

Migration, Islam and Masculinities: Transforming Emigration and Immigration Societies

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The Role of Religion in Social Ascension among Migrant North African Communities

My research focuses on a North African community of Muslim migrant male workers in France. During the last three decades these men arrived as non qualified workers, set up their own companies and became businessmen. They based their activities on the development needs of their countries of origin and the business opportunities offered by a free and dynamic market in the receiving countries. Some experienced an extraordinary economic and social ascension exploiting, in a time of Islamic resurgence, the pilgrimage ritual to Mecca as a booming and hitherto unexplored market based on religious products, within which they created their favorite niches.

The main findings of my research are as follows:

- Islam is more a binding element within the young and fragmented North African immigrant community, originating from different countries and having nothing else in common than religion, than a return to religion;
- Religion is being instrumentalized economically as it offers a market, an alternative product label to be bought and sold. An entire industry has developed around the pilgrimage to Mecca: introductory education for a successful pilgrimage ritual, special pilgrimage clothing, special gifts, administrative procedures etc;
- Finally, the accession of only men, not women, to international mobility, matrimonial strategies and the way patrimonies are constituted, reflect the continued masculine domination in the process of social ascension.

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