ABSTRACT

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

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In this paper 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. My 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. Southern Europe is still in the process of adjusting to cultural diversity and the implementation of gender policies. This process of adjustment has a direct effect on justice, morality, ethics and fundamental rights. The Mediterranean is a crossroads that represents a different way of being an immigrant and having a cultural identity. 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 traditions and their cultural identities. 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. 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. Women who migrate to Southern Europe need new policies and new attention from the European Union and from each country within the Union. The commercialization of frontiers during the last 10 years have provided a wealth of new perspectives and created new trends in migration. Before the 1990s, most of the people coming to 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. As Europe continues to change, so does the construction and deconstruction of gender and ethnic identity. The changes are not only due to the forces of government but are also shaped in large part by the actions and voices of individual people who are leaving their homes and creating new lives. The crossing of frontiers forces women to adjust their cultural identities in order to be integrated. The labor market is still divided on the basis of gender: migrant women face modern forms of slavery through the trafficking and smuggling of women. Large numbers of trafficked women who enter E.U. countries legally and illegally are forced into prostitution, and face different consequences according to race. In conclusion, I will address the role of religion in shaping the experience of immigration and migration for members of host 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. In summary, I will examine 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.