

Migration, Islam and Masculinities: Transforming Emigration and Immigration Societies

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Stigmatized Masculinity: Muslim Gender Relations and Cultural Citizenship in Europe

This paper demonstrates how the stigmatization of Muslim masculinity arises from a process by which local cultural practices in western countries – especially culturally specific aspects of gender and family organization – are confounded in public discourse with an idea of the ethical subject that is based on universally applicable ideas of human rights and democracy. When these two levels of culture are confounded, minorities that do not conform to local cultural expectations are also presumed to fall outside what is expected of a citizen in a western democracy. Through this process, Muslim organizations of gender and family relations are identified as oppressive of women, and the Muslim man is located as other. He is stigmatized in the name of freedom, democracy and human rights and is mythologized as the antithesis of these principles. Because of his masculine position within a family organized in terms of hierarchy and gender segregation, he is recognized as seeking honor and respect in ways that are incompatible with the ethical subject of a democracy, through violence and the oppression of women. His location as other stimulates moral outrage at the violation of culturally local but universalized ethical assumptions about the proper organization of gender and social space, and his stigmatization goes unrecognized. I deconstruct this discursive linkage of the democratic subject with culturally specific western ideologies of gender and family organization through two basic strategies: 1) by demonstrating how these conflatons and stigmatizations occur in public discourse and 2) by showing how Muslim men themselves struggle to align their own cultural practices and masculine identities with their understandings of the democratic subject.