

# Unsettling and Stabilizing Social Order: Educational Discourse Targeting *Young Muslim Males*

## Povzetek

### Preizpraševanje in utrjevanje družbenega reda: izobraževalni diskurzi, usmerjeni proti mladim muslimanom

Avtorica v članku reflektira evropska, še zlasti nemška politična izhodišča, ki določajo izobraževalne diskurze o mladih muslimanih in ki se osredinjajo na ospoljeno nasilje in islamski fundamentalizem. Izobraževalni diskurzi so družbena arena, v kateri se v nacionalnem kontekstu tako preizprašuje kot utrjuje družbeni red, kar velja tudi za spolne režime in etnično-kulturne demarkacije. V tem dominantnem diskurzu so mladi muslimani (moški) obravnavani kot grožnja. Članek se osredinja na mehanizma, po katerih deluje ta diskurz: neupoštevanje koncepta hegemonih moškosti (R. W. Connell) in splošno pomanjkanje védenja o *drugih*. Avtorica tako kritično reflektira dožemanje integracije, migracij in religijsko-kulturnih razlik. Pozornost in nadzor, ki sta posvečena (*muslimanske-mu*) *drugemu*, avtorica razume kot način izogibanja družbenim spremembam, h katerim pripomore tudi izobraževanje. Kritični pogled na ospoljeno nasilje in družbeno (dez-)integracijo razkriva, da je ekspertiza o muslimanih, ki prehaja v izobraževanje, nereflimirana.

**Ključne besede:** izobraževalni diskurzi, mladi muslimani (moški), ospoljeno nasilje, družbena (dez-)integracija

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## Abstract

Taking a closer look at the educational discourse on *young Muslim males* with its focus on gender-based violence and Islamic fundamentalism, this article reflects on the European and especially the German political background of educational tasks and educational research. With regard to gender regimes and ethnic-cultural demarcations within the national context, educational discourse is described as an arena in which social order is both unsettled and stabilized. In this dominant discourse *young Muslim males* are considered a menace. The article highlights its mechanisms: the disregarding of hegemonic masculinities (Connell) and the definition of a general lack of education on the part of the *others*. Hence, the framework of integration, migration, and religious-cultural difference is critically reflected. Focusing and controlling the *Muslim other* is discussed as an evasion of societal change to which education contributes. A critical perspective on gender-based violence and social disintegration unveils the unreflected production of educational expertise about *Muslims*.

**Keywords:** educational discourse, young Muslim males, gender-based violence, social (dis-)integration

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## Introduction

The indissolubly ambivalent character of education<sup>1</sup> is manifest in the pedagogical discourse on *young Muslim males*<sup>2</sup>. Education is ambivalent as it faces extended demands of society, such as ensuring productivity and efficiency as well as providing integration and upward mobility for marginalized groups and eventually prevention of youth violence, extremism, and fundamentalism. In this interpretation education proves susceptible to the interests of the dominant regimes. As Bernhard (2015: 81) notes, it seems that today there is not even an awareness of the problem posed by serving sectional power interests in educational science. Educational processes are always characterized in societal and political respects as they are integrated in actual social living conditions and social reproduction. Critical pedagogy is committed to investigating the conditions of subjectification, to a critical reflection of societal demands and ideological constraints in order to foster autonomy (Bernhard, 2017: 89f). This inherent ambivalence of education becomes apparent with regard to gender relations and national-cultural demarcations: *young Muslim males* are being targeted, assuming a general lack of education and a persisting patriarchal culture. There is a growing interest in *Muslim migrants* in social science, not only since the European 'summer of migration' in 2015. *Muslim identity* has been a matter of interest for centuries, and it draws on a gender narrative that is traceable to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the Oriental-despotic myth<sup>3</sup> served to neatly arrange Western monarchy as opposed to *Oriental despotism*, to legitimize colonial interventions (cf. Krämer, 2007: 115ff). Today's public discourse on migration, integration, and cultural-religious difference continues to draw on elements of Oriental despotism when characterizing Muslims as patriarchal, violent-tempered savages. This has especially been the case since the sexual attacks against women in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015, which created an international stir. In this 'post-colognial' debate, sexual harassment and immigration are hardly distinguishable (Weissenburger, 2016). With this far-reaching event a process of constructing the *Muslim other* continues; driven by political discourse, mass media, social science and education (cf. Spielhaus, 2013).

Education provides an arena of unsettling and stabilizing social order. In Germany, but also in other European societies, gender regimes and ethnic-cultural demarcations in the national context have become unsettled throughout the

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<sup>1</sup> In German academic terminology, 'Erziehungswissenschaft' (pedagogy) as academic discipline entails several fields of action, e.g. schooling, social work (e.g. youth work, working with families, residential education), and early childhood education.

<sup>2</sup> Italicizing indicates that these notions are treated as coined terms, rather than descriptions.

<sup>3</sup> Krämer describes it more precisely as legend according to which the ensemble of cruel, inept, above all Muslim Oriental despots, corrupt officials, bloody warlords, greedy landlords, and apathetic retarded peasants unalterably characterizes a culture stuck in its past (Krämer, 2007: 114f).

past decades. Pedagogical discourse and practice strive for an understanding of boyhood and girlhood, of family roles and gender relations, of cultural milieus and transnationality. Social regimes are also stabilized in educational discourse, when perpetuating patterns of hegemonic masculinity (in the sense of Connell: cf. Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 2015) or ethnic-cultural categorization (cf. Mecheril, 2010). This becomes evident when researching current constructions of *Muslim males*. Therefore, the focus of this paper is not Islamic masculinities<sup>4</sup>, but rather an immanent critique of categorizations in educational discourse. This means reflecting on the cultural frame in which *young Muslim males* emerge as a target group of education. Instead of examining contrasting Islamic and Western masculinities, the article criticizes the discursive order in which gender regimes remain unchallenged as far as they serve as a supposedly neutral background against which the *others* are held as patriarchal. This dichotomy takes, for instance, the shape of *authorities versus endangerers* ('*Gefährder*')<sup>5</sup>, of protective *nationals* versus molesting *strangers*. Critique and deconstruction of the West versus Islam dichotomy in reference to gender relations have been undertaken before (e.g. Amir-Moazami, 2007; Attia, 2007; 2009; Rommelspacher, 2010), often considering the example of the head scarf conflict in Germany. Recently *Muslim males* in particular are eyed as a threat to the public.

In the text to follow, the discursive framework of the educational preoccupation with *young Muslim males* is reflected. There are two symptomatic topoi which I will illustrate by examples of different scope: a local publication by German teachers, and the European research and innovation program *Horizon 2020*. They are exemplary for the dominant educational discourse, its claims and controversies. Subsequently, emphasis is directed at the contradictory reference to gender regimes made in educational discourse. Vindications of *masculine traits* and of *Western civilization* converge in a neoliberal understanding of education. The paper concludes with a critical reflection on educational knowledge about *Muslims*.

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<sup>4</sup> Fedele (2013) states that there is only little analysis of Islamic masculinity in sociology and gender studies; she investigated Maghreb Islamic masculinity and negotiations of gender experience in diaspora in Europe. Archer (2001) explored British Muslims' construction of racialized gendered identities; both authors refer to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Also see the essay collections by Ouzgane (2006), Ghousoub and Sinclair-Webb (2000) on Islamic masculinities in diverse national and cultural contexts.

<sup>5</sup> The German term *Gefährder* has been coined by public safety authorities for persons (especially Islamists) who are considered capable of threatening public safety by terrorist attacks. There is an ongoing debate about how to treat them, because people who fall in this category are innocent as such. Not only security authorities but also youth welfare offices are in the focus of this debate, because young unaccompanied migrants might make false statements about their identity and age.

## German migration society and education

In early January 2016, when it was reported that on New Year's Eve groups of *North Africans* had sexually attacked women in Cologne<sup>6</sup>, it was not only the expected anti-Islamic movements who spoke out against the menace of letting in *Muslim males*. The cover of German *Focus* magazine<sup>7</sup> showed a black-white photo of a naked, white female model whose body is full of handprints in black color, her head cut off above the slightly opened mouth, headline: "Women accuse – after sex attacks by migrants: are we still tolerant or already blind?" As usual in *Focus*, the model's bare body is displayed in an appealing manner. Sexist itself, it blames the migrant *others* – those dirty paws symbolize sexual assault by brazen strangers. Even though this and other media representations of the Cologne attacks were denounced, they conveyed their point. What explains the vehemence in public speaking about 'North African' and 'Arab' males? Bearing in mind that sexual attacks against women do not in general spark outrage<sup>8</sup>, the motive is less of solidarity with the victims. Rather, there is an Orientalistic projection at work: the *Oriental, animalistic male* (Mecheril and Messerschmidt, 2016: 154f). The issue of sexual assault becomes an issue of strangers who molest, disregarding sexist phenomena within families and public institutions.

*Othering* in terms of culture and religion is taking place in a crisis of global capitalism that affects groups of EU citizens, migrants, and refugees differently. The diverse groups' everyday experiences in relation to the state are decoupling: while citizens of the EU core countries are facing challenges, but not an emergency situation, thousands of immigrants fall victim to the 'security policy' at the European borders (cf. Demirović et al., 2016: 529). Nonetheless, migrants crossing the Mediterranean are identified as a menace to EU citizens. Origin does not really matter, because *Muslim* serves as a cipher. It indicates not only religion but migration, ethnicity, and culture, all at once (cf. Spielhaus, 2013). The perception of menace draws on topoi originating in the tradition of academic and popular Orientalism (cf. Attia, 2007; 2009; Krämer, 2007; Schulze, 2007) and in the context

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<sup>6</sup> On New Year's Eve 2015 groups of men were assaulting women in a central square in Cologne – in a crowd of people, they grabbed and massively harassed women, and stole handbags and mobile phones. It turned out that those groups consisted of young, male immigrants from Morocco and Iraq. A year later, groups of *North African looking men* were stopped at the same site and many sent off by police. German police used the abbreviation 'NafriS' for *North African criminals (NordAFRIkanische IntensivStraftäter)* in a tweet (31<sup>st</sup> December 2016), implying hundreds of *North Africans* had come to Cologne in order to commit crimes. Later in January, it turned out that only a minority of the men stopped were from Northern African countries, and they were not criminals.

<sup>7</sup> Focus, Heft 2, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

<sup>8</sup> In a recent survey of perceptions of EU citizens regarding gender-based violence, around one in six respondents (15%) across the EU consider domestic violence to be a private matter that should be handled within the family (European Commission, 2016a: 17).

of current EU security policy, as well as in the context of national family and educational policies.

### *The topos 'sexually offending Muslim immigrant'*

This topos posits cultural backwardness and a lack of education on the part of *Muslim males*, based on an oversimplified understanding of masculinity. Assaults committed by individuals are considered an expression of the very nature of the *Muslim others*. The menace of sexual assaults equals the menace of letting in Muslims. After victims and witnesses of the Cologne sexual attacks had described the perpetrators as looking 'North African', which the authorities shared only a couple of days later, this category was stressed throughout the debate and became a synonym for offender. "The 'North African', in fact merely looking 'North African', is likewise foreigner, Muslim, and refugee." (Sander, 2016) This topos of *Muslim males* threatening *our girls* reveals a perspective in which *their* cultural identity makes for harassment and violation, or more specifically: their *Muslim* identity includes a culture-specific masculinity resulting in harassment and violation. The issue of sexual assaults becomes an issue of molesting strangers, disregarding the reality of gender-based violence (including domestic violence, sexual harassment and violence, harmful practices and cyber harassment) which happens "in every country, across the full spectrum of society" (European Commission, 2016a: 1).

Just weeks before the Cologne incident, the chairpersons of the union of gymnasium teachers in Saxony-Anhalt<sup>9</sup> published an editorial article in their trade magazine (Seltmann-Kuke and Mannke, 2015; own translation). The article, titled *Debate on refugees: Adaptation to our core values required* warns against *Muslim* immigrants. This one-pager serves as a lesson: depicting menace is a matter of wording, and the article starts with an "immigrant invasion slopping over Germany". The authors come to the point of "young, sturdy, mostly Muslim men" who ask for asylum not necessarily for political reasons but for mere economic or even criminal motives. Those who often come without their families or women "certainly don't always come with pure intentions". That seems to insinuate philandering and really, the authors assert a sexual desire of those "young and often uneducated men", which is "just natural". They connect this to the role of women "in their Muslim cultures" and wonder how these young men could live their sexuality and strive for partnership without coming into conflict with "our society's norms". According to Seltmann-Kuke and Mannke: not at all, because they have heard "from several places", "from talks with acquaintances" that sexual harassment in public already occurs – implying it gets much worse. The authors claim to just share the view of mothers with adolescent daughters who have "plenty

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<sup>9</sup> Philologenverband Sachsen-Anhalt.

of sorrows" watching the "nearly uninhibited streams of immigration". They also claim to be responsible-minded pedagogues, warning: "our young girls from 12 years onwards" need to be told the facts of life so "they will not engage with those surely often quite appealing Muslim men for a superficial erotic adventure". That is, *their* sexuality does not meet *our* standard of profoundness and reproduction. This implication ties sexual desire together with "Muslim families' values"; the latter should be prevented from being taught in German schools (ibid.).

In their one-page editorial, Seltmann-Kuke and Mannke have exemplarily expressed an understanding of education aimed at maintaining the status quo while suggesting a specific regime of national culture<sup>10</sup>. According to this quite prevalent view education caters to the successful adaptation of educands instead of fostering maturity and autonomy. The insistence on conformity could be interpreted as an expression of prevalent uneasy feelings concerning unsettled notions of national-cultural identities. E.g. men and women of Turkish origin, mostly recruited since the 1960s as so-called 'Gastarbeiter', and their German-born children and grandchildren pose a challenge to national-cultural demarcations, and so do refugees and transnational migrants. In 2000, a reformed German citizenship law was adopted which at least partially provides for birthright citizenship<sup>11</sup> (cf. Storz and Wilmes, 2007). This may have increased Muslimization: otherness referred no longer to nationality; as *Muslims*, naturalized persons stay *others* (cf. Spielhaus, 2011).

## *The topos prevention of radicalization*

Another important context for constructing *Muslim others* consists in European research funding. The EU research and innovation program Horizon 2020 has a focus on societal challenges with a security-political intervention primacy ("preventing radicalization leading to violent extremism in the form of terrorism", European Commission, 2016b: 4). Social research is commissioned to prevent radicalization; however, this topos suspends analyses of societal dominance as a whole. The current Horizon 2020 work programs address "Contemporary radicalization trends and their implications for Europe" (Horizon 2020, WP 2016-2017, Reflective Societies: 35f) and "Developing a comprehensive approach to violent radicalization in the EU from early understanding to improving protection" (Horizon 2020, WP

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<sup>10</sup> The clearly racist implications have been disapproved and in the end Mannke resigned from the chair of the teachers' union. He and Seltmann-Kuke regretted phrases that could be mistaken for xenophobic while they stood by their warning message. Contrarily, the cited phrases were essential to the construction of menace posed by *Muslims*.

<sup>11</sup> Migrants who were considered foreigners for decades could now become Germans. However, only a minority applied for German citizenship, as Storz and Wilmes (2007) assess.

2016-2017, *Secure Societies*: 22f). They call for investigations of cognitive and emotional dynamics of radicalization and of fundamentalism in the context of migration societies. It is implied that *Muslim identity* is mired in such dynamics. Horizon 2020 aims at the complex interplay of diverse dimensions of radicalization, such as societal integration, religious-cultural difference, and global migration. Indeed, this nexus framing research and innovation is well established. Accordingly, *Muslims* are being targeted in funded projects. The framework of integration, migration, and religious-cultural difference holds true for the German context as well. Government authorities and political foundations commission research and practice development in the field of education, partly with a direct focus on fundamentalism, but also going beyond: research objects such as family relations, adolescence, gender roles, and religiosity apply to this framework. In educational and social work practice, publicly funded model projects with mothers and fathers emerged, new concepts of youth work and informal education, networking with mosques and organizations of migrants. These concepts rarely speak of Islamism or radicalization but of socio-cultural integration, support of adolescents' quest for identity and assistance of democratic development. Strategies of preventing radicalization count on self-representation and address *Muslim* community members as auxiliaries. Increasingly, social workers, policemen and teachers with a *Muslim migration background* are being involved. Whether intended or not, at least implicitly intercultural and interreligious projects are conceived within the topos of preventing radicalization as this legitimizes their public funding. Focusing and controlling the *Muslim other* can be interpreted as an evasion of societal change towards social justice. Education contributes considerably to this evasion by targeting *Muslim youth* and *Muslim families* as regards their integration. But how to integrate *the others* is not a meaningful question if it lags behind a critical analysis of society.

## Disregarding hegemonic masculinity

Condemning *Muslim* patriarchal culture is set against the background of gender equality in European societies, which, however, is an illusion. But gender regimes are at stake, likewise national-cultural identities have been unsettled. In general, the dissolution of boundaries between the public and the private due to globalization, the deregulation of the job market and digitalization make for upheaval in gender relations (Meuser, 2012). Constructions of masculinity and femininity in upbringing and teaching children are challenged by gender reflecting approaches. This has enhanced a focus on empowering girls and women in several areas of youth work and further education. Gender studies affect educational research on masculinity as well as pedagogical practice with boys and men; realizing gender dynamics within seemingly gender neutral institutions of youth work and educati-

on and analyzing risks of predominantly male forms to cope with life (cf. Böhnisch, 2015). Yet heteronormativity does not disappear, even though traditional forms of gender regimes have been unsettled and become precarious (Woltersdorff, 2013). Rather than juxtaposing traditional patriarchal gender relations in opposition to new, emancipatory gender arrangements, Woltersdorff speaks of 'neo-traditionality' and describes precarious heteronormativity as

an obsessive and passionately performed imperative to deal with gender and sex norms, to exhaust them, to desperately strive for compromise and not least to acquiesce in blaming ourselves for how successfully we accomplish that. (Woltersdorff, 2013: 613; own translation)

It is all about privilege: although changes in gender regimes allow better access to social positions for some women, class inequality and prerogatives of the well-established remain essential. Moreover, privileges are being stabilized. Some educationalists emphatically essentialize male-female differences, defending *homogenous natural masculinity* against feminism and gender mainstreaming (e.g. Tischner, 2008). More or less candidly evoking an eroded gender regime, the mission of education is to foster *gender traits*, especially in boys. In this understanding no reflexivity is needed, neither on the part of pedagogues nor that of educands. The latter are expected to acquire skills and competencies: functioning, not emancipation is the relevant point of reference. The social construction of *masculinity* and *femininity* are disregarded, and so is hegemony (Connell, 2015; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Using the terms masculinity and femininity in a biologicistic way, educational practice is divided into opposite qualities. Consequently, the fact that female educators outnumber male ones appears as discrimination against boys and men, who are rendered effeminate. The concept of hegemonic masculinity is rejected by those who consider it a threat to boys and men. Besides, this understanding draws on the pedagogue as a mere warden, a managerial autocrat. In that respect, the vindications of *Western civilization* and of *masculine traits* converge.

The public discourse on Islam with its focus on menace by *Muslim others* suggests internal homogeneity of civilization and decency in gender relations. Thereby relations of hegemony and complicity are disregarded, and so is the complexity of masculinities on a global, regional and local level (cf. Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 847ff). Targeting *Muslims* legitimizes dominance over them in the guise of integration, whether declaring educational deficits regarding common decency and education, or racist remarks debasing *Muslim men* by ascribing a kind of moral depravity. Women are taken as a symbol of national purity being contaminated by strangers. Essentializing religious-cultural difference serves separation: *They* represent violation and submission, while *our* masculinity is reasonable. Thus, the dialectic of changing and persistent gender regimes is dissolved, resulting in an



imaginary group identity and a group of *others*.

Those benefiting from the 'patriarchal dividend' easily condemn harassment (Connell, 2015: 133), and this can be observed in the 'post-colognial' debate, too. Rape is verbally condemned, but at the same time embellished and aestheticized (e.g. on the cover of a magazine with a naked white woman). While rape culture is a setting within European societies, it is alleged to the *others*. Locally specific hegemonic masculinities constructed in interaction and in institutions can be found in several milieus; so an analysis would have to take account of "the interplay of gender dynamics with race, class, and region" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 839; 'region' refers to culture or nation-state: *ibid.*: 849). Then again it is not about understanding and criticizing gender regimes in Islamic countries or in diaspora, but all about patronizing.

## Defining a general lack of education

In the above-quoted gymnasium teachers' editorial there are several references to education (Seltmann-Kuke and Mannke, 2015). First, sexual harassment and philandering are ascribed to a general lack of education among *Muslim migrants*. Second, immigration of young skilled personnel is affirmed: "yes, we need them", the authors state, with insisting *they* have to be willing to integrate themselves, to adopt to *our* values. Then "actual integration" requires German language acquisition to which "our profession can make a positive contribution" (*ibid.*). That is to say: Islam as an obstacle to integration must be overcome, education equals adaptation and employability, and teachers are trainers for eligible young migrants. This understanding refers to claims to authority, it dismisses subjectivation in terms of emancipation from what is set. Consequently, there is only one way of teaching and being taught. Facing global migration, it is not just the teachers trying to draw up a frontier by declaring a general lack of education on the part of the *others*: Monolingualistic conceptions of society ideologically connect people-language-territory, particularly in the German context (Mecheril, 2014: 201). Such conceptions are pressurized by a new migration-political rationality that calls for regulated immigration, considering human capital to improve national competitiveness (*ibid.*: 209f). Within the dominant paradigm of usability, adolescents are expected to acquire requested skills and competencies (cf. Rühle, 2015). The neoliberal background of social disintegration and its many ramifications are gravely neglected in current expertise on *Muslim males* and radicalization. There are manifold educational recommendations on *Muslim* youth culture, radicalization and Islamism, gender roles and male honor, homophobia, and educational styles in *Muslim* families. However, "democratic development" and "prevention of violence" are coated ideologically when applied to backlog demand of immigrants and not to society as a whole.

## Conclusion: Educational knowledge about Muslims

*Muslim identity* is dealt with within a framework of integration, migration, religious-cultural difference and conflict. Many educational research works, although starting from diverse perspectives and methodologies, result in constructing the *cultural others*. But the knowledge produced unveils more truth about its production than about *Muslims*, as the assurance of the *cultural-religious other* is enmeshed with reassuring oneself. There is no mere detection of pre-existing, endogenous properties. To set the object of research is to set obscuring premises, and producing knowledge means to reaffirm them.

Already in the early 1980s some educationalists articulated a profound critique of the approach educating *foreigners* ('Ausländerpädagogik') (cf. Griesse, 1984a; 1984b; Hamburger, 1984). Their criticism, aimed at the paternalistic manner and incapacitating construction of target groups, still applies, even though the perception of target groups underwent a considerable change. During the 1970s, migrant women and youths were treated as victims of patriarchal culture. Today, *Muslims* are considered agents perpetuating a fundamentalist regime. In the early 1990s scientific research focused on fundamentalism (cf. Tezcan, 2003: 241); especially among *Turkish youths*. Those mostly German-born youths were no longer regarded as merely disoriented adolescents, but actors with religious-cultural views and attitudes towards nation and culture who were likely to profess Islam instead of the German state. The hypothesis of cultural conflict survived with an added note of endangered public safety from fundamentalism (Heitmeyer et al., 1997; critically: Inowlocki, 1998; Auernheimer, 1999). In this hypothesis premise and conclusion coincide. Culturalization remains vivid not only in a common sense but also in educational studies, nowadays specifically referring to *Muslim identity*, targeting cultural-religious families and youths. These studies benefit from a societal atmosphere in which *Muslim males* are considered menacing and uneducated. Such research fails to analyze heteronormativity, social inequality and authoritarianism; it fails to focus on education as involved in the unsettling and stabilization of social order. Research either remains within the well-established framework, or the frame itself is considered an object of research; the latter results in a critique of education processes reifying categories of identity and foreignness. A pedagogical examination of gender regimes and masculinities must not give up a self-critical stance by culturalizing gender relations through a simple dichotomy of Islam versus West.

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