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Leslie Kealhofer-Kemp, *Muslim Women in French Cinema: Voices of Maghrebi Migrants in France*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015. xii + 226 pp. Appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. £80.00 (hb). ISBN 978-1-78138-198-4.

Review by Michael F. O'Riley, The Colorado College.

Leslie Kealhofer-Kemp's book explores cinematic representations of Muslim women from the Maghreb who migrated to France prior to and following the end of French colonial rule. As the author points out, this is the first book to examine first-generation women from the Maghreb who have been less visible in cultural representations compared to their children or grandchildren. While "beur" or second-generation girls and women have been the subject of much scholarly interest, the generation of women who immigrated to France in the 1960s and 1970s as wives of economic migrants or *harkis* has received less attention and those voices have, in many ways, been underrepresented.

The book draws on fieldwork in audiovisual archives and research institutions in France and examines a corpus of over 60 films including documentaries and short fictional films, feature-length films, and made for television *téléfilms*. Additionally, the book contains a helpful appendix providing information about how to access the films featured in the study. Instead of organizing the book thematically, the author has organized it according to contrasts between different types of cinematic expression--different types of films rather than themes--as a way of examining how "various kinds of 'mediation,' notably different cinematic processes, influence the ways and extent to which the voices and experiences of first-generation women come through in the films in question" (p. 5). Voice, here, is a complex term that the author places both within and outside its varied inflections in postcolonial, cinematic, and feminist discourses; it is intended to denote not only what is stated in vocal discourse but also one's subject position through words, silence, gestures, body language, and other non-verbal elements through which communication is conveyed, such as the object world.

Kealhofer-Kemp's study represents a shift in focus in work on representations of Maghrebi culture in four different ways that she outlines in the introduction. First, compared to other full-length books such as Carrie Tarr's *Reframing Difference: Beur and banlieu filmmaking in France*, this book is devoted entirely to cinematic representations of first-generation Maghrebi women rather than to a consideration of both men and women.<sup>[1]</sup> Secondly, the book endeavors to re-examine feature-length films treating Maghrebi culture by underscoring neglected aspects of these films and bringing to the forefront first-generation women's voices and experiences. Additionally, the scope of the book extends well beyond feature-length films

and also considers films positioned outside mainstream production and distribution circuits. Fundamentally, this multi-tiered shift in focus attempts to elucidate an understanding of how these cinematic representations can inform our understanding of first-generation Maghrebi women's experiences in relation to larger societal perspectives, stereotypes, and placement. Questions such as the degree to which these women are represented as transcending potential social boundaries and the extent of potential audience understanding of their positions and experiences are posed alongside questions of religion, integration, and relationship to France as well as to culture of origin.

Primarily, the approach of the study is to examine to what degree these cinematic representations offer or shape new perspectives on the experiences of first-generation women from North Africa. Kealhofer-Kemp's diverse corpus ultimately enables her to answer these questions by underscoring that there are no easy answers. Ultimately, the diversity of subject positions and experiences of these women aligns with the diverse representations that the cinematic corpus chosen provides. Nonetheless, as she points out, commonalities exist within this shared diversity. First, all of the women migrated to France from North Africa during a similar time period and raised families there. Additionally, as Kealhofer-Kemp says, "[t]hese commonalities include the fact that first-generation women tend to be of a similar (lower) economic class, share a dominant cultural and religious heritage, and hail from three countries that, while distinct, were part of the French colonial empire" (p. 23). The representation of these commonalities nonetheless points to a diversity of experiences and voices even amongst women from similar national and ethnic backgrounds. This conclusion is not necessarily groundbreaking in and of itself given that the narratives of these women's very diverse yet shared backgrounds inevitably inform cinematic representations of their experiences. However, it does indeed shift the focus of scholarly discourse that has concentrated on representations of *banlieu* culture, integration, and religion with little to no widespread attention to the diversity of voices and experiences of negotiating within and between cultures that these representations of first-generation women present.

Drawing on Bill Nichols' work on different modes of documentary film, chapter one examines different degrees of intervention and documentary technique as a way of exploring how first-generation women's voices are framed and the various ensuing consequences.<sup>[2]</sup> This chapter explores three differing degrees of intervention (of camera, crew, and director, in particular) in the filming of these women, including a high degree of mediation, a more minimalist approach, and a third approach which seems more minimalist but in fact incorporates a higher degree of intervention on the part of the camera and crew. While the conclusion of this chapter finds that degrees of intervention have differing consequences in terms of the women's expression and consciousness and that no one type of intervention necessarily produces the same consequences, post-production intervention is argued to influence greatly the impact of these women's voices. Ultimately, the approach of this chapter demonstrates that even when influenced by mediation, reactions of first-generation women vary and present diverse voices and experiences.

Chapter two examines the seldom-studied realm of shorts by highlighting the interaction in them between first-generation women and people who are different from them and, quite frequently, do not speak the women's mother tongue. Analyzing the use of objects, this chapter examines how first-generation women navigate spatial, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. The chapter argues that the object world of these films plays the role of voice and is critical in expressing the experiences of these women given the short narrative form. This chapter, too,

aligns with the book's theme of shared yet diverse experiences and voices in its attention to common physical and metaphorical boundary crossings through diverse forms of voice represented in textual and non-textual objects.

Chapter three examines a wide range of representations of Maghrebi women in *téléfilms* broadcast from 1993–2012. The chapter focuses on agency and the degree to which these women appear to achieve it. Here, too, the representations are found to demonstrate varying degrees of agency and often conflicting or contradictory expressions of voice. In general, the achievement of agency in these *téléfilms*, as argued here, is associated with conforming to the dominant mode of individualism in France. Conversely, an absence of agency in these films is associated with a turn towards tradition and the patriarchal oppression of the women's country of origin. Kealhofer-Kemp points out that conformism to the norms in France leads to the achievement of agency and a concomitant positive outcome for these women and their families in these films while an unwillingness to conform and achieve agency results in a negative outcome. This chapter points out, then, that films depicting integration of the family unit are those in which first-generation Maghrebi women achieve agency and effect change in their own lives.

The final chapter of this book examines feature-length films that are generally more familiar to spectators. Exploring the use of verbal, non-verbal, and a mixture of verbal and non-verbal communication, the chapter examines the degree to which these films enable a more nuanced, "better" appreciation and understanding of the subjective experiences of Maghrebi mothers who migrated to France in the 1960s and 1970s. Examining a range of films including Yamina Benguigui's popular *Inch'Allah dimanche* (2001) and Mehdi Charef's *Le Thé au harem d'Archimède* (1985) for their non-verbal communication, as well as other popular contemporary films, Kealhofer-Kemp arrives at the conclusion that these films consistently encourage the spectator "to have a better appreciation for—and understanding of—the subjective experiences of Maghrebi mothers who came to France" during the period in question (p. 185).

*Muslim Women in French Cinema* challenges, as its author underscores, the notion that there is an easy way to define first-generation Maghrebi women. In fact, as the conclusion to the work points out, the terms used to describe this group are themselves inherently problematic and do not denote the diverse and often contradictory experiences of these women highlighted by the filmic corpus studied in this book. Most importantly, many of these cinematic representations of this group of women, especially the short films and *téléfilms* studied here, have been the subject of little attention in the past. This work brings the voices of these women represented in this mode to a wider scholarly audience and convincingly underscores their diversity.

Along with its significant contributions to the questions of agency, self-expression, identity, and immigration in relation to Frenchness and the wider Maghrebi community, perhaps the greatest strength of this book is its comprehensive study of this group of diverse women and their representations. Each chapter concludes with an acknowledgment and brief mention of films that the author could not treat. This gesture, along with the helpful appendix enabling the reader to locate these films, is a very welcome addition. This book will be of interest to scholars working in French and Francophone Studies, History, Film Studies, Feminist and Postcolonial Studies, and Sociology, in particular. You will want to read and purchase this important book not only for its contribution to current discussions about French identity and

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the composition of the *Hexagone*, but also for its comprehensive overview of the various cinematic representations of this generation of women.

#### NOTES

[1] Carrie Tarr, *Reframing Difference: Beur and Banlieu Filmmaking in France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

[2] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

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