings of rights and feminism are 'simultaneously a site of critical practice and an object of critique' (Trotz, 2007: 1) but which also allows creation of spaces for understanding that women value their women's rights *and* rights they have as members of cultural groups. It is important to analyse categories like gender, race, and class or caste as permeable and in relation to contemporary reconstructions of womanhood and manhood (Mohanty, 2003: 133).

When promoting a dialogic approach, I recognise that assumptions according to which 'merely talking to one another will increase empathy, reduce systemic social ills, and lead to a better world' (Delgado, 1993: 1600) are naïve. Thus, I point to the importance of working within the structures[16] in consideration of the ability to facilitate authentic conversations and link this to an effective action. By promoting this view, I disagree with critics like Devlin (1996) who argues that 'the dialogic approach is always limited and limiting' (1996: 131) and that those aiming for social transformations are unlikely to prefer dialogue over action. I argue that a dialogue amongst and between women more than often *is* the platform for action and for formation of alliances sustaining that action.[17]

The formation of alliances amongst women on the basis of struggles and the solidarity is another reason why I promote the dialogical approach. Ethical and meaningful dialogues are possible between marginal groups and these groups can develop alliances on the basis of common oppression (Mohanty, 2003). Sharing 'a common cause fosters dialogue and encourages groups to transcend their differences' and form alliances (Collins, 1991: 236-237). As Mohanty's (2001: 498) work shows, the experiences of racism and hetero-patriarchalism in the context of an immigrant South Asian community in North America can also be related to other anti-racist resistance (e.g., Latina and African-American women). Similar alliances between Muslim and Indigenous women have been taking place in Australia, where 'the hegemonic discourse of protection' (Dreher and Ho, 2009: 11) reinforcing the othering via the colonial feminist and racist narratives about 'saving' the women from their oppressive communities (and their men), also resulted in formation of a powerful platform for alliances amongst women that are marginalised. Finally, consultations such as 'Living Spirit Forum' (2006) which engaged Muslim and non-Muslim Australian women exploring parallels between human rights principles and Islam in order to increase mutual respect, highlight this further. Dialogues about human rights such as these serve to successfully promote harmony and understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims (HREOC, 2006), demonstrating aspects of cultural compatibility often overlooked in debates on feminism *versus* multiculturalism.

CONCLUSION

Minority culture women need to be recognised as women and as members of cultural groups. The lives of minority culture women are intersectional and cannot be adequately grasped with binaries like victim/agent or by a dichotomising discourse of feminism versus multiculturalism. Whilst there are some similarities in oppressions that diverse women face (women's rights standards attest to these) the differences between women open up the dialogical spaces. This pursuit of difference can be most effectively analysed relationally, because this considers women's claims for recognition of the oppressions they experience on the basis of gender *together with* the claims of oppressions they suffer as members of minority culture. The recognition of difference is essential in aiming for a more equal society and can be pursued if women conceive of commonalities and differences amongst them, conceptualising these in women's rights claims as a part of a series of ongoing, mutually empathetic dialogues.

This paper has stressed the need for attention to the lives and realities of minority culture women. The minority culture women's experiences of rights indicate that the issues of concern and research on minority culture women should not only consider the impact of their cultural groups on their lives but must be inclusive of the broader contexts that minority culture women are situated within. Minority culture women are at the intersections of culture, race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality. Representations of minority culture women as *others,* who are oppressed by their culture and are passively waiting to be saved, severely undermines the complexities intrinsic to their lives. Although these positive efforts are not always visible, minority culture women consistently challenge injustices within their communities. To aid them in this task, we need to provide meaningful avenues for women to articulate their vulnerabilities and oppressions, but also to demonstrate their resilience and agency. Recognition of differences is crucial to advancing minority culture women's lives.

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[1] For example, following the Paris terrorist attack, the media broadcasted an interview with Reza Aslan (2015), a Muslim scholar, who apportioned blame for Hebdo attack to France's failure to embrace multiculturalism. Aslan's stance was heavily criticised online in public debates which cited an American Biologist's Jery Coyne's criticism of Aslan arguing: 'By all means keep your Ramadan, your delicious food, your clothing (except, perhaps, the veil), your prayers, your mosques**,** and so on**.** But don't you dare try to squash freedom of speech, beat your wives, kill your daughters, or try to practice sharia law in France' (cited in Firma, 2015)**.**

[2] For more information on these online debates, please see: http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2015/01/12/are-there-limits-to-multiculturalism-jerry-coyne-ripping-into-apologist-reza-aslan-says-absolutely/
https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2015/01/11/charlie-hebdos-cartoons-werent-racist/
https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2015/01/11/reza-aslan-blames-charlie-hebdo-massacre-on-frances-inability-to-tolerate-multiculturalism/
http://www.patheos.com/blogs/danthropology/2015/01/jerry-coyne-explains-multiculturalism-to-reza-aslan/

[3] During the last days of election in 2013 Opposition Leader Tony Abbott has reignited a national debate on the burqa when asked to make a comment about the practice of Muslim women covering their head and face, Mr Abbott said the burqa was 'a very confronting attire'. 'Frankly, it's not the sort of attire that I would like to see widespread in our streets' (Chan, 2013).

[4] In Australia, events such as the September 11 attacks in 2001, the Bali bombings in 2002 and Cronulla Riots in 2005 served to amplify the dilemmas about cultural compatibility and furthered discrimination against some minority cultural groups, namely those that identify being of Muslim religious background.

[5] In Australia, the anti-multiculturalist sentiment is evident in the current Government's repetition of the previous Liberal (under John Howard) removal of multicultural affairs from ministerial responsibility and in plans to repeal or reform the racial vilification provisions of the *Racial Discrimination Act* (1975). The recent parliamentary debates on burqa highlight these anti-multiculturalist tendencies further.

[6] HREOC (2011) outlined that the concern about the way mainstream media perpetuated negative stereotypes and perceptions of African Australians was a feature of many community consultations. It was seen as a major hurdle to acceptance and integration with the broader Australian community, as well as a 'trigger' for incidents of physical and verbal abuse of African Australians.

[7] The concern in recent public debates has been with Muslim women. This discourse is problematic because it is not inclusive of the fact that Islam, as a religion that has between 1 billion and 1.8 billion followers and that is predominantly located in the Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia, is 'experienced, practiced, and interpreted quite differently over time and space' (Moghadam, 2003: n.p.). This plurality of interpretations and laws within Islam also makes any generalisations about the configuration(s) of gendered existence for women of Islamic background problematic.

[8] Due to word limit, I will not explore multiculturalist policies here. For the purposes of this paper's discussion it is nevertheless important to note that, I acknowledge the shortcomings of multiculturalism grounded in the liberal-pluralist

discourse and argue instead for multiculturalism embedded in the politics of recognition. This means, that it is essential to concede that people do not simply demand equal treatment, but more importantly, *recognition* of their distinct identities as members of particular cultural communities. As Charles Taylor (1994: 36) states, 'not only contemporary feminism but also race relations and discussions of multiculturalism are undergirded by the premise that the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression'. This is the multiculturalism that is conceptualised within the discourse of multicultural feminism. In other words, multiculturalism that I advocate for does not simply evoke the mere existence of multiple culture, rather, it designates a project which calls for envisioning world history and contemporary social life from the perspective of radical equality of peoples. Unlike a liberal-pluralist discourse; a polycentric multiculturalism entails a profound reconceptualization and restructuring of intercommunal relations within and beyond nation state (Shohat, 2001: 2).

[9] The research data with refugee Afghani and Liberian women is derived from focus group and individual interviews conducted in South Australia. Seven Afghani women participated in the individual interviews and ten in the focus group interviews. Nine Liberian women participated in individual interviews and seventeen in the focus group interview.

[7] Australian Africans 'come from nearly all countries on the African continent, representing a diverse range of cultures, religions and language groups' (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010: 3). Whilst there is no clear definition what constitutes African Australians, people who declared being born in Africa made up a 12.8 percent of the overall population in 2004-05 and at the 2006 Census this number included 248,605 residents to Australia.

[9] According to the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour (2006) there are approximately 340,393 Muslims residing in Australia.

[10] Dowry murders occur when a new wife is murdered, usually burned to death, in connection to escalating dowry demands (Vollp, 2001: 1180). Dowry murders are thought of as a peculiar indicator of the extreme misogyny of India and are frequently confused with sati-the widow immolation supposedly justified by Hindu scripture that rarely takes place in contemporary India. Theorists like Narayan (1997) have suggested that dowry murders are a cultural alternative to domestic violence murders in United States. Narayan (1997: 99) has calculated that death by domestic violence in the United States is numerically as significant a social problem as dowry murders in India. Only one analogy is used as a signifier of cultural backwardness- dowry murders. Yet, as Narayan argues, domestic violence murders in the US are just as much a part of American culture (and elsewhere in the West, for that matter) as dowry death is a part of Indian culture.

[11] *Not another hijab row* was a national conference that took place on 9 and 10 December 2006 at the University of Technology, Sydney. At the conference 'women from across the cultural and religious spectrum' discussed 'racism, nationalism and the reality of Muslim women's lives in Australia'. For more information on the *Not Another Hijab Row* conference see the conference website: http: //www.uts.edu.au/new/releases/2006/December/05.html but also Ho's and Dreher's 2007 publication titled '"Not another hijab row": New conversations on gender, race, religion and the making of communities'.

[12] For the experiences and dilemmas stemming from the *Gender, Violence, Protection workshop* series see Dreher (2009) 'Eavesdropping with permission: the politics of listening for safer speaking spaces'.

[13] This has been evident in what Ho (2009) identifies as *new politics of gender* in Australia. For more information see Dreher and Ho's (2009) book on *Beyond the Hijab Debates: New Conversations on Gender, Race and Religion* as they examine the negative implications of the structures that reinforce masculinist protection of Muslim and Indigenous women in Australia.

[13] Hussein and Imtoual (2009: 8) here cite the Australian National Council of Imams, Australian Federation of Islamic Councils and the Lebanese Muslim Association, as the examples of socially conservative organisations.

[14] Some of these include Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria, the Muslim Women National Network Australia (MWNNA) and Al Zahra Muslim Women's Association who are seriously involved in a range of alliances (see Hussein and Imtoual, 2009: 8).

[15] Similarly, in the "'Living Spirit': Muslim Women and Human Rights Forum", participants expressed feelings that that Islam and human rights principles were largely compatible and played a major role in Muslim women's lives. Many workshop participants expressed that Islam provided them with more human rights than the international laws based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They found the application of human rights within Islamic practices and beliefs to be more practical (HREOC, 2006: 17).

[16] For instance, undoing mythologies about 'cultural practices that violate women's rights' such as those claimed in public discussions after Paris attack requires public attention to minority women's unhindered opinions. One way of achieving this is via continuous engagement with structures such as women's NGOs that represent the experiences of minority culture women.

[17] A dialogical approach has been used by the feminist movement in 1970s and 1980s in Australia to change women's position in the society. As Braithwaite and Bush (1998) argue, it was via the dialogical approach 'that the affirmative action legislation was achieved and the processes of consensus building, strategic alliances and dialog have been used to encourage organizations to look more critically at their work practices, and introduce policies and procedures that provide as many opportunities for women as have been traditionally provided for men'.