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Portraying the lives of North African and Middle Eastern women and girls in places as diverse as Argentina, Canada, France, India, and the United States accentuates the artifi ciality of the concept “Arab diaspora.” As many of the articles in this file point out, a constructed sense of group identity was initially externally imposed. It was based more on the defi ning power of host societies than on any common denominators easily recognized by the respective Arab immigrant communities themselves.

Historically, Arab pioneer migration was predominantly Eastern Mediterranean and Christian, either from Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, or Palestine. These fi rst generation migrants often had more in common with neighboring, early 20th century Greek, Southern Slav or Italian diaspora communities in the Americas, Australia or Western Europe than they did with the predominantly Muslim societies from which they came. This was nowhere more obvious than with the issue of gender.

Until the collapse of the European colonial empires after World War II, the ongoing shortage of labor led to a large scale recruitment of young, able-bodied men from North Africa, South Asia, the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. A signifi cant number of these new immigrants were Muslim and as the “guest workers” stayed on to form immigrant communities, migration became increasingly feminine. This laid the foundation for one of the most contentious issues surrounding Arab migration to the West, i.e. the role of Islam in determining the position of women in industrialized, liberal democracies.

This issue of Al-Raida covers a wide variety of topics, encompassing seemingly unrelated issues such as war, the arts, forced migration, motherhood, the ICT communications revolution, the anti-colonial rebellions in the Middle East, and the roles played by religion and politics in the self-construction of Arab diaspora community identities. It deals with a timeframe of over 100 years and, with the exception of Africa and Australia, covers all signifi cant regions of immigration. On the surface, most of these articles share one common denominator, i.e., their focus on women and girls from North Africa and the Middle East. As editor of this file I hope, however, that the reader will soon realize that these contributions also refl ect the manner in which Arab diaspora women have gradually begun to take control of their own fate; defi ning themselves in opposition to both the prejudice inherent in their host communities and the entrenched gender traditions still predominant in their countries of origin.

In the fi rst four articles of this file, the authors deal with the oftentimes controversial nature of the role of Arab women as seen from within their immigrant communities and from the perspective of the majority populations in the West. Maria del Mar Logroño Nartona deals with the confl icts that rocked the Syrian and Lebanese communities in Argentina with respect to French occupation of the Middle East after World War I. She highlights how this issue impacted the portrayal of Arab women in the diaspora print media. Along similar lines, Nina Sutherland deals with the collapse of the French colonial empire in North Africa and how refugee and migrant women from Algeria began to gradually redefine themselves. Rachel Egg Bulher introduces four artists, from Algeria, Iran, Morocco, and Palestine, who deal with the thorny issue of the Muslim women’s covering in very personal and contradictory ways. The hijab, like no other symbol, clearly marks the transition from the historical, predominantly Christian Arab emigration of the past, to a modern, overwhelmingly Muslim world.

Gunther Dietz and Nadia El-Shohoumi deal with a phenomenon which is typical of the traditional countries of emigration in the northern Mediterranean. As they gradually became more modern and secular in the late 1980s and 1990s, countries like Greece, Spain and Portugal experienced a wave of predominantly Muslim labor immigration for the fi rst time. Drawn by job openings in the burgeoning Spanish economy, as a result of European Union accession, North African women were caught in a triangle of cultural alienation, which they shared with post-fascist indigenous women.

These four case studies, which all make important points about the history of women in the Arab diaspora, are followed by two articles with a strong cultural-sociological emphasis. In “Arabs, Copts, Egyptians, Americans,” Phoebe Farag demonstrates how current day Egyptian Christians are torn between multiple identities, which have unique implications for Coptic women in the United States. Helen Vallianatos and Kim Raine report on the way giving birth in Canada can contribute to a mutually experienced sense of Arab female identity. In both articles, the authors offer insights into the way being “the Other” in a largely benign environment makes Arab women aware of the costs and benefi ts of living away from a “homeland” that they largely only know from a visitor’s perspective.

The fi nal section of this file is dedicated to personal, anecdotal, and self-refl exive opinion pieces, interviews and reports about distinctive aspects of the Arab diaspora. In an interview with Guita Hourani, Al-Raida managing editor Myriam Sfeir asks LERC’s director how her experience as a refugee and emigrant in North America and Japan, during and after the Lebanese Civil War, has affected her work as an administrator and scholar in the fi eld of diaspora studies. In “Aqlah Brice Al Shidyaq: A Woman Peddler from Northern Lebanon,” Guita Hourani tells the story of a pioneer Lebanese migrant to the United States, whose individual courage, perseverance and integrity laid the foundation for her family’s future. Hourani illustrates that 19th century Arab emigration was also feminine. During the 2006 Summer War in Lebanon, the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) monitored the mass evacuation of Lebanese dual nationals and summer visitors of Lebanese origin. In “Gender Mainstreaming Forced Migration Research,” Hourani and I relect on the diffi culties inherent in developing gender sensitive research methods in the midst of a crisis situation. Rita Stephan recalls how the introduction of the internet transformed the nature of Arab-American feminist activism over the last two decades. Based on personal experience, she underlines the link between the anti-colonial Arab struggle and the fight for gender equality.

Running parallel to Stephan’s portrayal of Arab female activism, Nancy Jabra tells the story of Lebanese activist women in southern California. In a personal opinion piece, Jehan Mulla deals with the exclusion of Lebanese daughters of foreign fathers from Arab society, because of the sexist nature of Middle Eastern citizenship laws. Finally, Naime Athalyan, an Indian graduate student, describes how she “discovered” the Arab diaspora community in her native town of Pune City, and discusses how Muslim Arab female students rediscovered and redefined their own identity in a largely Hindu environment.
In the last two decades, Spain has experienced a remarkable increase in its immigrant population (Cornelius, 2004), of which North Africans make up a significant percentage. Concurrent and concomitant to this increase, since the end of the Franco regime, a strong tendency for conversion to the Islamic religion has been observable in Andalusian cities like Granada and Córdoba. In the face of these two phenomena, anti-Islamic and anti-“Moorish” attitudes reflecting the combination of ethnic, religious, and nationalist dimensions of discrimination now prevail amongst large segments of the Spanish public. These attitudes are deeply-rooted and can be interpreted in one sense as historically transmitted stigmatizations of “the other”. As Stallaert (1998) explains in detail, since 1492, when the process of the so-called reconquista resulted in the “Christian reconquest” of the Iberian peninsula from the various Muslim ruling dynasties beginning with the final fall of Granada after a lengthy siege by the “Catholic kings”, the Spanish nation-state mission has been founded on a mixture of ethnically-based “anophobia” and religiously motivated “Islamophobia” (Runnymede Trust, 1997). The construction and imposition of a common Spanish-Castilian hegemonic identity has always relied on measures of religious persecution — such as the institution of the Santo Inquisicion, originated in Spain — as well as “ethnic cleansing”, implemented since 1492 through “laws of blood purity”, which constantly blur supposedly biological, ethnic, and religious terminology.

Accordingly, even before the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington and the March 11, 2004 bombings in Madrid, increasing xenophobic and particularly islamophobic tendencies were observable within Spanish society; the Madrid bombings have now made former inherently hidden deeply-rooted attitudes more visibly explicit. Particularly affected by this newly emerging islamophobia are Muslim women, whose societal functions, in the opinion of the majority, are reduced to motherhood and obedience to their husbands. For several centuries now, Islam and in particular Muslim women have been misperceived, misunderstood, misinterpreted and consequently portrayed as the opposing reflection of the West’s self-portrait as a modern, secularized, and inclusive civilization (Martín Muñoz, 1999). Regardless of their age, profession, ethnic or social class background, citizenship and immigration status, the West focuses on Muslim women as being the stereotypical prototype of “etherness”. The recent feminization of North African migration reflects that many Moroccan women from

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Muslim Women in Southern Spain between Discrimination and Empowerment

Gunther Dietz and Nadia El-Shohoumi

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In the last two decades, Spain has experienced a remarkable increase in its immigrant population (Cornelius, 2004), of which North Africans make up a significant percentage. Concurrent and concomitant to this increase, since the end of the Franco regime, a strong tendency for conversion to the Islamic religion has been observable in Andalusian cities like Granada and Córdoba. In the face of these two phenomena, anti-Islamic and anti-“Moorish” attitudes reflecting the combination of ethnic, religious, and nationalist dimensions of discrimination now prevail amongst large segments of the Spanish public. These attitudes are deeply-rooted and can be interpreted in one sense as historically transmitted stigmatizations of “the other”. As Stallaert (1998) explains in detail, since 1492, when the process of the so-called reconquista resulted in the “Christian reconquest” of the Iberian peninsula from the various Muslim ruling dynasties beginning with the final fall of Granada after a lengthy siege by the “Catholic kings”, the Spanish nation-state mission has been founded on a mixture of ethnically-based “anophobia” and religiously motivated “Islamophobia” (Runnymede Trust, 1997). The construction and imposition of a common Spanish-Castilian hegemonic identity has always relied on measures of religious persecution — such as the institution of the Santo Inquisicion, originated in Spain — as well as “ethnic cleansing”, implemented since 1492 through “laws of blood purity”, which constantly blur supposedly biological, ethnic, and religious terminology.

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urban areas have been migrating alone to Spain, which is contrary to the traditional pattern of female North Africans migrating from rural areas as dependents of their husbands and families. Currently, Muslim women are becoming the most important protagonists in the processes of forming and developing a Muslim diaspora community (Martin Muñoz & López Saia, 2003).

In the Context of Southern Spain

An ethnographic study has been conducted (Dietz & El-Shohoumi, 2005) in order to address the largely unknown daily living conditions of these “different” female migrants living in secluding, yet still mainly Catholic, southern Spanish society. Their daily lives are profoundly shaped by diverse, but often overlapping and mutually reinforcing, sources and forms of discrimination and exclusion. Gender-related, citizenship-based, ethnocultural and religiously motivated discriminatory attitudes and behaviors are simultaneously at work — both from the “outside”, the non-Muslim majority in Spanish society, and from within Muslim minority communities.

Granada was the local setting of the research. In this Andalusian city of approximately 300,000 permanent inhabitants, a highly differentiated migrant population has arrived and settled during the last two decades. The main reasons for choosing this city are economic. Granada is the principal commercial city in eastern Andalusia, with economic relations with both the north and the south of Spain and with the African continent, and the eastern province of Almeria, which has been transformed over the last decade into one of Spain’s most important centers for growing olive monoculture and, since 1998, the eastern part of Almeria, which has undergone rapid demographic growth due to immigration. Even though non-European immigrants started to settle in Granada in the second half of the 1980s, a complex economic pattern of urban construction work (dominated by Moroccan and Algerian workers, employed in the construction trade (controlled by Senegalese) and seasonal migrations to the olive harvest in the north as well as to the tomato plantations in Almeria, has evolved. Further advantages of Granada derive from its character as a university city. On the one hand, the flat market responds to the demands of 60,000 students for cheap rental property, from which the migrants also benefit, and on the other hand, the university has attracted highly skilled immigrants. Furthermore, the “orientalist” legacy of the city has turned it into a sensitive and welcoming city for Muslim converts as well (Dietz & El-Shohoumi 2005).

Emerging Muslim Life-Worlds

The infrastructure of the Muslim community in southern Spain is still rather inadequately developed. After emigrating from Morocco, Algeria, and other Muslim countries, what were previously routine religious practices frequently become seriously problematic to fulfill, or at least a challenge for one’s sense of duty. Different strategies are developed in order to cope with these challenges. Some women try to compensate for the lack of context and of cultural embeddedness by increasingly internalizing their faith. In many cases, however, the suddenly missing framework of family and kinship networks imbues a deep feeling of personal isolation weaker their willpower for the daily practice of Islam. This supports only temporarily the sense of support and community. As a result, some institutional representatives say that Muslim women “should not exaggerate” and should not look “as if they were Moroccans”, as this would make it difficult for their Catholic neighbors to “accept” them. A social worker dealing with Muslim women even claimed that some of them are covering their head as a means of self-isolation.

In order to avoid this kind of discrimination, some migrant women in certain situations strategically remove the headscarf, however, this conforming action does not counter the underlying prejudice concerning the phenotypical distinction arising from wearing the headscarf, which results in islamophbic attitudes and the overt rejection of Moroccans. A majority of women who wear the veil regard it as an integral part of their religious and gender identity, and therefore an unquestioned part of their traditions. However, there is a minority of women, mainly of Amazigh origin, who reject the headscarf, which they identify as “something imposed by the Arabs” and above all by “the macho attitude of Muslim husbands”. For this minority, the preservation of an archaic religious symbol, which has nothing to do with higher or lower degree of religiosity, is one of the factors preventing Muslim women from liberating themselves. This perspective, which is aristocratic in the eyes of Muslim families, is supported by the fact that the social and political representation of Muslim women as victims, is sharply contradicted by other women, who emphasize that the variance of veiling customs is just as susceptible to change as any other “article of clothing”. Ironically, several Muslim women, immigrants as well as converts, even claim the hijab serves as an erotic device, while Christian Spanish women are criticized as boringly “naked”.

However, in the migration context of a non-Muslim host society, some women perceive the headscarf not as a question of custom or fashion, but as a strictly religious symbol of identifying oneself vis-a-vis the Christian “other”. In their eyes, the religious practice is seen as a unique opportunity of encountering divinity in the daily routine of life. Another frequently discussed issue is the significance and necessity of wearing the headscarf. In Spain, despite the fact that there have been no major public conflicts surrounding the issue of the headscarf, women are “even allowed to wear it when taking a passport photograph”, as one Moroccan interviewer gratefully acknowledged, whereas it is seen as prejudicial when searching for employment or trying to rent a flat. Institutions and NGOs see the “problem” of veiling as a major indicator of the host society’s “racism”. Even though tolerance towards veiling is always expressed, some institutional representatives say that Muslim women “should not exaggerate” and should not look “as if they were Moroccans”, as this would make it difficult for their Catholic neighbors to “accept” them. A social worker dealing with Muslim women even claimed that some of them are covering their head as a means of self-isolation.

Struggling for Community Formation

All female Muslim immigrants and even many young Muslim women studying at Spanish universities who normally feel well integrated, suffer from loneliness, and especially isolation from their families. Their feelings of isolation also reflect the difficulties and challenges which characterize their daily lives in southern Spain. To some extent, an emerging “transnational” and “trans-Mediterranean” migration network can counter this problem, i.e. experienced by frequent visits from and to families living in the region of origin (González Barea, 2003). On the other hand, even married women who migrated in the context of a family reunification complain about difficulties in establishing more stable social and neighborhood relations. This is due to their heavy dependence on their husband’s social and work relationships or on their own employment in the shadow economy, which will be addressed below. While the necessity of community building in the migrant situation is reflected in all of the interviews conducted, immigrant community life is still strongly fragmented and departmentalized according to the needs of the first immigrants, mainly unmarried male employees. The immigrant sections of the two major Spanish trade unions that still dominate associational life are controlled by male representatives, and their union activities are accordingly focused on sectorial issues relevant above all to male employees. Additionally, men also dominate the religious organizational life that is emerging through newly established mosques and religious associations. In the city of Granada, the Consorcio Islámico de Granada at the local level or the Comunidad Musulmana de España at the national level (Rosón Lorente, 2005) is the only Muslim organization with a broadly conceived institutional framework. Unfortunately, this framework unfortunately cannot satisfy the requirements of migrant women, who above all seek the opportunities to meet other Muslim women, in order to hold informal encounters, to get advice, to exchange experiences and to find an atmosphere to be recognized as Muslims, share this attitude. However, other Muslim women openly reject this tendency of using the hijab as a religious distinction or even as an “ethnical marker” in inter-religious contexts. In their view, it turns the issue of veiling into a superficial question of belonging to a religious minority regardless of one’s individual faith and attitude towards religion.
resistance stems from the "illegal" immigrants' fear that these public institutions will denounce and deport them. While many Muslim women criticize the frequent NGO practice of "diverting" them from one organization or institution to another, NGOs are also critical of interacting and experiencing the phenomenon of being uprooted from immediate family, relatives, and other social relations that existed before conversion.

Between Gender, Religion and Ethnicity: Experiences of Discrimination and Racism

Many Muslim women report discriminatory attitudes in the local and personal contexts of their immediate neighborhoods. As one example, they often face discrimination in the process of renting an apartment. According to public institutions and NGOs, the major factor preventing migrant families from renting a well-equipped apartment is the impossibility of paying simultaneously the first month's rent and the deposit. Due to this and to the stereotypical opinion that Moroccan immigrants "don't clean" and "leave apartments in a mess," real-estate owners feel very insecure when dealing with migrant people. In addition to the financial factor, public institutions also perceive "cultural" and "ethnic" problems as the initial challenge of renting an apartment. According to relevant statistics, the major factor preventing migrant families from renting a well-equipped apartment is ignorance about the immigrants' religious and ethnic origin. In particular, the converts stress the negative impact of the Spanish mass media in producing a generally negative and often false picture of the Muslim-Arab world. By reifying the cultural and religious stereotypes, which inevitably guide the perceptions and interactions of the local majority society, many Muslim women express how fed up, despondent, and insulted they feel when always having to counter allusions to "machista" Muslim men and "submissive" Muslim women, to the "hideousness" of Arab men and the "lasciviousness and eroticism of Arab belly-dancers." They are further angered by having to answer explicit questions about the supposed customs of "Arab revenge and blood-feuds," or about the "strangely cultured" rumor according to which "the Arabs" are trying to conquer the "Spanish shores" by sending their pregnant women illegally to the peninsula offering them money for giving birth to "so many moritos." The blurring of distinctions between the religious and the ethno-cultural dimensions of being a Muslim-Arab-Maghrebin woman is also suffered by interviewees within as well as from without (Rosón Lorente, 2005). In the case of Muslim women, this frequently means that particular cultural and geographically limited traits, customs and traditions—be they of Arab, Amazigh or other ethnic origin—are transmitted and acquired as if they formed part of Islam as such (Jawad, 1998). According to a Pakistani woman, who refuses the simplistic identification of one particular cultural horizon with the supposedly global legacy of Islam, "Religion is an easy argument and simply a way of controlling women." Exogenous forms of gender-based discrimination have been documented several times in the course of our study and are mainly based on stereotypes about Muslim-cum-Arab men and women; these stereotypes are often reinforced by social and public opinion. For example, "immigrant" minority communities, who are supposed to be problematic per se, and the "sedentary" host majori-ty society in charge of solving these migration-related problems (Dietz & El Shohoumi, 2005), and the dividing line drawn by public opinion between "immigrant" minority communities, who are supposed to be problematic per se, and the "sedentary" host majori-ty society in charge of solving these migration-related problems (Dietz & El Shohoumi, 2005)...

The blurring of distinctions between the religious and the ethno-cultural dimensions of being a "Muslim-Arab-Maghrebin" woman are also suffered by interviewees inside their newly-emerging communities, where endogenous forces may also use Islam as an ethnic mark-er vs-à-vis the host society. As a result, incipient minority communities are increasingly "ethnicized" from within as well as from without (Rosón Lorente, 2005). In the case of Muslim women, this frequently means that particularly cultural and geographically limited traits, customs and traditions—be they of Arab, Amazigh or other ethnic origin—are transmitted and acquired as if they formed part of Islam as such (Jawad, 1998). According to a Pakistani woman, who refuses the simplistic identification of one particular cultural horizon with the supposedly global legacy of Islam, "Religion is an easy argument and simply a way of controlling women." Exogenous forms of gender-based discrimination have been documented several times in the course of our study and are mainly based on stereotypes about Muslim-cum-Arab men and women; these stereotypes are often reinforced by social and public opinion. For example, "immigrant" minority communities, who are supposed to be problematic per se, and the "sedentary" host majori-ty society in charge of solving these migration-related problems (Dietz & El Shohoumi, 2005), and the dividing line drawn by public opinion between "immigrant" minority communities, who are supposed to be problematic per se, and the "sedentary" host majori-ty society in charge of solving these migration-related problems (Dietz & El Shohoumi, 2005)...

Societal Responses and Institutional Perspectives

Finally, these experiences of discriminatory practices are contrasted, on the one hand, with official public definitions of and attitudes towards discrimination, and on the other hand, with the awareness of ethno-religious dis-
The perspective of Spanish NGOs dealing directly with migrant populations is more nuanced. Contrary to the public institutions, all NGOs admit that exogenous discrimination ... any treatment of women both in Muslim countries and in Islam as a major source of gender-based discrimination.

Conclusions

Even prior to the events of September 11, 2001, Huntington’s evidently accurate prophecy of a “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996) was increasingly becoming an attractive and often cited framework for the debate not only on international relations, but also on Muslim immigrants and integration policies throughout Europe. As briefly sketched above with respect to the issue of Muslim women, a scenario of increasingly visible and explicit islamophobia, arabophobia and anti-immigrant attitudes, which has been existing implicitly before, has been re-solidified in Spain. September 11, attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. and the March 11 bombings in Madrid have only accentuated this phenomenon.

Through the comparison of the experiences expressed by Muslim women themselves, on the one hand, and by their Spanish institutional counterparts on the other, the complexity of the Muslim woman’s particular life-world as part of an emerging minority community inside a non-Muslim environment has become evident. For the Spanish case, this complexity results from a “double dichotomy” to which not only the Muslim women and their male partners but also the Spanish society and its institutional framework are exposed: firstly, the dichotomy of “oriental” religiousness versus “Western” secularism; secondly, the dichotomy of Christian-Castilian versus Muslim-Arab ethno-religious categories (Dietz in press).

As the institutional representatives frequently state, the “return of Islam” to the Iberian Peninsula challenges the process of secularization which the Spanish state and society are currently undergoing. In this perspective, a fundamental contradiction seems to reside in the relation between an all-encompassing, comprehensive worldview (formerly Catholicism, currently Islam) on the one hand, and Western meta-religious laicism, on the other. This perspective, however, is constantly challenged by an ancient rivalry which has been fundamental to the historical emergence and shaping of Spanish national identity, and which persists today inside the Spanish majority society and culture: the supposed antagonism between Islam, perceived as “Arab” or “Moorsish”, and Christianity, in general, and Catholicism, in particular, identified as the predominantly Castilian ethnicity. The resulting ethnic, intercultural and/or inter-religious conflicts analyzed above have a negative impact particularly on Muslim women. These conflicts have a negative impact on their daily experiences precisely at the moment when these first-generation Muslim women are establishing their own communities, struggling for their positions and networks inside a non-Muslim host context.

As reflected in the women’s experiences of both exogenous and endogenous forms of discrimination, ethnocentric perceptions of religious and cultural otherness, and gender-based tendencies of female exclusion and victimization, mutually reinforce each other and end up restricting the development of flourishing intercultural life-worlds in the midst of the multicultural legacy of Andalusia.