

Migration, Islam and Masculinities: Transforming Emigration and Immigration Societies

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Dr. Knut Graw

Barça am Barzakh: Life Histories and Social Theory from the African- European Borderzone

Barça am Barzakh, 'Barcelona or death': This unambiguous epitome has become something like a *cri de guerre* for many West African migrants, reflecting both the decidedness of the mostly young men trying to make it to Europe, as well as their knowledge of the imminent risks involved in the journey they are about to undertake.

The dramatic truth of this expression is amply reflected in the coverage of African-European migration in Western media. While in autumn 2005, the story of African migration reached a temporal climax with the pictures of migrants killed during the attempt to climb the fences of the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla, today's archetype of West African migration is that of a seemingly endless stream of fishing boats operating as makeshift ferries between the Mauritanian and Senegalese shores and the Canary Islands, many of which are lost at sea. The prominent place of these images of West African migration in the media contrasts notably with the almost complete anonymity of its protagonists.

The main problem with this relative absence of detailed accounts of life histories from the African-European borderzone is that migration comes only into view either as a humanitarian catastrophe or a matter of border security while the underlying cultural and socio-economic dynamics remain largely out of sight, or are reduced to generalized visions of the African continent as being struck by violent conflict, poverty, and famine. Starting from the personal experiences and accounts of West African migrants, this paper argues that West African migration should not be

solely considered in terms of socio-judicial conflict but as an existential trajectory and emergent space of postcolonial praxis and experience.

Looking at the migratory process from a threefold perspective (pre-departure, departure, and arrival), the theoretical analysis will focus consecutively on: (1) the impact of globalization and the phenomenon of the borderzone on endogenous patterns of mobility and agency, (2) the experiential and biographic significance of the process of bordercrossing, and (3) the openings and repercussions of life in Europe's new African Diasporas for the individual subject as well as for socioeconomic and cultural dynamics in the countries of origin. Answering to the conference's innovative focus on the relation between masculinity, Islam and migration, the paper will specifically address the question in what way and to what extent West African migration draws and impacts upon Islamic religious practice, gender identities and gender relations.

The paper draws on extended anthropological research in Senegal and Gambia (2002-2004, November/December 2005), Portugal (March 2004) and Spain (June 2006).

Dr. Knut Graw

Africa Research Center
Catholic University of Leuven

<http://soc.kuleuven.be/arc/staff/knutgraw.htm>
knut.graw@soc.kuleuven.be