

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Guiding themes

Changing attitudes and cultural change are not easy to measure. Both themes are explored in my research. At the heart of this study are the perceptions of individuals. My interest was to find out what individual women in Morocco and women of Moroccan origin in France believe and think about certain issues. I was most interested in their personal understanding rather than the official discourses for example on the legal reform in Morocco or the banning of selected religious insignia in French public schools. In addition, I wanted to find out what women in both places have in common and what sets them apart. At present, there is little published scholarship with a comparative focus on women in Morocco and women of Moroccan origin in France. I set out to fill this gap through a qualitative research project based on a sample of target populations in Morocco and France.

Qualitative research is a type of research that produces findings not arrived by statistical procedures or other quantitative means. While some of the data may be quantified, such as demographic information, the greater part of the analysis is interpretative (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 11). The choice of this methodology was determined by the nature of the research problem. The goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of attitudes of a population, their aspirations, thoughts, and feelings.

Qualitative research is based on certain assumptions and inherent biases however it does not start out with a narrowly defined hypothesis followed by field work designed to test this hypothesis.

My research was designed to allow respondents to speak their minds on issues of importance to them. An interview schedule was used to provide a framework for the sessions with participants. This interview schedule included categorical and open-ended questions. Categorical (sometime referred to as “closed”) questions refer to questions with a fixed catalogue of answers from which to select, for example “yes/no”, “agree/disagree” or a number chose from among a range of alternatives. Such questions were used when inquiring about matters such as marital status, age, fasting during Ramadan, support for recent legal changes, etc. Open-ended questions, with no pre-set range of responses, allow respondents to elaborate on their answers to the categorical questions in their own terms and/or for new themes to emerge. They provide respondents with an opportunity to raise issues which they consider relevant and which might otherwise be overlooked by the researcher. As Lofland (quoted in Patton, 1980) writes:

The commitment to get close, to be factual, descriptive and quotive, constitutes a significant commitment to represent the participants *in their own terms*.... A major methodological consequence of these commitments is that the qualitative study of people in situ is a process of discovery. It is of necessity a process of learning what is happening....It is the observer’s task to find out what is fundamental or central to the people or world under observation. (36)

Social science scholars have developed a variety of research methods that apply to an investigation of attitudes. In the following, I will give a brief overview of Grounded Theory, a methodology from which I draw.

In the 1960s, at the University of Chicago, Glaser and Strauss developed Grounded Theory based on a perceived need to get out into the field and find out what is “really going on.” The two scholars saw a need for theory, grounded in data, for the development of a discipline and as a basis for social action (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 9). Grounded Theory is derived from data and illustrated by characteristic examples from that data. Categories are developed in ex-post facto from the data in an effort to determine patterns that may lead to theory. This type of qualitative research begins with the collection of data and then develops a theory based on this data. An integral part of

this methodology is sensitivity to the evolving and unfolding nature of events (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 5).

There are three major components of this type of qualitative research. First, there are the *data*, which in my case come from interviews. Second, there are the *procedures* that are used in organizing and interpreting the data. These include coding and conceptualizing data. The *literature review* or prior research findings accompanies the research process but does not entirely determine the direction of the research (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:12). The Grounded Theory approach is based on the assumption that framing the investigation too narrowly in terms of existing scholarly research will bias the researcher and reduce openness for new themes to emerge during the data collection.

In preparing for this dissertation, I selected three broad themes (Islam, legal changes, personal and professional goals and challenges) and then structured my literature review around these themes. I subsequently conducted a series of pilot interviews which brought my chosen themes into sharper focus. The next step was initial field work in Morocco and in France in the summer of 2004 in which a network of contacts was established and some preliminary interviews were conducted. The final part of the field work in Morocco and France consisted of conducting the formal interviews which are the basis for this dissertation in the summer of 2005. In the year between the first and the second field trips, the review of the literature was completed, the methodology refined and the categories for the data analysis were developed.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) consider that everything that occurs in the process of collecting the data is as important as the data themselves. In the following, I will describe the research process in greater detail.

Data Collection

My data collection consisted of interviews conducted in Morocco and France in the summers of 2004 and 2005. After laying the groundwork and establishing a network of contacts in 2004, I collected my core data in the form of 55 interviews conducted in 2005 among a sample of young, urban, educated professional Moroccan women between the ages of 18 - 35 and a sample of comparable women of Moroccan origin in France.

Ten additional interviews were conducted with older women, in some cases mothers of the women I interviewed for this study. These interviews were not conducted in a systematic manner but often brought interesting points to light on data collected through the core interview schedule. In the main body of my analysis, I will draw on these interviews. Some of the interviews with more mature women offered a perspective on generational differences and put responses of the younger women into a broader context. Where appropriate, I draw on these additional interviews in the main body of my analysis. I also consulted experts on issues such as law, social and political science and religious scholars.

In Morocco, these experts included legal scholars and lawyers, political scientists, scholars of Islam and journalists and social workers. I also interviewed prominent public figures like feminist Leila Rhiwi of the Union of Feminine Action (UAF), an organization which was instrumental in promoting the family law reform. As Islamism is a rising force in Morocco, I sought out Nadia Yassine, spokesperson of the largest non-violent, fundamentalist Islamic Movement *Al Adl wa Ihsane* (Justice and Charity) and daughter of its leader Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine. Nadia Yassine is one of the most influential and, due to her critical stand towards the monarchy, controversial women in Morocco today.

In France, I did not have access to women of comparable public standing. However, I interviewed women who direct a variety of grassroots social service organizations, such as a center for aging workers of North African immigrant origin, a center for abused women, *Voix d'elles Rebelles*, an organization that caters to troubled young women (*filles en difficultés*) in the *banlieues* (socially disadvantaged neighborhoods). I consulted with scholars such as Nacira Guénif-Souilamas who has written on the subject of second-generation women of Maghrebi origin and Philippe Dewitte, editor of the long-established, monthly journal "Hommes et migrations." Consultations with these experts provided context, background information and allowed for a better understanding of the answers provided by the women interviewed for this research. Because of my background in journalism, conducting interviews is a well-practiced skill and even seemingly casual conversations can be directed so as to provide important insights and background information.

In all, a total of 80 interviews are drawn on in the dissertation, i.e. 55 conducted using a common interview schedule with my core sample of women in Morocco and France and 25 supplementary interviews conducted in more flexible ways with a more diverse range of subjects. Because all interviews were conducted in compliance with the Human Subjects Committee requirements for confidentiality, none of my interview partners will be referred to by their real name in the Data Analysis Chapters. Throughout, real names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

The Samples

The samples were selected from the target populations, namely young, educated, professional and urban women in Morocco and comparable women of Moroccan origin in France. The responses of different interviewees are drawn on in varying ways. Because of the exploratory nature of this research, certain responses will be cited in greater detail than others to illustrate a particularly striking point or to highlight an issue raised by several respondents. Naturally, some respondents were more eloquent than others and therefore their answers are referred to more frequently especially when these reflect a viewpoint of several other women. These multiple case studies serve to explore characteristics of the population and gain deeper insights into their perceptions and attitudes about specific issues and to discern possible patterns.

The reason for focusing on this particular population lies in the comparative nature of the study. To facilitate a valid comparison, the two groups need to have criteria of significance in common. Because the study has as its focus women in Morocco and women of Moroccan origin in France, certain commonalities can be taken for granted, for example the majority, if not all, women are Muslim and have been inculcated with Moroccan culture and traditions. The reasons for choosing the additional criteria mentioned above are follows:

Young: Young women are in the process of charting out their personal and professional lives and they are an integral part of cultural shifts. Inasmuch as their lives differ from those of their mothers, young women are breaking new ground. The age of the women interviewed for this research ranges between 18 and 35 years.

Educated: As agents of change, educated women play a larger role in the public sphere of their countries than, for example, illiterate, rural women. According to World Bank statistics, Morocco has a literacy rate of 50.7 per cent. Among women, the literacy rate is 38.3 per cent: that is, more than 60 per cent of Moroccan women are illiterate. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization defines the adult literacy rate as follows: “The adult literacy rate is the percentage of people aged 15 and above who can, with understanding write a short, simple statement on their everyday life” (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2002). For France, no comparative data are available. It is, however, safe to assume that the literacy rate among women brought up in France, where the educational system is far more developed, is very much higher than among women in Morocco. Granted these educational differences between Morocco and France, rather than sampling women representative of the general population of the two countries, my investigation focuses on those with similar educational attainments, thereby facilitating closer comparisons of their attitudes on the topics selected in my research.¹ All the women interviewed for this study possessed at minimum a baccalaureate, the majority in both samples held the equivalent of a Bachelor’s Degree, some a the equivalent of a Master’s and some a Ph.D. The reasons why women in the French sample generally have attained a less advanced degree than those in the Moroccan sample lies in the fact that educated, professional women in Morocco often come from a higher social class and therefore have easier access to educational facilities. The issue of the importance of social class is addressed in the Data Analysis chapters and in the Conclusion.

Professional: Professional women, i.e. women who possess distinctive qualifications for their jobs, are a relatively recent phenomenon in Morocco. Likewise in France, second-generation professional women of Moroccan origin are only now emerging. It was therefore of particular interest to ascertain the differences and similarities between two groups of people who are among the first in their respective countries to enter the job market in comparatively large numbers. Some of the women

¹ Women immigrants often have received only minimal schooling before leaving Morocco and moving to France; however, their daughters - the target population of this study - will have attended schools in France.

were between jobs and some were unemployed at the time of my first meeting with them in 2004 but most had found professional positions when I interviewed them in 2005.

Urban: For the purposes of a comparative study, urban residence was selected as a criterion for sample selection. In metropolitan France, few second-generation Moroccan women live in a rural environment. Even the socially disadvantaged *banlieues* or *cités* have basic services such as electricity, water and healthcare and children growing up in these parts of town will attend school, which is not the case in the shantytowns on the outskirts of Moroccan cities such as Casablanca. Therefore, the sample in Morocco was drawn from an urban, population, even though the families of some of the women I interviewed came from small towns across Morocco.²

Despite the commonalities of both samples with regards to the above criteria, there are significant differences as well. The single biggest difference between young, urban, educated and professional women in Morocco and a comparable group of women of Moroccan origin in France, was found to be social class. I endeavored to take this into account in constructing my samples.

In Morocco, most women who fit the selected criteria hail from middle or upper middle class backgrounds. The mothers of these young women are literate, but most have not pursued a professional career, while their fathers are often in the employ of the government or are highly skilled professionals such as medical doctors, pharmacists, academics or businessmen.

In France the majority of women of Moroccan origin come from working-class backgrounds and have grown up in the socially disadvantaged outskirts, *banlieues*, of industrial cities. Their mothers are often illiterate; if they had a job outside the home, they had menial jobs such as domestic servants. Most fathers work in low-skilled, low-wage jobs.

Because of these disparities with regards to social class, in selecting interviewees particular effort was made to locate young, educated, professional women in Morocco

² A hallmark of Moroccan society is its rural/urban dichotomy. About half of the population of 32 million lives in the rural areas and hinterlands, the other half in the urban centers. In the urban areas, there is great disparity between the poor, socially disadvantaged shantytowns where dwellings may not have running water or electricity or adequate educational facilities and the middle-and upper-middle class sections of town.

who come from modest backgrounds though these cases are rare in a society that knows little upward social mobility. Women in that category are a particularly small minority but as the data analysis will show, they are also a particularly outspoken and active minority. In a similar way, in France, efforts were made to include women of Moroccan origin whose parents come from middle-class backgrounds. These were women whose fathers had come to France to pursue university degrees and then found well-paying, high-skilled jobs and remained there or they were businessmen who traded across the Mediterranean but maintained their residence in France or who worked for international companies.

Interview Topics

The topics for the interviews revolved around three main themes: Conceptions of Islam, Legal Changes and Personal and Professional Aspirations and Challenges. Because religion is central to a believer's identity and because Islam in particular has become an important issue in current public discourse, women's individual perceptions and understandings of their religion were deemed an important theme. I was particularly interested to investigate the extent to which attitudes of women in Morocco, a predominantly (Sunni) Islamic country, differ from or are similar to those of Muslim women in France, a secular state with a marked Roman Catholic heritage. In France, discussions about the Muslim minority reached an almost feverish pitch culminating in the debate on the headscarf ban in public schools in the spring of 2004. Furthermore, as Turkey is poised to become the first predominantly Islamic country to enter the European Union, integration of Muslim populations into the European mainstream is a pressing issue.

Selection of the interview topics was also influenced by my personal experience in Africa. Before living in Morocco, I had lived in South Africa (1982-1984), a country of diverse cultures and religions. At the time, the apartheid system was still in place and tension and conflict between peoples of different races was an all-encompassing, daily reality. From southern Africa I moved to Kenya, East Africa, (1984-1993) which, like

South Africa, has a substantial Muslim population³, particularly along the Indian Ocean coastline. The national language, Kiswahili, is closely related to Arabic (*swahel* meaning coast). During the decade I lived in Kenya, I did not perceive religious differences as a major dividing factor between people. Quite the contrary, it is not uncommon to find families whose individual members profess belief in different religions, from a variety of Christian denominations to traditional African religions or Islam. Differences in religious belief rarely were a main cause for tension. My experience in North Africa (1999 -2001) by contrast was marked by an absence of religious diversity and religious differences associated with external cultural spaces, were perceived as a major stumbling bloc in human relations.

Both France and Morocco have recently seen important legal changes that directly impact women's lives; therefore this theme was deemed relevant. Again, the focus of the investigation was on how women in the two samples understood and perceived legal changes with regards to their own lives. Among other things, I wanted to find out how much women in France knew about the family law reform in Morocco and conversely how much women in Morocco had followed the debate on the banning of the veil in public schools in France.

The third thematic group of questions concerned personal and professional challenges. I developed this part of the interview schedule after conducting pilot interviews with young Muslim women of immigrant origins in the United States. (The pilot interviews will be discussed in greater detail in the next section). The initial interview schedule had contained open-ended questions concerning participants' assessment of the status of women in the country of their residence and what they considered some to be of the most pressing social issues facing women. However, during the pilot interviews, participants were more inclined to speak about their personal situations than to discuss a topic in the abstract. This desire to stay with the personal rather than the general can be attributed in part to the fact that the sample consisted of

³ Protestant 45%, Roman Catholic 33%, indigenous beliefs 10%, Muslim 10%, other 2%
note: a large majority of Kenyans are Christian, but estimates for the percentage of the population that adheres to Islam or indigenous beliefs vary widely (World Fact Book)

young women. For them, decisions about marriage, family and/or a professional career are issues of immediate concern.

Weaving together family obligations and the demands of a professional life are of course challenges for women regardless of their cultural, religious or educational background. Marriage, however, presents a particular area of concern for most Muslim women. Marriage is often understood as a fact of life and not primarily a matter of choice. Questions about early marriage, arranged marriage, the requirement to marry within the culture⁴, weigh particularly heavy on Muslim women.

The pursuit of professional ambitions is also of particular relevance for women in Morocco and women of Moroccan origin in France. In France, second generation women whose North African parents came to Europe as low-skilled immigrants, are the first of their kind to claim a place in the public sphere. Khosrokhavar describes the emergence of a professional class among women of Maghrebi origins as follows: “L’irruption des femmes sur la scène publique est un phénomène nouveau dans l’islam” (115) and he continues, “Les filles, elles, s’émancipent progressivement, mais leur marge de manoeuvre est beaucoup plus restreinte [que celles des hommes]” (121). In Morocco, a similar phenomenon occurs with increasing numbers of young, educated women seeking entrance into the workforce. The 2003 Arab Human Development Report, published by the United Nations Development Programme, identifies three main tasks for the Arab world: “Building, using and liberating the capabilities of the Arab people by advancing knowledge, freedom and women’s empowerment” (UDP, 2003:III). An increasing number of women in Morocco and France eschew early marriage to pursue higher education, a professional career and are faced with the task of accommodating personal and professional aspirations. In achieving a balance between the two, there are particular hurdles for women in the Arab world associated with the demarcation between the public and the private sphere. An understanding of this matter is important in order to appreciate the acuteness of the issue of personal and professional goals and associated challenges for the two samples.

⁴ Islam is a patrilineal religion, i.e. a Muslim father is required for a child to be born a Muslim.

In Moroccan culture, as in most of the Arab world, the public and the private are two distinct spheres. They are two separate worlds for which the rules of behavior are different. The public refers to: the street, men's place, where everything is up for grabs, and where it is every man for himself. This is contrasted with the private that refers to the home, where all relationships are clearly defined and rules of behavior are unambiguous and all actions are accounted for (Gray, 2005). Anyone who has traveled to North Africa or the Arab world will have experienced the rude behavior in the street which is in sharp contrast to the generous and kind hospitality in the home, widespread neglect of public spaces versus the immaculate cleanliness inside the house. There also is a marked absence of personal space and boundaries in public places which particularly for women can create uncomfortable situations (Hall, 1966: 159 p).

Families who moved from Morocco to France have a deep seated sense of this distinction. Concern - even fear - among fathers, brothers, husbands of releasing their female relative into the unruly world outside, is not merely a control issue as it is often presented, but it is also based on an understanding of the different rules governing social interaction in the private and the public spheres.

Questionnaire Development and Pilot Interviews

Pilot interviews preceded the main fieldwork. The purpose of this phase was to explore responses to the provisional interview schedule in order to identify unexpected problems or shortcomings and possible ways of eliminating these. The development of the interview schedule was significantly influenced by the pilot interviews conducted with young Muslim women of immigrant origins in the United States. These women came from families who had immigrated to the United States from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. All women were second-generation, that is their parents were born abroad and came to the United States as adults. The daughters were born in the U.S. or came to the U.S. as infants but families had maintained ties with their relatives in the country of their origin. In most cases, these young women were the first females in their families to obtain a university education and embark on professional careers. Some of them wore the Muslim headscarf, *hijab*, others did not. Socio-cultural

similarity between these women and the target population was a relevant factor in selecting women for participation in the pilot phase. Because easy access was also a factor at that stage of my research, all women who participated in the pilot interviews lived in Tallahassee, Florida.

For the pilot phase, I used a provisional interview schedule but otherwise employed the same procedures I was later to follow in Morocco and France. I informed respondents that the interviews were confidential and that none of the information would be made public by using their real names; instead pseudonyms would be used in any write-up of the interviews. I asked respondents if I could record our sessions on tape, if they declined, I took extensive notes.

During these interviews, I paid particular attention to non-verbal responses as well as the way in which women responded verbally to a question. For example, I looked to see if participants asked for clarification and/or hesitated before answering a certain question.

As a result of these pilot interviews, the interview schedule went through several stages of refinement to ensure that the questions were clear and allowed plenty of scope for respondents to speak their minds. Still, as will be seen in the data analysis chapters, there were questions that were unambiguous in an American context but were not as readily understood in France or Morocco.

An example of changes made as a result of the pilot interviews was a question that asked women to identify themselves on a continuum between “progressive” or “conservative”. The pilot interviews quickly showed that these categories did not capture the particular characteristics of the target populations. Consequently, the question was modified to include categories such as “practicing Muslims” and “*laïque*.” As already mentioned above, the general or abstract questions about the status of women were changed to more personal questions about hopes and goals for the future and obstacles that stand in the way of achieving them.

Extensive notes taken during and after these sessions highlighted recurring themes, such as the role of religion for all aspects of marriage - choosing a spouse to parental involvement in that choice, the importance of children, to physical traits such as circumcision - and thus helped to refine questions pertaining to marriage.

The questions were not grouped thematically in the interview schedule. Instead, they were mixed so that a particular topic was addressed at different times during the interview. This procedure was used to cross-check internal validity of the responses. For example, if someone answered “yes” to the categorical question: “Do you think men and women have equal chances of getting a job?” but then later in the interview in response to the open-ended question “What do you think are the main challenges for you to get ahead in your profession?” offered the following answer: “Being a woman makes it harder to compete in the job market,” it was obvious that either a misunderstanding had occurred or there was a deeper issue concerning that question. Participants were then asked to elaborate further on the topic in question.

If respondents gave prompt, concise answers and elaborated on their replies without being encouraged to do so, a question resonated and made sense to participants regardless of differences in opinion or point of view.

Another issue of importance during the pilot phase was to ascertain how easily a relationship of trust could be established. In most Arab cultures, formal discussions need to be preceded with - by American standards - lengthy personal exchanges. I let respondents determine the extent of these conversations before moving to the actual interview. Because of the personal nature of some of the questions, most respondents did not wish to part ways immediately after the interview was concluded but wanted to continue the conversation in a more relaxed setting. Often it was then that respondents elaborated on important themes raised during the interview. Thus, the interview process generally had three parts: the pre-interview personal exchange, the formal interview, the post-interview conversation.

The interview schedule for the pilot interviews helped to model the actual interviews to be conducted in France and Morocco. The choice of venue was decided by the participants, as was the duration of the interview. The protocol of informed consent was followed before commencing the interviews and recording them on tape. Some women requested not to be tape recorded. In those instances I took copious notes and met or spoke on the telephone with the women a second time to verify the accuracy of my notes.

A major difference between the pilot phase and the actual interviews, on which this dissertation is based, was that I asked participants in the pilot phase to offer feedback on the questions themselves. Also, I asked respondents to evaluate my own performance during the pilot interview. Did they feel at ease or did they feel intimidated? Did they get the impression I was looking for certain answers or did they feel free to say what they believed? This type of feedback enabled me to make adjustments in the actual interview sessions.

The pilot interviews also prepared me for a range of reactions to the interview process. Several times, at the end of an interview, participants requested that I share with them my own responses to the interview schedule, particularly on questions concerning Islam. Later, in Morocco and in France, I encountered the same requests. Most respondents were interested in a sincere dialogue with someone from a different religious background. Veiled women defied widespread Western stereotypes. Once a basis of respect and trust was established, I was often met with a virtual avalanche of questions about perceived differences and similarities between Muslims and Christians or Islamic and Western culture. Most often, respondents inquired about life in the United States, religious freedom and opportunities for minorities. Because the questions addressed to me were remarkably similar among all the women I interviewed, they served to bring into focus issues of concern and interest of the target populations groups.

The research design – protocol of the interview schedule

For this research I followed an interview schedule that included 64 questions. Fifty of the questions were identical in Morocco and France and 17 were different in order to accommodate differences between the two locations.

The interview schedule also contained questions that differed in Morocco and in France. Examples of these types of questions include: In Morocco: “How many times have you visited France? Can you envision settling in France? Do you have relatives in France? In what circumstances do you use the French language?” And in France: “How

many times have you visited Morocco? Do you have relatives in Morocco? Do you speak Arabic? Can you imagine permanently moving to Morocco?”

During the interview, non-verbal indicators were also observed, that is behavior that reflects attitudes not conveyed in the spoken answers. For example, a respondent wiped tears from her eyes when answering a seemingly straightforward question such as: “Do you live alone or with family or friends?” Such non-verbal indicators led to probing deeper even if the categorical question appeared to be adequately answered. In personal interviews, taking note of these types of behaviors is crucial in uncovering deeper themes underlying a question of the interview schedule.

Routinely, I discussed responses with experienced academics of Moroccan origin to search for hidden clues as well as a larger context. These scholars understood the nature of my research, including the guarantees of confidentiality given to respondents, and were at home in the culture of the women interviewed. They could shed insights on responses obtained during the interviews. This applied to categorical as well as open-ended questions. On occasion, a deeper meaning to a seemingly uncomplicated “yes” or “no” response was thus revealed. An example of this was the question: “Do you fast during Ramadan?” Almost all women in Morocco answered “yes” to this question while they were being recorded. At the end of the official interview when we were chatting informally, some women said that they did not fast but did not want this answer recorded on tape. Despite assurances of confidentiality, they were hesitant to admit in a formal setting that they did not fast during Ramadan. In Morocco, the Ramadan fast is a national event in which all citizens are called to participate and eating in public is a criminal offense. According to the scholars I consulted, an admission of not fasting, even to an outsider and non-Muslim, was to be interpreted as a sign of trust and that I was held in confidence.

In all cases, I asked respondents to suggest a meeting place. There were several reasons for this. It is important that respondents have some measure of control over a process that requires them to speak frankly about personal issues. The choice of locale was also indicative of a variety of factors, for instance how comfortable they felt being interviewed in view of colleagues or friends or if they chose a place where they were not

likely to be seen by acquaintances. If they chose a public venue for our interview, this also indicated that these young women were claiming their place in the public sphere, especially when this occurred in Morocco.

In Morocco, I interviewed participants either in their home, their place of work or, in the case of university students or professors, on campus. If they asked me to come to their office, I was seen by their co-workers. There, they introduced me to their colleagues which meant telling them that they were being interviewed for a research project. In this type of situation it sometimes happened that a colleague showed interest and asked to participate as well. Whenever I was invited to a woman's home, I was welcomed by other family members who showed an interest in my research. Some particularly self-confident women suggested we meet in a café, while carefully choosing one that had both male and female customers. Most outdoor cafés in Morocco still are a predominantly male domain.

In France, no interview was conducted at a place of work. Most women suggested meeting in a café, neighborhood restaurant or on campus. The only women who invited me to their home were women who lived alone. Because I have no established ties in France, it was particularly important there to conduct field work in two consecutive years, allowing for relationships to develop and to deepen these (by maintaining contact via electronic mail) between the first contact in 2004 and the second meeting in 2005. For example at our first meeting in 2004, several respondents would simply state their profession without much further elaboration. In our second and third meeting in 2005, they would confide that they actually felt rather insecure in their present position, were overqualified but could not find another position or felt that they could not move up within the company as they had expected.

In Morocco, there was no difference between veiled and unveiled women in terms of the ease with which they approached the interviews. In France, veiled women hesitated to be tape recorded and they were cautious in their choice of venue; one requested written assurance from my advisor as to the legitimacy of my research which was duly provided. The precarious situation of veiled women in France was made apparent when I conducted a series of interviews at the university campus in Nanterre where a guard approached me to inquire about my meetings with "these women".

In Morocco without exception, everyone who agreed to participate in the interviews did so. In France, on several occasions, women did not show up for an appointment, cancelled at the last minute or when we did meet, said they were actually not prepared to be interviewed. This difference can be attributed to the fact that I started out with a good network of contacts in Morocco. Even when I met someone for the first time, I had been referred by a common acquaintance or because of my affiliation with a Moroccan university, my research was considered legitimate. In France, I could rely on no such network, and met all the women for the first time as part of this research.

In Morocco, I met a young American researcher in the medieval city of Fès who was in the process of conducting interviews with women as well. Her situation in Morocco was comparable to mine in France. She had no network of established contacts in Morocco and met the women solely for purposes of her research. She experienced similar frustrations in Morocco as I did in France, namely that women were hesitant to talk to her, or simply did not show up for appointments. This illustrated the fact that doing research with private citizens on matters of personal attitudes and opinions requires time to develop a certain level of trust. By private citizens, I refer to people who are not usually consulted as experts or are not accustomed to expressing their views to strangers.

Indeed, trust was a major issue of concern. In doing research on attitudes, a researcher has to minimize the risk that respondents do not reveal their own views but respond in ways they believe are expected and/or that have the effect of retaining their privacy despite their having agreed to be interviewed. Particularly in authoritarian societies such as Morocco, conformity is highly valued, therefore respondents may say what they believe the researcher wants to hear or repeat official viewpoints. This was liable to be the case, for example, in answer to the question “Do you believe the Personal Status Code reform is based in the Qu’ran?” The reform was introduced by the King himself who presented it as being in conformity with the religion of Islam. With official discourse in Morocco thus based on the premise that the legal reform is grounded in the Scripture, few people would dispute this assertion in public.

Another seemingly simple question was: “Do you have friends who are not Muslim?” Like most participants, one particular woman responded “yes.” I knew this student had not traveled much beyond her hometown and had lived all her life in the

heartland of Morocco. Furthermore she came from a strict Islamist family that monitored her relationships and she was still living with her parents. Therefore I was curious as to where she could have met someone with a background different from hers. At the end of the interview, I casually asked her who her non-Muslim friends were, to which she exclaimed: “Why, you!” In the course of our evening together, this shy woman said that nobody had ever shown an interest in her opinions. The encounter with my fieldwork was her first opportunity to express her own views on religion, family, marriage, her dreams and hopes for her personal and professional life. And so she concluded that we must be friends.

Respondents were found in various ways. In Morocco, I started by contacting former university students whom I knew from my residence there. These women now had professional jobs in Rabat and Casablanca. As I knew some of these women quite well, I asked them to refer me to others who fitted the sample characteristics. I also contacted acquaintances and asked for recommendations. I interviewed sisters or daughters of friends. I moved from city to city to meet women from different parts of the country. One interview led to another and so the sample included women in locations ranging from the small, mostly Berber middle Atlas towns of Ifrane and Azrou, to the large economic center of Casablanca, the capital city of Rabat, the industrial city of Safi, the ancient royal cities of Fès and Meknes and lastly the northern coastal city of Tangier.

France proved a more difficult terrain to navigate as I had few established contacts there. I was based in Paris and all the interviews were conducted either in Paris, the department of Seine-Saint-Denis, in the *banlieues* of Montreuil and smaller towns in the vicinity of Paris from Nanterre to Orry-la-Ville in the north to Créteil in the south-east and Trappes, an industrial town west of Paris. Prior to my arrival in France, I had contacted several Muslim groups, Maghrebi women’s organizations, and support groups for Moroccans in France by e-mail. I had also asked my contacts in Morocco if they had family or friends in the Paris region. In addition, I followed leads provided by my advisor. Many of these contacts did not in the end come to fruition in terms of securing an interview but they pointed the way to other potential participants. One major difficulty in France was the intense level of mistrust of a U.S.-based researcher. The French

government had opposed 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, a stance widely supported by the population, and public discourse in France often has an anti-American bent.

Occasionally, women backed out of an interview already agreed upon. Some simply did not show up or called to cancel or asked a friend to call and cancel on their behalf. Some interviewees could only be found with great difficulty. Because veiled women in France were exceedingly apprehensive about being interviewed by an U.S.-based researcher whom they knew nothing about, some unconventional techniques had to be employed to secure interviews. Patience and persistence were crucial in securing interviews with this particularly reticent group of women.

Once I located an Islamic study center in a Parisian suburb and placed myself in the hallway at the entrance area for more than five hours. I knew of a self-proclaimed fundamentalist woman who attended classes there but had stood me up several times. I introduced myself to each woman who walked through the door and told them who I was waiting for. I rightly assumed that women who frequented this center knew each other by name. While sitting in the waiting area, I could observe through the slightly ajar door a study session in progress. A bearded man held forth on the role of women according to the Qu'ran to an all female, all veiled audience. The lecturer apparently spoke Arabic whereas the audience members did not because he repeatedly invoked sayings in Arabic which he then translated into heavily accented French. Eventually, the woman I had been waiting for agreed to talk with me under the condition that the door of the room to which she guided me remained open, and that she could end the interview at any moment. She furthermore insisted on writing short answers to my questions down herself and requested to read over the notes I had taken during the interview. This young woman insisted that in her understanding of Islam, there was no differentiation among people along national or ethnic lines because all believers were brothers and sisters and national or ethnic background was of no import. Though her parents were Moroccan, she considered herself first and foremost as part of the *umma*, the community of believers.

In fact, the circle of friends of most respondents in France included people originating from all of the countries of the Maghreb. This was evident when I asked participants to introduce me to some of their friends for further interviews. The most common response to this request was that they were willing to introduce me to their

friends but often they were not of Moroccan origin. Their circles of friends included people from North African immigrant families, mostly from Algeria, occasionally from Tunisia. Interestingly, in Morocco one does not find too many people positively inclined towards Algerians. Because of Algeria's support for the Polisario movement that is fighting for the independence of the Western Sahara, a territory claimed by Morocco, the two countries have had a long, acrimonious relationship. In France, these national hostilities have all but disappeared among the second generation. Also, I met several women in France, though none in Morocco, who came from mixed parentage, i.e. one parent was Moroccan, one from a sub-Saharan African or a Middle Eastern country.

Appointments in France were generally made by phone, occasionally via e-mail. During the initial phone conversation, the nature of the research was explained and the contacted persons were asked if they were interested in contributing to the project. We exchanged particulars about our appearance so that we could recognize each other. This was mostly the case in France, because as a foreigner in Morocco, I was easily recognized. Still, the way women in Morocco described themselves made it easy to spot them even in busy places such as in front of the main railway station in Rabat or at the edge of the medina of Fès, the walled-in part of town that has remained largely unchanged since the 14th century. Their self-descriptions matched their actual appearance.

By contrast in France, most women described themselves on the phone as looking "typically Moroccan." Routinely, potential interview partners would spot me before I saw them. What they viewed to be "typically Moroccan" could be lost on an outsider. Most participants were clad in fashionable western attire, had brown or black hair, coiffed in a variety of styles - all very usual for women in France. Yet these women of Moroccan origin had a deep-seated sense of differentness from other French women.

Upon meeting, I again explained that this was a comparative study of young, educated professional women in Morocco and women of Moroccan origin in France. Occasionally, women brought one or two female friends along. I insisted on the confidential nature of the interviews and therefore they had to be conducted with one person at a time. Respondents insisted on the closeness of their friendship and

consequently had nothing to hide from each other. Still, I remained firm on the protocol of one-on-one interviews. There was one exception where a non-veiled woman introduced me to her veiled friend. This veiled woman was adamant about the presence of her friend during the interview.

During the course of certain interviews women occasionally revealed secrets they had not shared with their friends or family. Some respondents admitted to having had sexual relationships despite keeping up the appearance of being a virgin in the eyes of her family and most of their friends. One woman spoke of an abortion - arranged by her mother - after she had become pregnant from a relationship with a non-Muslim boyfriend. Because of the shame and disgrace she felt afterwards, she agreed to a marriage arranged by her parents to a man she did not know prior to their engagement. Her friends knew nothing of the events that preceded this arranged marriage.

Due to the sensitive nature of certain topics, some respondents requested that I turn off the recorder during portions of the interview. Others elaborated on their answers after the formal session ended and the recorder had been turned off. Here again, my journalistic experience in rapid note-taking came in handy. In these instances, I wrote down everything I remembered of the conversation as soon as we parted ways. Often, what was said during these informal conversations was particularly relevant and revealing. Where appropriate, I would meet respondents a second time to go over the notes again, or ask for clarification via e-mail or over the phone, to make sure I had recorded their responses accurately.

Language

The interviews were conducted primarily in French. In Morocco, some women preferred to use English for parts of the interview because they felt they could express their personal views in that language more freely - especially when their opinions differed from mainstream discourse. Because neither French nor English is my native language, I can understand some of the internal processes and the freedom that comes with expressing oneself in a foreign language.

In Morocco, most participants responded in a mixture of French and *dereja*, the Moroccan dialect of Arabic. Especially when discussing matters of religion, they used common Arabic phrases or quotations from the Qu’ran. To ensure confidentiality, no translator was employed. When Arabic was spoken, the women used common expressions or sayings with which I am familiar. If I did not understand an Arabic word or sentence, I wrote down what I heard and later asked for a translation but I did not interrupt the flow of speech. Transcribing lengthy responses to open-ended questions in a tri-lingual mix, posed a particular challenge and occasionally required follow-up sessions to clarify certain points.

In France, the women spoke to me only in French, and in fact often apologized for not knowing even verses from the Qu’ran in the original Arabic. Occasionally, they would insert common expressions in Arabic such as “*Inch’Allah*” (God willing), “*Mektub*” (it is written, meaning destiny). To the question “Do you speak Arabic?” some women in France responded by invoking the *fatiha*, the opening sentence of most *suras*: “*besmellah errahman errahim*” (In the name of Allah, most benevolent, ever merciful) or recite parts of the *shahada*, the profession of faith “*La ilaha il Allah*” (there is no God but God) and say that this was the extent of their knowledge of classical Arabic.

In France, the majority of participants described French as their primary language even though they spoke *dereja* or a Berber language, or a mixture of languages with their parents and other senior family members, but used French with their siblings.

In the Data Analysis Chapter, I have used an English translation when quoting respondents. This is to facilitate the reading especially in cases where respondents switched back and forth between French, English or Arabic but also to further protect the identity of my respondents. English is not a language commonly spoken in Morocco and as my sample represented a select minority, it would not be difficult to uncover the identity of some of the women if only they were quoted in English.

Data Collection

“Collecting data” can be viewed as a cut-and-dried academic process of amassing information. Conducting interviews on qualitative constructs such as “attitudes” in a

cross-cultural setting and with a comparative focus, is a much more fluid process fraught with nuances and indiscernible hints.

Researchers who have based their studies on personal interviews describe a frequently occurring experience, summarized by Joyceline Cesari who quotes a young man in her *Musulmanes et Republicains*: “Nous voulons bien contribuer à votre enquête, mais est-ce que vous allez faire comme les autres ou dire la vérité? Pourquoi faut-il toujours se justifier ? La religion musulmane ce n’est ni l’intégrisme ni le terrorisme” (Cesari, 1998 : 13). This outburst reflects the assumption that a Western researcher who asks questions about Islam - particularly post 9/11 - must be concerned with terrorism and fundamentalism. In my interviews in France and Morocco, this sentiment was expressed frequently.

As some of the examples in previous sections of this chapter illustrate, considerable effort was expended to bridge the culture gap and to ensure that I understood responses in the meaning intended by the participants. Communication across cultures always presents a high risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. In examining differences both in perception and communication, anthropologist Edward T. Hall categorized cultures as being either “high” or “low” context cultures, depending on how much meaning their members attach to settings. Hall describes the role of culture in communication: “One of the functions of culture is to provide a highly selective screen between man and the outside world. In its many forms, culture therefore designates what we pay attention to and what we ignore” (Hall, 1976: 74). Hall defines context as “the information that surrounds an event; it is inextricably bound up with the meaning of the events” (ibid., 30).

To provide a contextual reference and to create an environment familiar to participants, I decided to enlist the support of my teenage daughters. Though it is not common academic practice for a researcher to be accompanied by his or her children, in this particular project, their presence proved to be an important asset. Islamic culture emphasizes the role and position of the mother. A commonly cited quote from the *hadith* says: “Heaven lies at the feet of mothers.” Motherhood is perceived as a revered state. Because this research depended on women to be open and honest about private matters,

much thought went into finding ways to create an atmosphere of trust. It was therefore important that participants did not see me primarily as a foreign researcher especially when meeting participants for the first time. Given the cultural gap between Muslims and Westerners, majority and minority cultures, developing and industrialized world, an effort on my part to conform to conventions of my respondents was deemed necessary to facilitate the process of data collection.

There was a noticeable difference in atmosphere when I was accompanied by one of my daughters or when I went alone to an interview. By myself, the tone between participants and me was professional, if cordial, but conversations rarely strayed beyond the themes raised in the interview schedule. When accompanied by one of my daughters, the environment immediately was more relaxed and familial.

Often participants felt more comfortable asking my daughters questions they did not pose to me, such as: “Is your father a Muslim?” or: “Are you thinking of converting to Islam?” indicating that this research was perceived in part as a quest on my part to gain a deeper appreciation of Islam. Participants frequently engaged my daughter in exchanges about the American school system, popular music, films, occasionally fashion and brand names - a virtual obsession among Moroccan women - in all, topics that never came up when I was by myself. Still, so as to meet confidentiality requirements, I asked my daughter to step aside prior to the formal part of the interview.

Overall, the process of data collection followed the guidelines for Grounded Theory research. There was extensive writing of memos after each interview, constant reviewing of responses in search for recurring themes and nightly, partial transcription of interviews.

Data Analysis

An important aspect of the grounded theory approach is the coding of data, i.e. the process whereby categories are identified, labeled and interpreted. Analytical tools differ depending on the particularities of each research project, yet their purpose remains the same, making sense of the collected data. The purpose of data analysis is to extrapolate

from the specific to the general by letting the data determine the direction of the research and “steer the researchers’ thinking away from the confines of both the technical literature and personal experience” (Strauss and Corbin, 1996).

In my research, I focused on content analysis to find common themes. Data Analysis, according to Strauss and Corbin is like working on a puzzle. Coding is the part of the analysis concerned with identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena. It is the analytical process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 101). Essentially, each response to a question is being read in search of an answer to the question “What is this all about? What is being referenced here?”

Strauss and Corbin suggest employing fairly abstract categories for “open coding” as the abstract will help to identify a trend. In my study, these categories are the three main issues addressed in the interview schedule, namely Conceptions of Islam, Responses to Legal Changes in Morocco and in France and Personal and Professional Aspirations and Challenges.

The analysis and interpretation of the data from each category are ordered conceptually and summarized in Chapters 3 to 6. Questions relating to a theme are grouped together and tabulated answers to categorical questions aspects of these longer answers are presented. Often, respondents elaborated even on categorical questions and these lengthy answers are presented as well. The Data Analysis of open-ended questions is presented as a narrative, based on themes that emerged during the interviews.

The interviews schedule is used as a guide for these narratives but there has been no systematic process of presenting each question and corresponding answers as they appear in the interview schedule. Because this research is concerned with attitudes and personal viewpoints, it was imperative to bring the issues raised by respondents to the fore rather than following a mechanical procedure of data analysis.

The first step in the Data Analysis process was to transcribe relevant parts from the interviews as they relate to a specific question and categorize them by country. Then, answers obtained in Morocco were compared with those in France. Often, responses were similar but some respondents were more eloquent than others in which case I used lengthy quotations from those who best communicated a particular point to illustrate an

issue raised by several women in the sample. In the narrative, I sometimes juxtapose responses obtained in France with those from Morocco and sometimes dwell on responses from one country more extensively.

Most research about Muslims in the West, in this case France, is conducted from the vantage point of the Western world and examines its influence on changing attitudes among Muslims. My research takes an Islamic country, Morocco, as a starting point and then looks at women of Moroccan origin in France with particular reference to the extent to which their views are different from and similar to those of their counterparts in the Maghreb. Therefore, the views of the sample in Morocco are often presented in greater detail because they allow for depth of understanding of the responses by the sample in France. It is also better suited for the purposes of this comparative analysis so as to arrive at a better understanding how to interpret attitudinal changes among a certain segment of people from an Islamic background and culture.

Conclusion

This research is cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary. It is a qualitative study that draws on Grounded Theory for its methodology. This approach is well-suited for exploratory research because it provides a structure that allows respondents to raise themes and issues that are important to them. It is also a useful tool in assessing cultural change at the time it occurs. The research is based on a series of structured interviews of two samples of a young, educated, professional and urban women in Morocco and in France. Field work in both countries was preceded by pilot interviews conducted with a comparable sample in the United States. The findings based on the interview schedule are presented and analyzed in four chapters. Chapter 3: Core Biographical Features which introduce the samples, Chapter 4: Conceptions of Islam, Chapter 5: Legal Changes in Morocco and in France and Chapter 6: Personal and Professional Aspirations and Challenges.