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Doris H. Gray, *Muslim Women on the Move: Moroccan Women and French Women of Moroccan Origin Speak Out*. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2008. v + 199 pp. Notes, appendices, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-7391-1804-8; \$29.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-7391-1805-6.

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In June of 2008, Moroccan national Faiza Silmi learned that she would not receive French citizenship. France's highest administrative court upheld a decision by the government to deny her citizenship. Throughout the process, Silmi fretted that her language skills might pose a problem. As it turns out, it was her *niqab* or facial veil that was the issue, not her linguistic abilities. The court argued for the incompatibility between what it construed as Silmi's radical Islamic practices represented by her veil and the French state's dedication to republicanism and secularism. This rational clearly took Silmi by surprise as she explained, "I would never have imagined that they would turn me down because of what I choose to wear."^[1]

The court's decision constitutes latest in a series of events that underscore the contemporary and historical tensions surrounding France's Muslim population. Previous incidents include the 2005 riots that originated in the Paris suburbs and the 2004 ban on religious insignia in French schools. Scholarly contributions from several academic fields have explored these and other immigration-related developments in a vast and varied literature. Yet a recently published book demonstrates that there is still much work to do.

Doris H. Gray's *Muslim Women on the Move* examines questions surrounding gender, identity, and religion through an analysis of women's lives in Morocco and France. Rarely in the field of migration studies does a scholar compare the experiences of those in the sending country to that of the Diaspora in the same book. To accomplish this, Gray—a faculty member in Florida State University's Women's Studies and French Departments with a background in journalism—conducted extensive interviews with women in each national context. As Gray explains it, she "...zeroes in on individuals and their personal perceptions and then uses these individual testimonies for analyzing larger trends" (p. 7). What follows is an important social and cultural analysis that engages with several critical issues ranging from individual understandings of Islam to social class, marriage, and family dynamics.

So how does she position each country? Gray describes Morocco as a country governed by a "near absolute monarchy where democratic processes are only now emerging..." (p. 129). This North African country is also grappling with efforts to grant more rights to women. Yet Morocco has also worked to maintain the religious integrity of an Islamic state while France officially separated religion from government in 1905. By comparison, Gray points to France's strong republican tradition and Catholic background as well as its attempts to come to terms with a growing Muslim population. While this is not an inaccurate assessment, the book leaves the impression that Gray is more comfortable discussing the nuances of Moroccan society than the experiences of immigrants living in France. In her synopsis of twentieth-century migration to the *métropole* from the African continent, she leans heavily on several contradictory assessments and assumptions (pp. 24-5). But this is not the book's focus. Gray's compelling assessment of the contemporary experiences of Muslim women in France and Morocco

outweighs any problems that arise with her brief discussion of immigration from the historical perspective. Her two-country approach is an ambitious undertaking, as comparative studies prove challenging in almost any scholarly context. The analysis works because of her ability to shift back and forth between national contexts, even if she seems more comfortable discussing developments in Morocco than in France.

At its core, Gray's study explores the role of Islam in the lives of its practitioners across geographical boundaries. Rejecting monolithic and stereotypical conceptualizations, Gray argues instead for Islam's heterogeneity and diversity (p. x). Throughout her work, the author bridges the so-called divide between "the West" and "the Islamic world" by choosing a "western" nation-state in France and a Muslim country in Morocco for her comparison. One area that Gray did not develop as fully as expected was the impact of French colonialism for women in post-colonial Morocco and France. The legacy of France's control of Morocco as a protectorate could be a productive area for further analysis.

To provide a foundation for her study, Gray focuses on two key legal changes in 2004 that affected women in each country. In Morocco, the reform to the Personal Status Code changed the state's conceptualization of a core social institution—the family. That same year, the French government banned religious insignia in public schools. Gray argues that the former reflected important changes occurring in Morocco, while the latter "can be interpreted as an indication of the French government's insistence on the status quo" (p. xii).

Beyond these legal changes, Gray provides another focal point that supports her argument for the heterogeneity of Islam in the global context. She examines individual women's conceptualizations of religious practices and state policies as they relate to their own lives. A seemingly simple question guides her analysis as she asks, "What do individual women in Morocco and women of Moroccan origin in France believe and think about certain issues?" (p. 1). To find an answer, Gray sought out Muslim women's opinions on the 2004 reforms in both countries. She narrowed her focus to the experiences of young, educated, professional, and urban women in both national contexts. Rather than interviewing high-profile public servants, however, Gray chose "ordinary" women who worked in several different areas, including journalism, law, academia, and social work. She places their perceptions of and experiences with Islam in France and Morocco at the center of her discussion.

To do this methodologically, Gray incorporated the "grounded theory" approach to personal interviews (p. 7). She allowed her subjects to shape and guide the major themes that she examines throughout her study, including "conceptions of Islam, legal changes and personal and professional aspirations and challenges," which became the central components of her analysis (p. 12). This approach enabled Gray to effectively navigate the challenges of discussing sensitive topics because she allowed her respondents to determine the trajectory of each conversation. And while much of her analysis is rooted in these interviews, she also incorporated newspaper articles, memoirs, novels, and a wide array of secondary literature in French and English to support her discussion.

The book's organization reflects Gray's use of the "grounded theory" approach as she dedicates each of the five chapters to the recurring themes that emerged during her fieldwork. In the first chapter of Gray's study, she examines the topics introduced by her respondents, including marriage, the veil, meeting locales, and linguistic "code switching" within each national context. Gray cleverly uses her own experiences as an interviewer to illustrate her argument and acknowledge the uneven dynamic between a researcher and a respondent. In Morocco, for example, women who wore the veil displayed little concern over where they met for their interviews. But in France, veiled women carefully considered their meeting locations before agreeing to speak with Gray.

Chapter two investigates immigration from Morocco to France. Historically, Gray maintains that cordial relations between France and its former protectorate have fostered important migratory

patterns. From the contemporary perspective, Gray makes an important contribution to our understanding of how immigrants and their children conceptualize themselves in France. Through her interviews, she found that French women of Moroccan descent perceive no conflict between their French and Muslim identities. It is the majority French population, the author argues, which feels uncomfortable with the idea that someone could be “Muslim” and “French” at the same time.

Gray also offers an intriguing way of measuring individual identity. She asks whether women in Morocco and France travel, if they want to live elsewhere, how they do so, and for how long, adding to our understanding of the relationship between Diaspora, travel, and identity. Gray argues that Moroccan women are more cosmopolitan than their counterparts in France, as their elevated social class position affords them more opportunities to travel overseas and experience new cultures. She explains that these two groups harbor very different perspectives when asked whether they would move abroad. On the French side, Gray found that while some women of Moroccan origin think about relocating to Morocco for permanent employment, few actually make the move. When they do, many leave and return to France “because they did not feel at home in Morocco” (p. 27). By comparison, Moroccan women are familiar with the concept of moving abroad as 10 percent of the country’s population lives outside its borders (p. 29). These women frequently consider relocating to France or Canada in search of the individual freedoms and professional opportunities they felt they lacked in their home country.

The book’s third chapter presents another important facet of her comparison, namely the ways in which women in Morocco and France understand and experience Islam. This is one of her major contributions to our understanding of Muslim women’s perceptions of and interactions with their own faith. Through this discussion, Gray underscores her argument regarding the diversity of Islamic practices internationally. She reveals that women in each national context relate to this faith differently based on individual skills and “national” attitudes toward religious practice. In France, Gray argues that “unlike Morocco, young French Muslims experience Islam not as an omnipresent reality but as the faith of a disenfranchised minority. It forms the basis of a culture that the second and third generation has to rediscover for itself” (p. 46). Not only do they live in a society that values secularism, but many French women of Moroccan descent also lack reading skills in Arabic. These women rely heavily on the internet and their interactions with their friends, parents, and other family members to formulate their rapport with Islam. By contrast, the women Gray interviewed in Morocco relate to Islam much differently. They live in an Islamic state where their faith is omnipresent. Nearly all of these women are fluent in Arabic and they actively read passages of the Qur’an, often as a part of their education. Within each national context, Gray demonstrates that internal and external factors determined Muslim women’s relationship with their religious faith.

Yet in asking women to define what it meant to them to be Muslim in France and Morocco, Gray made an intriguing discovery. Her respondents in both national contexts maintained that their faith was a result of an individual choice. They described their relationship with Islam as an affirmation of their religious and cultural identities. Gray found that, “women in Morocco and France approached religion from a perspective of personal meaning and belief and did not consider adherence to prescribed rituals as a measure of their faith” (p. 56). Whether or not they could read the Qur’an or recite passages from memory had little impact on their personal identities as Muslims.

Gray’s fourth chapter explores how women in France and Morocco interpreted the changes in the Personal Status Code, which enhanced their position and rights in Moroccan society. The author found that respondents in the two national contexts understood the reform as an indication of more deeply-rooted and encouraging shifts in mentalities, behaviors, and attitudes. Women in both places thought that it was “a step in the right direction” (p. 96). Yet in Morocco and France, Muslim women remained concerned over these legal reforms and maintaining their own ability to control their public and private lives within the context of family, tradition, and state law. But not every constituency appreciated the Personal Status Code’s 2004 reform. The non-violent group *Al Adl wa Ihsane*, or “Justice and

Benevolence,” argues that the reform benefits only elite Moroccans (p. 89). Rather than changing the Code, the organization calls for improved education and better employment opportunities for all Moroccans through its spokeswoman, Nadia Yassine.

In the book’s fifth and final chapter, Gray builds on this charge of elitism within the Personal Status Code’s reform by presenting an intriguing discussion of social class and its impact on advancement. She draws a compelling contrast between France and Morocco and illustrates the critical relationships between family connections, social class, and advancement in Morocco and other similarly-positioned countries (p. 136). Many of the women Gray interviewed from Morocco hailed from the highest social echelon. They understood that their social connections assisted them in obtaining the education necessary to pursue a professional career (p. 133). For those outside of the elite, however, a lack of connections served as a barrier to advancement. Gray then shifts her analysis back to the *métropole*, arguing that the situation proved different for women of Moroccan descent living in France. They face a different social reality than their counterparts in Morocco. Discrimination against people of North African origin prevents advancement more often than social class, gender, or connections. Yet social class emerged as a recurring theme in France as well, indicating its relevance in both national contexts.

Finally, Gray addresses the issue of marriage, arguing that Muslim women in both places considered this to be a critical step in their adult lives. In looking at this issue from the Moroccan and French perspectives, Gray discovered that unmarried women found their single status agonizing (p. 147). The idea of getting married, however, provoked anxiety for several reasons. Many of the women Gray interviewed wondered whether they could marry a non-Muslim man if necessary while fearing the changes that might accompany matrimony. As one woman from Rabat, Morocco explained, “the life of a married woman is still very traditional, you have to put your husband first, serve your mother-in-law and raise children” (p. 144). Women in both countries aspired toward marriage yet felt torn between pursuing their careers and becoming wives and mothers.

Gray’s work demonstrates the effectiveness of comparative studies in tracking Muslim women’s experiences in Morocco and France while also setting a course for future research. Those who study international migration should look to this book as a blueprint for the incorporation of sending countries and host societies into the same analysis. Scholars could also follow Gray’s lead by investigating the nature of gender relations in “western” and “Islamic” countries and considering Islam in different international contexts. Based on Gray’s findings, one could explore the relationship between masculine and feminine identities within Islamic cultures. In her fourth chapter, Gray mentions men’s obligations to protect single women before marriage. Yet men make few appearances in her discussion despite the critical role they play in women’s lives in France and Morocco as grandfathers, fathers, uncles, brothers, husbands, and sons. In an assessment based in a more gender-oriented methodology, one could examine the relationship between Muslim men and women within these national contexts. Subsequent analyses could also adopt Gray’s emphasis on the family and look more carefully at the relationship between mothers and their children while asking how the Islamic faith shapes attitudes toward childrearing and childhood. Gray touches on issues related to trust, fear, and domestic violence—topics that provide a window to understanding the experiences of Muslim women, men, and families in the global context. Overall, Gray’s work demonstrates that Morocco and France remain inextricably linked by migratory patterns and the struggle for human rights more than fifty years after Moroccan independence.

NOTES

[1] Katrin Bennhold, “A Veil Closes France’s Door to Citizenship,” *New York Times*, July 19, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/19/world/europe/19france.html?_r=1&ex=1217131200&en=7b38a50f656d9efa&ei=5070&emc=eta1&oref=slogin (accessed July 19, 2008).

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