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# THE TREATMENT OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY: WOMEN AND MIGRATION FROM NON-EUROPEAN COUNTRIES TO SOUTHERN EUROPE

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**1.Introduction. 2. European cultural identity and multiculturalism. 3. Migrant women maintaining homeland traditions and adjusting to cultural identity of the hosting countries. 4. The role of religion in shaping the experience of migration and immigration of women.**

## **1.Introduction.**

The diverse cultural and social realities faced by Southern Europe as a result of the dramatic increase in immigration and migration from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe inspired this paper.

As such, I will address ethnic and gender diversity, while focusing on the changing cultural identity of Europe and the meaning of migration from non-European countries to Southern Europe.

The analysis of theoretical problems will be enriched by the study of concrete situations that have occurred in recent years in my experience as an activist for the human rights of women.

In fact for the past 20 years I have worked for a non-profit non-governmental organization for women. At the beginning I worked as a volunteer, then, after graduating from law school, I started as a legal assistant and presently I am the coordinator for international projects. Through these various positions, I have been in touch with a diversity of practical problems which led me to analyze the theoretical complexities that underlie them.

At the Antiviolence Center I assist women who come from different parts of the world and who have suffered many forms of violence. My exposure to many different stories and situations has enabled me to consider violence against women from a number of different perspectives. Women who come to southern Europe from non-European Union countries have their own issues and dilemmas but they also face situations that are common to women in general, regardless of where they are from or whether they are legal or illegal residents. It is for this reason that my work with Italian women has helped me to understand the needs and expectations of migrant women. While some issues are specific to migrant women, many of the issues migrant women face are the ones faced by women everywhere.

After a brief introduction to the Antiviolence Center, I will then share some of my personal experiences with the association.

The Antiviolence Center of Parma, Italy (Centro Antiviolenza) is a non-governmental association dedicated to fighting against violence against women and their children and promoting the rights of women in all sectors of society. The association was created in 1985 as non-profit volunteer association and since that time has grown into a fully functioning center for battered women. The center offers free legal advice, psychological assistance, and support in all senses to women who are experiencing situations of violence. In cases where there is a threat to a woman's physical safety the center can offer hospitality for up to one year. In addition to assisting women on a daily basis and providing shelter, the center also organizes conferences, cultural events, courses in the local high schools and universities, courses for the local police force and emergency room personnel, and press conferences to promote awareness of violence against women. The Antiviolence Center of Parma also plays an active role in lobbying and promoting the rights of women. In recent years the demographics of the women seeking help at the Antiviolence Center have changed: over the past ten years the number of women from Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia, and South America have increased dramatically. For this reason the Center has decided to improve its work and to include projects on prostitution, genital mutilation and immigration.

Thanks to the consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, the Antiviolence Center of Parma works with other international NGOs to ensure that the human rights of women are protected and defended in all UN proceedings, particularly in resolutions and agreed conclusions relating to the prevention of violence and trafficking of young women.

Activism must be linked with the study of women's human rights and feminist law as the analyses of social changes and cultural diversity must always be studied through the personal stories of women.

Listening to a woman's personal story involves being respectful of their personal space and culture and making great efforts to respect their boundaries. Gestures and body language are also important while listening to a woman's personal story. Feminists and activists must resist acting in paternalistic ways when talking and listening to migrant women.

Just as there are different forms of communication between women, there are also unequal modes of communication between husbands and wives. From my personal experience I have seen that mediation by family members and relatives is common in the Mediterranean area and in Africa (Quiquerez Finkel, *L'immaginaires juridique africaine. Representations et strategies juridiques de migrants d'Afrique noire en France et au Quebec*, Paris, 1995) and Italy (Ronfani, *L'eguaglianza nelle relazioni familiari: cultura giuridica e strategie femministe*, in *Democrazia e diritto*, 1993, n. 2, 253 e ss.).

In these areas of the world, family members assume specific duties which prevents State control on people's private lives. Migrant women who are victims of domestic violence often have no support or help from their families because very often their families live many miles away. These women may ask for support from the institutions of their hosting country but such help is often difficult to find. It is for this reason that non-profit associations can be very helpful in supporting migrant women to solve their problems. Help can come in different forms and may include an referral to the proper office to get papers and a resident permit, an economic contribution to buy a car to go to work, protection in a safe shelter for women in danger, assistance in finding a job, or self help groups for women that have been victim of violence.

Telling one's own personal story can help a woman find new tools and motivation for dealing with her issues and planning her future. Women are often discrete when telling their personal stories. By listening to these stories, we discover that women have been relegated to the private sector of society in many different cultures. We also realize that story telling has been one way of passing down traditions and rules.

Exchange in different contexts and interaction with emotions can help us to understand cultural stereotypes and prejudice and at the same time can help us to fight against them. Understanding different ethnicities and religions can help us discover the singularity of life and understand that space, place and identity interact in determining the politics of belonging. Communicating our own personal stories, especially when we are women of different cultures, is a way of crossing over gender belongings, homeland, people and religion and helps us to understand the motivations, choices and differences that divide us in practice and in concrete situations. What is personal is political and each personal story leads to political thoughts.

## **2. European cultural identity and multiculturalism.**

Southern Europe is still in the process of adjusting to cultural diversity and the implementation of gender policies. Understanding Europe's changes can be relevant to foreseeing the new social system and future human needs. There is still diversity within E.U. Southern countries (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) and European Southern countries (Albania, Bosnia, France, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain) and the history that contextualizes the diverse areas of Southern Europe is also different. At the beginning of the past century Europe was a land of departure to other countries such as North and South America and Australia. People emigrated from Europe to other lands because for many reasons. Most of the people who left their homelands at that time needed jobs. Later on they left Europe because of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. After the 1950s, the structure of Europe changed and thanks to the economic improvements and the increase of trade and the overseas business, Europeans started to see a better future even in their homeland. This was due not only to the new trend of economy and new ways of transportation, but also because European migrants were demanding more and more contact with their homeland.

Nowadays, Europe has become, once again, a land of migration into which immigrants and migrants try to settle. But since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, things have changed in terms of law and policy, especially, for the people who consider themselves European.

Defining Europe and the boundaries of the 'fortress Europe' has changed the meaning of "European" and each of single member States of the Union (Sassen, *Losing Control, Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995).

This process of adjustment has a direct effect on justice, morality, ethics and fundamental rights.

Globalization and fragmentation affects women and their citizenship. The Mediterranean is a crossroads that represents different ways of being an immigrant and having a cultural identity.

Cultural identity and cultural diversity are often in opposition: E.U. citizens have different and stronger rights than non-E.U. citizens, therefore women from non-E.U. countries often face the most severe forms of hardship. As Europe continues to change, so does the construction and deconstruction of gender and ethnic identity. The changes are not only due to forces of government but are also shaped in large part by the actions and voices of individuals who are leaving their homes and creating new lives.

Differences between European identity and E.U. citizens' identity exist which makes it difficult to superimpose one over the other.

In the meantime, while E.U. citizens still have to understand the meaning of an internal space of trade and belonging, the E.U. has opened up to other realities, economies, laws, policies, languages, communications and populations.

Adjusting to diverse cultures is not only a matter of creating new policies, it is also a matter of understanding what it means on a personal level to each person who is part of this fantastic new reality.

Is there a European identity? If so, is this identity connotative of stereotypes and prejudice? Is there a difference between E.U. cultural identity and European cultural identity?

There are different ways of looking and understanding European identity as there are many forms of European identity (Preuss, *Problems of a concept of European Citizenship*, in *European Law Journal*, 1995, 1, 3, 267). It is very difficult to find a common position; we have to analyze the matter taking into consideration the concept of a postcolonial cultural identity (Braidotti, *Gender, identity and multiculturalism in Europe*, in *New Nomadic Subjectivity*, Rome, 2002).

The interactions between European nations' societies and colonized cultures has led to widespread interest in postcolonial literature and criticism in our own times.

The E.U. is artificial and made by men, despite images of Europe as "natural" geographic area.. The artificial Union itself discriminates against the people who live outside the fortress of the E.U., and have the same European cultural identity (if we can even say such an identity exists). Until now the elements used to consider a person as European were nationality, citizenship and national identity.

What constitutes European cultural identity? Which elements characterize the majority of the people living in the area of E.U. and of Europe? Religion ? – One could say Christianity (catholic, protestant or orthodox) but the presence of Muslims and Jewish disrupts the hegemony; racial origins ? - Caucasian or Indo-European; a history of Nationalism and the Civil War (World War I and II)?

Social practices are the most relevant factors that will change the society of Europe and create a multicultural European identity.

In Europe refugees and migrants ask for recognition of their existence in European culture and identity.

We cannot forget that, even if we are European, we still have our own national identity that reflects our position of being foreigners even in Europe.

Multicultural European citizenship is the answer. Thinking of Europe only by looking at the 'European citizen' is reductive as the society is composed of people coming to Europe from Asia, Africa and America, and also by diverse people who are already in Europe. Together they build a multicultural European identity. Despite these facts, there still exists the idea of preserving Europe from newcomers and reconstructing it as it was before the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with a strong national identity of member states. The historical decline of European State-Nation is a result of a post nation project. We are still trying to recover from the huge events that have transpired during the last century, events that have constructed and deconstructed Europe. Such events include the fall of the Berlin Wall and the two World Wars. From my point of view, we have to see that Eurocentric thought is completely consumed: most of the time it reflects racist and xenophobic reactions and nationalistic paranoia. These factors can explain the racist and sexist aspects of European culture.

Instead of such an approach, Europe could become a location in which is possible to resist racial, ethnic, gender and sexual discrimination and the European Union could be seen not as a redefinition of National States but as a call for common policy to help Europe achieve the goal of non-discrimination.

Flexibility of citizenship is linked to a multicultural identity in Europe and to the opening of a new E.U. in 2004, giving anyway the old idea of universality and universalism of Europe.

The world is composed of different continents and people who migrate from one continent to another. We can no longer think that Europe is the center of the world: the rules established by Europe over the past 400 years have affected colonized land but fortunately not all places in the world have been colonized. There are still some places that are not affected at all by our mentality or our way of living. Imposing European thought is to deprive people of their own identity and it is against the common sense of living.

The consumption of 'others' as Europe's history teaches, is comparable to what England, Spain, Portugal, Holland, Germany, Belgium and Italy have done. For centuries we have been exploiting other people and other people's land. But not only the Europeans committed such acts. We must also think about Japan and Russia. The world has been at war and has been conquered by the economic power of Europe and the damage that has been caused is still evident.

The idea of having a land free of war and violence against women, with each State having its own sovereignty is something we should strive for.

Imagination, emotion, desire and passion are useful to be able to build a common European cultural identity: gender theory could be very helpful in the making of such an identity.

Antifascist traditions are important and unforgettable: the fortress of Europe is symbolic and material. At the same time it has its roots in a fascist tradition. Keeping someone out of a land just because he or she hasn't been lucky enough is a real deprivation in the III millennium.

The idea of postnational State is failing. The idea of a Europe of Nations as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is coming back and taking its place. Police, security, defense and frontiers are old concepts that a conservative part of Europe is trying to revitalize.

The social imaginary of Europe is changing and we have to realize that it is time to have an important debate on the topic. Citizenship as political and juridical subjectivity is connected to personal identity: dividing citizenship from identity is a process in which we have to believe, because this will help Europe to find a new imaginary.

Feminist and gender theory can contribute to the construction of a new and diverse idea of Europe.

Subjectivity, daily life, and personal stories are evidence that political, legal, economic and social systems have to take many issues into account before shaping a new and changed European cultural identity.

The political setting of feminism helps us to find identity structures such as class, race, nationality, age, sexual orientation, and to individuate the differences between them. Situated knowledge and partial settings can provide new avenues for theory and identity practice.

The differences that exist among women are a resource that can be useful for constructing a new identity.

Multiculturalism and post colonial identity are taken into account by feminist theory even if some feminist have concerns on the topic (Okin, *Is multiculturalism bad for women?* Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999).

Gender and sexual difference is crucial in constructing the new identity of Europe and deconstructing the old and dominant one.

Women and migration in Southern Europe need new policies and new attention from the the European Union and from each country within the Union (Burman, *Justice for Social Change in a 'multi-cultural' Society*, in Quaderni fiorentini, 1985).

Nowadays, member States use the anti migrant and refugee policies to reconstruct a E.U. identity. The idea of the boundaries of Europe is utilized by each member State as an excuse to limit immigration and humiliate women, men and children coming from non E.U. Countries into the E.U. Detentions camps are like prisons where torture is allowed and defended as necessary in order to keep order and rules.

Women from different backgrounds should act to improve human rights in the Mediterranean.

Networks between NGOs and feminists from different countries should put pressure on European policy and society as well as national governments to protest the political exclusion of women.

### **3. Migrant women maintaining homeland traditions and adjusting to cultural identity of the hosting countries.**

The commercialization of frontiers during the last 10 years has provided new perspectives and created new trends in migration. Before the 1990s, most of the people coming into Europe were refugees from Communism. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, many aspects of women's immigration and migration have changed, particularly in the case of boundary crossing. While most people are no longer immigrating to escape ideological oppression, many are immigrating to escape poverty, misery, war and armed conflicts and inequalities.

Migrant women from non-European Countries have to face cultural diversity and different realities from the ones they come from; therefore it is difficult for them to maintain their home traditions and their cultural identities.

Female immigration is heterogeneous and is determined by multiple factors such as different origins, social differences, diverse education and migrating motivations.

Women from the South, through autonomous plans or by following family members, migrate because of the impoverishment of the international economic system. Total immigration of women in South Europe comprises roughly 49% of the total.

Crossing frontiers forces women to adjust their cultural identities in order to be integrated: this implies that women have a process in which they are involved. The route they have to walk is difficult and long because the home country is completely different from the new hosting one. Relations between people are always complicated and, if you are from a different country and don't speak the language, it's even more difficult. When a woman leaves her home country and her house, maybe her dearest affection such as her children, it is always because she is looking for a change. Maybe it is a matter of economic problems or a family matter, or maybe she is trying to promote her personal life or her family life or trying to empower herself; anyway she still will be in the margins both cultural than spatial (bell hooks, *Elogio del margine*, Milan, 1998).

This is a precarious position and can lead to a double belonging.

Being foreigner in a foreign territory, can also help natives to see things with a new sight. It allows criticism and elaboration.

Sometimes these experiences can cause problems between native and migrants, or even inside people themselves.

Or it can migrants to feel neither part of one or of the other world, because they are without relation and linkage, and are vulnerable both in body and mind.

It is important to understand the relation with the homeland culture and the threat of the new land culture: women are traditionally trustees of the cultural continuity and have the role of preserving and translating culture.

Women sometimes feel that their role in the new land is different from the one at home. They have to adapt to the new experience and start to build a new identity, maybe different from the one at home. Daily adjustment and adaptation are constant (Bachu, *Identities constructed and reconstructed: representation of agent women in Britain, in Migrant Women. Crossing Boundaries and Changing Identities*, Oxford, 1993). Nowadays, migrant women have contacts, relatives and relations with other migrants in different foreign countries. Travel and migration don't seem anymore to be an absolute uprooting; people interact in different way; culture and traditions mix.

Thanks to new technologies, such as the Internet and communications, women can still keep contact with relatives, children at home and brothers and sisters all over the world.

Women's aim is also to go back to their home country with different outlook for her and for her relatives.

Migrant women, unless is impossible for different reasons, such as political or judicial, when they leave their home land, still think they will be able to go back somehow and sometimes in the future.

Europe is seen as a land to dock at, and also to be able to leave it someday. Coming to Europe is seen as a conquest, but also the dream of going back to the homeland, is a conquest, if it is made by choice.

At the same time Europe is seen also as a land of transition to Canada or United States. These States are commonly recognized by migrants as more satisfying by their way of living. By the way, Canadian policies for migrants are one of the most efficient and effective: in Canada, integration and multiculturalism has been accepted and implemented since a long time now. Starting from accepting the diverse French and English cultures, the multicultural approaches to identity are achievements for all sectors of society.

Refugees as well have a different treatment from the one in Southern Europe.

Women who seek refugee status in Southern Europe are numerous and they are the majority with respect to men seeking refugee status. Nevertheless, the majority of refugee permits are given to men. Neglecting the rights of women is based on the fact that the States don't recognize the common persecution that women are victims of and which provide motivation for them to leave. Such persecution includes those that are perpetrated by harmful traditional practice, or sexual violence. Such crimes are not seen by international treaty as forms of torture.

In other cases the political activism of women is not seen as comparable to that done by men. Prejudice against women's political involvement exists all over the world.

The position of women asking for refugee status is even harder than the other migrant women, because they cannot have contact with their homeland and must leave all their affection behind.

Women seeking refugee status have hardly recognition of their Status. Asking for recognition of specific needs of women in international treaty and in E.U. policy is fundamental, otherwise all the women that come into the E.U. escaping from any form of violence that is perpetrated against them by States or political institutions will become victims again in the new country because of lack of recognition of women human

rights (Kelson, *Granting Political Asylum to Potential Victims of Female Circumcision*, in *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law*, 1995).

Harmful traditional practices are numerous and different. They include forced marriages, female genital mutilation, forced pregnancy, ethnic rape, honor killing, acid scar, trafficking and others.

These harmful traditional practices are deep-rooted in cultures: women trying to escape to that perpetration are symbols, positive and negative, for society.

When a migrant woman comes to Southern Europe looking for new life, she tries to recover from the run. She should be able to settle and have recognition of her struggle: having the right for her children and family to rejoin her, would be a chance of civilization for the hosting country.

To recall the right to her family, a woman has to wait years and she needs to put together papers and hosting State permissions; all this has many costs for her even in her expectations that times to times get frustrated. Sissy from Sierra Leone came to the Antiviolence Center trying to bring her children with her to Italy. She had all the permissions needed in two years but her husband decided that instead of sending her children to Italy, he would get a new wife in Sierra Leone as a new mother for Sissy's children. Now Sissy is not able to talk to them anymore and she is desperate. She is trying again to have permission on her name this time, but now there is the civil war and everything is going to be much harder. In the meantime she's working to support herself and her children in her homeland.

The typical jobs that are given to women coming to Southern Europe are care and cure: the sexual industry and prostitution. These two jobs seem obligatory. Stereotypes of migrant people living in the hosting country helped to build collective imaginary that prejudices migrant women looking for jobs. Prejudice and racism is evident in Southern Europe: being a migrant from the South or from Eastern Europe, being black or of a religious or cultural context not similar to the Eurocentric model means obstacle in exercising one's rights, in developing subjectivity and to an equal dialogue in society.

For all migrant women, finding a job is very difficult and it will never be the same one they had at home.

Women with a degree from high school or college or university are forced to accept health care positions in assisting old people or doing cleaning in private houses. So the care system of households and health assistance is given to migrant women. Most of the time these jobs are low paid, illegal, and on the black market which means these women don't have any social security, holidays, resident permits and rights.

Working night and day in a family as housemaid deprives and limit substantially a migrant: she loses physical, psychological and emotional space. She has limitation on her personal freedom. From an active role inside her family she becomes subordinated in someone else's house. Most of the women that have diploma from high school are involved in housework.

The labor market is still divided on the basis of gender: migrant women face modern forms of slavery through the trafficking and smuggling of human beings. Large numbers of trafficked women who enter E.U. countries legally and illegally are forced into prostitution and face different consequences according to race. Male dominance starts on women's bodies and extends to personal relations to invade the public sphere of life and society and different sectors of economy, culture and politics.

The sex trade is based on male sexual habits relating to affection and to daily responsibility in affective relations. Italian men are the largest group of European men who goes regularly to prostitute for sexual intercourse. The analysis of men's reaction to the exploitation of women's sexuality is interesting: no Italian man will ever tell you that he ever paid for sex. But the number of women that are on the street and victims of sexual exploitation is really unbelievable. So men don't say the truth.

If there are women in the streets giving away themselves for money, it means that there are men interested and asking for that.

To fight this phenomenon it is important to act on girls in the street, explaining them that they can be helped if they want to have a resident permit and a different and regular job thanks to art. 18 of the Italian Immigration Act that allows them to get out of the sex trade, if they want to.. The Antiviolence Center also coordinates a satellite office in the municipality of Fidenza that is open one day per week to the public and one day per week to women with appointments. Nighttime street trips take place once a week for the purpose of helping women escape trafficking, raising awareness about HIV/AIDS and STDs, and helping young women with anything they need.

In the Emilia-Romagna Region the phenomenon of trafficking is rapidly increasing as more and more and young women especially from Nigeria, Albania, Moldavia and Ukraine, but also from many other states, are introduced illegally into the country via the sex market. In the areas where the prostitution operates there has been a huge increase of tension and social emergency. Problems connected with social health, violence and trafficking of illegal migrants have raised the necessity of programs of social protection instituted by the

Emilia-Romagna Region in 1996. The Antiviolence Center of Parma joined these efforts in June 2002 by monitoring the phenomenon, providing support and assistance to young women who are victims of trafficking, and assisting any women who express a desire to escape the market of sexual exploitation.

The phenomenon of trafficking of young women for sexual exploitation is very complex and is constantly changing. It is therefore a very difficult problem to solve and requires flexibility and creativity on the part of many institutions, organizations, and agencies.

Trafficking in young women is known to be a trans-national problem that will only be resolved through the joint efforts of different countries.

It is important as well to work with men to educate them to have a different approach with sexuality and with women: the role of men and young boys to achieve gender equality is fundamental for women.

Discrimination on the basis of gender is multiple when connected with race and ethnicity. Even on the streets the sex market has discrimination within itself: Patricia, a girl from Nigeria in the street gets paid less for the same job as Irina, a woman from Ukraine.

Women come from Eastern Europe with high expectations. They are looking for a different life where they can work and have a chance for better life. Instead the trafficker is linked with a criminal organization that already has a structure in the migrating country and from which is almost impossible to escape.

The traffickers take away your documents, your passport, and forces the newcomers into the streets, in any season. Most times girls cannot live in the same town where they work, and have to travel by train; normally they live 300 km away and must go to work every day. They have to earn at least € 500 a day, Patricia from Nigeria normally gets paid around € 15 for sexual intercourse while Irina from Ukraine gets € 25.

Is there a reflection on sexuality? Italian men say that if they go to prostitute it's because Italian women can't give them enough. They put the blame on women. Is this affecting sexuality, sexual behavior and affection? Well, this is a social and cultural problem and we should at least think about it.

Lack of rights for women makes society less suitability for human living.

It is also important to consider the issues faced by the 'hosting' country when large numbers of people are entering as immigrants and migrant workers.

Some native think that the constant pressure of migration on Mediterranean shore can make the phenomenon of women's subordination so impressive that when it will reach the north area of E.U., were there is a better position for women in society, it could lead to worrying consequences if we'll not be able to handle it. Migrant's communities often discriminate against women, imposing a subjected culture. The private sector of family life is reserved by the community network to inside rules and cannot be touched by the hosting State law.

Domestic violence is one of the most representative situations, in which we can test the influence of community appurtenance: influences on women's decisions by her closed family and mediations from the people of the community are normal. Everything is set to avoid the legal intervention of the hosting State's institutions.

Najet, from Tunisia, had problems with the Courts for Minors because of episodes of domestic violence committed by her husband against her and her children. It happened that she had to go to the hospital when she was pregnant of her second child because of biting by her husband. Then after few days, she went back to her house with her husband, because she didn't have any other place to go. For a while everything was almost fine. Then the Italian Courts for Minors intervened into the relationship, asked the mother to choose between her husband and her children and forbid the father to visit the child without a social assistant. She chose to come to the Antiviolence Center to ask protection from her husband and from the Italian State. She was wondering why the State of another country was intervening inside the relations of two Tunisian citizens.

Complex aspects of daily life show the difficulties of reconciling patterns and norms which may often be very different from what migrant women are used to. Rebuilding your life from scratch both mentally, economically and socially is hard.

Migrant women try to adapt to the hosting country, but handling different habits is very difficult: women are supposed to keep traditions alive also because they will go back some day.

Recreating a network of social contacts and reconstructing one's life is no easy.

In the complexity of dynamic transformation of migrant's women life, staying in a western country is not always better than the country origins' life. In the home country there is a network of families and sociality that provides more protections; women do not suffer from isolation and can count on their traditional role.

The rights of migrant women have to be implemented through specific women's associations that try to avoid the male community power and decisions. Some migrant women are active within associations. So

they are considered more frequently as active subjects also in the hosting society: women promote changing of social transformations (Sen, *Development as freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000).

Migrant women are protagonists of a new form of associations of migrants and native: exchanges of experiences and getting together in communities, supports better integration with the hosting society through participation.

Association between migrant women, becomes a political strategy: natives and migrants may put together diversities to face difficulties and realize individual, family and groups projects.

European women should recognize migrant women as a diverse female subjectivity that carries resources and needs. Absence of recognition of migrant's women rights could reflect the vulnerability of European women's rights. The rights of women have been achieved through battles in social, economical, individual and cultural life, but they are still in danger.

Feminist analysis must be brought to the public sphere of society to approach a different subjectivity. We should try to use it as well to solve moral, ethical, juridical and political problems of modern society.

The theory of positioning of gender emphasizes the recognition of differences between women, especially racial and economic ones (Puwar, *Parole situate e politica globale, in South Asian Women in the Diaspora*, Oxford, 2003). This can help us to contextualize social and cultural alienation.

#### **4. The role of religion in shaping the experience of migration and immigration of women.**

Inequalities are the origins of migration and regional conflicts: the E.U. recognize that fighting inequalities, alienation and violence against women could led to an active participation of population in economic, social and political sphere.

In fact, among the reason that violence on women is so widespread and present in all societies is the fact that for centuries it has been ignored. The crimes went unpunished and the victims were silenced and ignored.

The Mediterranean area is living in a time in which women's human rights are going backwards.

Lately the Mediterranean has been crossed by conflicts in the Balkan area with huge violation of women human rights and violence perpetrated on them. Violence against women continued anyway through religious fundamentalism in the south bank of Mediterranean such as in Algeria.

Differences between women in the Mediterranean area exist; these have been useful to find common spaces and solidarity between them.

Discrimination and the exclusion based on sex and gender are well known in the area. But women have been building, surviving and resistance sets to enrich and transform nations and international institutions. Minority women, including young women, are subject to violence and to discrimination which is often due to their visible difference. Discriminatory attitudes towards minority women often exclude them from acting as equal European.

Balkan and North African environments for women are similar but as it is any were in the world, women do not have the same rights as men.

Even in the most developed countries of northern Europe, such as Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark, where women's rights are respected, there is still physical and economic discrimination, such as domestic violence and rape.

The concept of civilization and the confrontation between different civilization in Mediterranean area is everyday a way of experimenting with different cultures and how they clash (Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization*, New York, 1996).

How should we achieve sustainable cohabitation of diverse civilizations in every part of the Mediterranean area?

The clash of civilizations reflects the problem of the universality of rights and cultural relativism.

The religious fundamentalism and regime based on ethnical appurtenance is excluding women from public and private spheres of Mediterranean civilization.

It is relevant to address the role of religion in shaping the experience of immigration and migration for members of hosting countries as well as individual migrant and immigrant women and men. The way in which Islam and Christianity, as well as other religions, approach sexuality and define women's gender and marital roles affects the reporting of crimes and the implementation of new laws and policies to defend the rights of women.

Fundamentalism is based on inadequate social and economic condition of some Islamic country.

The patriarchal system on which male society and fundamentalism are based suppresses the symbolic of women and relegates females outside public space of society.



Arab and Muslim women in Europe come from diverse backgrounds and do not form a universal homogeneous category. There are differences according to age, social background, education, religion, employment, but there are also commonalities as they are all women, migrants, living in European contexts. Women embody diverse strategies and the existence of common Europe is making it easier to network among the various Muslims groups within E.U. borders.

Among young women there is a self-conscious exploration to religion, with traditions and rules to be respected.

Sometimes religious fundamentalism gets space in households because women take an active role in developing family rules and religion belongings.

In Europe Muslims are more than 50% of migrants and Muslim association claim rituals and social religious behavior. Islam carries values, belief, and rules organized in sets of norms very deep rooted in migrant population. This gives migrants the power of contracting Fridays instead of Saturdays, having veils on pictures instead of the bright faces of women, and adapting working rhythms to Ramadan.

The patriarchal system of Islamic society is carried into Europe and achieves strengths through the submission of women: the female position in some Islamic country is formally discriminated and therefore their participation becomes weaker.

But on the other hand, sometimes religion can be less effective because of the distance from the home country and to official institutions.

Some women from Muslim countries come to Europe to avoid the rigid structure of the State and traditional Muslim institutions.

In most cases, religion - Muslim or Catholic - reassessment appears to migrants as an identity element.

There are different process of building personal identity and one of them is to do it in contraposition to the hosting country: religious and cultural needs do exists and can become a site of contraposition and conflict (Facchi, *I diritti nell'Europa multiculturale*, Roma-Bari, 2001).

Islam and Christianity have become more cultural religions that religious: in Europe there is a relation between religion and migrant women that reflects intimacy with institutions; more spiritual than ritual or juridical.

The need of the Muslim Community to have recognition from E.U. Member States reveals the intention of asking for national religious status.

But the Muslim religion hasn't itself given a submissive role to women any more than any other religion.

Islamic as well as Christian traditions are based on the fact that God first created man and then from man woman was created; the existence of Eve's fault and the fact that woman was created by and for man, exists both in Catholic and Islamic religion.

These concepts reflects the shape given to society by patriarchal system.

There are many reasons for coming to South Eastern Europe: Women come for work reasons, or family reasons or refugee reasons, and some are trafficked. Most Muslim women come in order to be reunited with their husbands.

Most of the times autonomous women are not accepted by the homeland community not by the migrant community in Southern Europe. Therefore they have to find a husband if they want to be accepted, and conform to religious rules.

Religion has shaped the roots of migrants: the Catholic Church has been recruiting girls from South America to come to Italy to become housemaids.

Other girls came to Italy in the same way and for the same purpose from the Philippines and other parts of Asia, such Mauritius and India.

Years ago migration was controlled by the Catholic Church. Now the Catholic Church asks the Italian Government to prioritize catholic migrants over Muslims, using stereotypes of Catholics and prejudices against Muslims. This is another way of giving more power to the Catholic religion.

There is a linkage between religion and gender in migration (Campani, *Donne, Islam e processi di discriminazione in Italia*, in Donne, migrazione, diversità, Roma, 2002): autonomous women come more from catholic countries than from any other land. Instead the majority of Muslim women come to join their husbands and families.

Migrant women normally find support in religious institutions. They have more support from religious than from native women. Women can meet in religious spaces and get help and exchange information. Religion helps to build migrant communities. Churches for Catholics and Mosque for Muslims are the places where women get together to pray and to exchange solidarity.

But these spaces cannot help women with the difficulties they face inside the family or in the religious community. Association between women, migrant and native, could avoid the gaps of religious fundamentalism.

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