

CHAPTER 3

CORE BIOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

This chapter introduces the two samples from France and in Morocco. This includes demographic details such as ranges of age, marital status, living situation, and proficiency in *dereja* (Moroccan Arabic) and/or one of the Berber languages spoken in Morocco. In addition, the interview schedule contained a section wherein respondents were asked to describe themselves by using specific categories or by offering different descriptors. Also presented here is an analysis of responses to questions that differed in Morocco and in France. The section of the interview schedule that contained country-specific questions aimed at gaining an understanding of the extent of family relations across the Mediterranean. Naming a preferred country of residence provides an indication of the degree of satisfaction with or loyalty to the country in which respondents reside. All answers have been tabulated and, combined with content analysis of responses and descriptive narratives, they provide preliminary insights into similarities and differences between the two samples which are then explored in greater depth in the Data Analysis chapters.

Table 3.1. Age of Respondents

Age	18-22	22-26	26-30	30 and over	Total
France	5	8	6	6	25
Morocco	3	7	9	11	30

Table 3.1. shows that the majority of women in both samples are in the age ranges of 22-26 and 26-30. Five women in France and three in Morocco were younger than 22 and six women in France and 11 in Morocco were over thirty years of age. These particular age ranges were chosen because younger women, still in the process of forming

their viewpoints and understanding of important issues, are less set in their ways and are exposed to a great variety of influences which point towards future developments. Younger women are also more directly affected by recent changes in the law of their respective country of residence. Their views on personal and professional issues are of immediate concern as they are in the process of making decisions with regards to marriage and family and are developing their careers. These types of options are more limited in older women. Nevertheless, I conducted some interviews with women over forty or fifty years because their reflections provide context and depth and illustrate some of the differences in perceptions and aspiration between the generations. These interviews are not included in the core sample but will be referred to in the overall analysis.

Table 3.2. Marital Status of Respondents

Civil Status	Single	Married	Divorced	Total
France	18	3	4	25
Morocco	24	6	0	30

Table 3.2. shows the marital status of women as single, married or divorced. The majority of women were single, three in Morocco and six in France were married and four in France but none in Morocco were divorced. In Morocco, all women in the sample were either single or married. In France, the situation was more complicated. For example, two women were single mothers as a result of a divorce. One lived with her child while the other woman’s child was raised by relatives in Morocco. This woman felt that though she was divorced, her status as a “single mother” was a great burden. She also cited practical reasons for sending her son to live with relatives across the Mediterranean, namely the cost of living in Paris and the difficulty of establishing herself in a professional career while raising a child. Another “married” woman did not live with her husband because the marriage existed on paper only, that is, she had married a French citizen with the goal of obtaining French citizenship for herself. The status of this woman is recorded in the category “single” even though her official status is “married.” Yet another divorced woman had been divorced from such a “*marriage blanc*” but had never

actually lived with her “husband.” These demographic complications tell of the precarious personal status of descendants of the immigrant population in France.

The relatively large proportion of unmarried women in their late twenties and early thirties is unusually high given that Moroccan culture historically encourages early marriage for women. The recent family law reform in Morocco raised the legal marriage age for girls from 15 to 18 years. Islamist groups in Morocco opposed the raising of the legal age for marriage because they considered early marriage an acceptable practice as long as there were large numbers of girls in the rural areas without any or only limited formal education. Raising the marriage age was perceived as being of advantage primarily for educated, urban women.

Interestingly, most of the women over the age of 26 followed the response “single” with a sigh or an exclamation such as: “Unfortunately, I am still single.” Or turning to me: “You are lucky, Western men don’t mind marrying older women but ‘our’ men don’t do that.” As shall be seen later in the data analysis in Chapter 6, not being able to find a husband is the price women in both countries have to pay for pursuing higher education and embarking on professional careers.

Table 3.3. Number of Respondents with Children

Children	Yes	No	Total
France	4	21	25
Morocco	3	27	30

Table 3.3. shows the number of women in the samples who had children. All women with children were either married or divorced, i.e. there were no single mothers in the samples. In France, there were some divorced women with a child or children, whereas all women in the Morocco sample who had children were married. Certainly, there are unmarried women (*mères célibataires*) with children in both countries, but the social stigma associated with single motherhood is formidable. In Morocco, these women are widely regarded as prostitutes. Until the recent reform of the family law, single mothers and their children had few legal rights and existed on the fringes of society, often

at the mercy of social service institutions because they were no longer welcomed in their parents' home. The stigma associated with single motherhood carries over into the community of women of Moroccan origin in France. For example, there was one woman in the French sample who said she had been in a hastily arranged marriage, followed by an equally rapid divorce so that her child would not be born out of wedlock. These personal circumstances were revealed in the interviews in great confidence and it caused women visible pain to speak about these issues. It is reasonable to assume that these admissions could be made in part because I am a foreigner who is considered sufficiently distant not to pass judgment on their personal circumstances.

Table 3.4. Living Situation of Respondents

Living	Alone	w/Friends	w/Family	w/Husband	w/Hus+Ch.	Total
France	7	1	14	1	2	25
Morocco	9	4	10	5	2	30

Table 3.4. shows the living situation of respondents. **Living alone** is a relatively recent phenomenon among Moroccan women and women of Moroccan origin in France. I asked respondents if their mothers had ever lived by themselves. Without exception, the answer was “no.” Given this context, the number of women living alone is relative large (seven in France and nine in Morocco). This seemingly straightforward categorical question about living situation unleashed a torrent of emotion. Women in both countries were at pains to explain why they lived alone. Apparently, they had not come to terms with this situation. None of the women simply affirmed “living alone” and moved on to the next question. Instead, they felt compelled to offer lengthy explanations as to the circumstances that led them to live alone.

In France, living alone most often was the result of a painful break with the family caused by one or both parents' disapproval of the personal or professional choices of their daughters. Another reason for living alone was that these young women had escaped from an impending arranged marriage. An illustration of just how complex and conflictual it is for women to live alone can be found in interviews conducted with two

sisters. One lived by herself without the parents' knowledge of her place of residence while the other, married, remained in close contact with her family. The sisters talked to each other often but the married one agreed to keep her sisters' whereabouts a secret. Though it may be a coincidence, in France divorced women with children wanted me to visit their home for the interviews where they made sure that I was given a tour of their small but immaculately clean apartments. As in most Moroccan homes I had visited, there were no visible signs that children were present in the household, such as toys, children's books, crayons, little shoes, or some such items that would normally be found in a Western household with small children.

The majority of the women in the French sample lived with their families and said they planned to stay there until they got married. Most said they could not imagine living by themselves.

In Morocco, respondents who lived alone considered this an "unnatural" but necessary situation because their place of employment was far away from where their family or relatives lived. This was most often the case among women who came from small towns, had received higher education and subsequently found rewarding jobs in the capital city of Rabat or the commercial center of Casablanca. Living alone was also often a class issue. Women of more affluent backgrounds did in most instances have relatives in the large urban areas with whom they could live whereas women from modest homes had no such relations. While none of the veiled women in France lived alone, in Morocco there was no difference between veiled and unveiled women with regards to their living situation. This is significant because it reflects a different understanding of how life can properly be led in accordance with the scripture. Veiled women in France considered it "impossible" or "improper" to live alone, whereas veiled women in Morocco made no such connection between personal religious commitment and living situation.

The category **living with friends** refers to living with friends of the same gender. In France and in Morocco, the number of women who share an apartment is small compared with the number of women who live alone or with family. To a Western reader it may be striking that no woman said she was living with a partner to whom she was not married. Though it is conceivable that some respondents may in fact live with a male partner, none admitted as much.

The majority of respondents in France and in Morocco said they were **living with family**. This was the case regardless of age. Family mostly means parents or siblings but can also refer to extended family such as an aunt or a female cousin. For most women this was seen as the most natural arrangement. They expected to leave their family's home only upon marriage. Some of the women over the age of thirty did, however, say they had briefly tried living alone, only to move back in with their families as they found this too lonely.

Married women said they **lived with their husband** when this was a consummated relationship. In the cases where the marriage existed on paper only for the purposes of gaining citizenship, the women lived alone. Married women with children lived with their husband and children.

Regardless of age, all “really” married women were in their first marriage relationship even though some had husbands who had been married previously. None of the women in the samples was in a polygamous marriage, though some said their fathers had been married to multiple wives. Almost all had some degree of familiarity with a polygamous marriage among relatives or friends of their parents. For all respondents, a polygamous marriage was unequivocally out of the question. The issue of polygamy is addressed in the chapter on legal changes.

These core biographical features reveal significant similarities between the two samples. This is evident from the tables but even more so in other aspects of the ways in which women responded or reacted to questions. For instance, it is safe to assume that a question about “living situation” would not likely have resulted in such outpouring of emotion among Western women who live alone. Also, from a comparable sample of Western women, one would expect to hear some say that they are living with a boyfriend. Likewise, one would have to consider the possibility that living with someone of the same gender refers to a sexual partnership. However, none of the women in either sample as much as hinted that “living with friends” indicated anything more than sharing an apartment. While male homosexuality is mentioned in the Qu’ran, same-sex relationship among women is not and therefore lesbian relationships do not exist officially.

The two most significant elements gathered from the demographic information are the large proportions of single women and of women living alone. Similar research conducted only a decade earlier would not have been likely to yield the same results. Then it would have been exceedingly uncommon for women over the age of 25 not to be married. It would have been equally unheard of for young women to live by themselves. These data indicate a significant shift in societal norms, attitudes and values.

Several women talked about their mothers who had married in their teens to a man chosen for them by their families. Some respondents spoke about their sisters, younger and older, who were already married, to underline their own unusual status even within their own families. In Morocco, I interviewed a 28-year-old school teacher, Khadija, who lived with her 45-year-old mother Aicha in a medium-size town. The young woman also had an older brother. Laughingly, mother and daughter remarked about the differences between their lives. The illiterate Aicha, who only spoke Tamazight, had been married at age 14 to a man she had met for the first time on her wedding day. Through her daughter's translation, she said she had grown to love her husband because she had been a child when they got married and thus she had not had time to develop her own ideas about love and marriage. Her husband now lived with one of her sons in another part of the country after a car accident had left the son handicapped and unable to work and provide for his family. The father worked to support his son's family while the daughter took care of her mother. Aicha was proud that her daughter had studied at a university and was thus well-educated and she gesticulated vividly to make me understand that she thought it was quite alright for a 28-year-old not to be married in this day and age. Fatima for her part said she would like to get married but did not have much opportunity to meet a man as she worked full-time and did not go out much. Fatima felt that the transition from arranged marriage to choosing one's own spouse was not an easy one and that several of her girlfriends were in a similar situation. In some ways she envied her mother's situation because the absence of choice had made her life simpler. At the time she embarked on her university studies Fatima had not envisioned that this would lead to her being what she laughingly called an "old maid."

This encounter illustrates a shift in values and attitudes because like Fatima, women in both samples postponed marriage sometimes with the dire consequence of

remaining single longer than anticipated. Some were willing to explore new territory by living alone. Despite the different cultural and social environments in North Africa and Western Europe, young, educated women on both sides of the Mediterranean share common traits as they are charting a course that differs in important ways from that of previous generations.

Table 3.5. Self-Description of Respondents

Describe yourself by checking one or more of the following categories:

Categories	Progress.	<i>Laique</i>	Conservat.	Practicing	None	Other	Total
France	19	7	4	14	0	4	48
Morocco	19	2	8	16	2	5	52

Table 3.5. shows how respondents described themselves when asked to choose between specific categories. Respondents were not limited to one category but were free to choose as many - or none - that applied to them. The total number of responses reflects the sum of categories chosen by the 25 women in the French sample and the 30 in the Moroccan sample. Several women in both samples asked for the definition of certain categories. Most often they requested definitions for “progressive” and “conservative.” I explained the terms the way I understood them, namely that “progressive” is most commonly associated with forward-looking, supportive of change with regard to individual liberty and freedom of choices. “Conservative” referred to an inclination of wanting to preserve the status quo and upholding conventions and traditions. Categories are necessary tools when collecting data, however their usefulness is limited when respondents consider these categories irrelevant or insufficient descriptors or if their meaning is unclear or differs from person to person. As the above listed categories are commonly used in the West, they are useful in the context of this dissertation.

Lacitié is an important aspect of French society and most respondents affirmed that it is in large part due to this concept that the rights of individual Muslims are better protected in France than in Morocco or for that matter in most of the Arab world. Nevertheless, recent legislation banning selected religious insignia in public schools is

often understood by Muslims as aiming directly against them, and proponents of this law often present it as a necessary feature of *laciitié*. Perhaps because of this, as can be seen from the above table, respondents in France generally preferred to categorize themselves in other ways, rather than as *laiques*. *Laciitié* is not part not of the social fabric in Morocco, where the unity of the religious and the secular sphere is firmly anchored in the constitution. Still, two women (one veiled, one not) said they supported the idea of separation of the religious from the secular. This is noteworthy because at the heart of this assertion is a rejection of the monarchy in its present form, a position that is criminally liable. Even allowing for my repeated assurances of confidentiality, these two women demonstrated quite some courage in stating their position so clearly. In fact, around the time I conducted my interviews in Morocco in May/June 2005, Nadia Yassine, spokesperson of the Islamist movement *Al Adl wa Ihsane* faced court proceedings due to a remark she made at an academic conference at the University of California at Berkeley earlier that year in April which was subsequently reported widely in the Moroccan media in which she posed a hypothetical question about a the possibility of a future Moroccan republic¹.

Among the women who chose two categories to describe themselves the majority opted for telling combinations, such as “practicing” and “*laique*,” or “progressive” and “conservative.” The most frequent combination was “progressive” and “practicing.” This allows for the conclusion that women in both samples did not perceive a conflict between being a practicing Muslim and having progressive views on societal issues, such as personal freedoms, choice and professional careers. I routinely double-checked to make sure I had correctly understood their insistence on being considered “practicing and progressive” or “conservative and progressive.” In the cases where women responded by describing themselves as “conservative and progressive,” I asked them to elaborate on their answers. Respondents in both samples said they were proud of certain traditions and religious customs and therefore thought they were worth preserving while they considered themselves supportive of change on social issues. Among the traditions worth

¹ For complete coverage of the court proceedings, the remarks made by Yassine and the response of the U.S. State Department in defense of the Islamists’ right to free speech, see *Le Journal*, June 24, 2005, or at: www.lejournal-hebdo.com. Also see “Le climat politique se dégrade au Maroc” in *Le Monde*, June 29, 2005.

preserving, most said “strong family ties,” “Islam,” including the Ramadan fast and the holiday *Eid al Kbir*, or a preference for Moroccan over Western cuisine. Veiled women in both countries most often chose the combination “practicing” and “conservative.”

Those who chose the category “other” described themselves in similar ways in Morocco and in France, namely as “open-minded,” “ecumenical,” or “non-dogmatic.” In France, some used the term “feminist,” in Morocco one described herself as an “Islamic feminist.” Two women in Morocco felt the categories provided did not reflect the way they saw themselves. They did not, however, offer any other categories and instead chose to skip this part of the interview schedule.

These self-descriptions are revealing in several ways. For one they show that the majority of individuals in the French sample chose similar categories to describe themselves as the women in the Moroccan sample despite their significantly different county-specific circumstances. The comparatively large number who described themselves as “progressive,” i.e. in support of social change indicates that young, educated, professional women are faced with similar challenges and therefore want to see certain aspects of their respective societies changed.

So as to illustrate some of those country-specific circumstances, the interview schedule contained a series of questions that differed in Morocco and in France. In the following, I will present data obtained from questions that differed in Morocco and France. These questions were designed to ascertain the level of familiarity and the bond respondents felt with the country on the other side of the Mediterranean. In France, questions pertained to respondent’s desire to move to Morocco, their fluency in *dereja* (Moroccan Arabic), how often they had visited Morocco and which country they would like to settle in permanently. In Morocco, respondents were asked if they had ever visited France or any other country, if they had relatives in France and also if they had ever thought of moving to a foreign country.

Respondents in France

Table 3.6. Attitudes concerning Relocation to Morocco among Respondents in France

Have you thought about the possibility of permanently moving to Morocco?

Moving to Morocco	Yes	No	Other
	11	14	0

Table 3.6. shows that in France most respondents had not thought about the possibility of permanently moving to Morocco while slightly less than half of the respondents said they had in fact at least entertained the idea of moving to the country of their parents' - and in some cases their own - birth. In itself these response are not surprising. Viewed through a comparative lens however, another dimension appears. When I shared responses obtained in France with the Moroccan sample, most said they doubted the veracity of statements made by women of Moroccan origin in France. Said Bouchra in Rabat: "They did not tell you the truth; of course they want to come back to Morocco. They are Moroccans. They just said that because you are a Westerner yourself and so they wanted you to believe that they too consider a western country their home." Occasionally I had a slip of the tongue and asked respondents in France: "Have you ever thought about the possibility of permanently 'returning' to Morocco?" which was immediately followed by a correction such as: "It is not 'returning,' I am French," or "I was born in France and lived all my life here, so if I go to Morocco I am not returning, I am visiting," or: "Even though I still have a Moroccan passport, I have never lived in Morocco and therefore am not really Moroccan." Among those born in Morocco, now living in France, most said they had not considered ever moving back.

When I discussed how some women in Morocco had reacted to responses of women of Moroccan origin in France, a middle-age lawyer in Rabat who had studied and lived abroad for several years, explained: "Our women have to say that. They feel a sense of pride in being Moroccan and don't want to think that people who leave to settle

elsewhere cut their ties with their home country.” Another person offered this comment: “Every summer, we see Morocco invaded by immigrants and their families who are coming back for the summer. It seems there are more cars with French, Belgian, Dutch or German number plates in Morocco during the summer months than cars with local number plates. So we have a sense here that those working overseas still consider Morocco their home. It makes us feel good to see them coming home.” However, another observed: “My brother comes back every year from France, his suitcase loaded with goods, many of which we can get here. But if something is from Europe, people believe it is special, of superior quality. I told him to stop bringing us stuff. It is humiliating. We have what we need here. Last year, he came with just his backpack and other than me; everyone in the family was disappointed. This longing for all things Western is schizophrenic because on the other side, people say they are so proud of living in an Islamic country.”

There were some women in France who actually had come to work in Morocco for a short period of time, only to return to France because they did not feel at home in Morocco. A social worker in Paris had moved to Casablanca to work for a year for a social service organization a distant relative was heading. She said: “I could not stand it. I could not handle the Moroccan mentality. Even though I lived in a large, modern city, the way women were treated was terrible.”

Those respondents who said they did consider moving to Morocco often were in their early twenties and felt unsure about their professional future in France. They hoped a French university degree might make it easier for them to find a satisfying job in Morocco. As there is a difference between hopes, wishful thinking and reality, the question about moving to Morocco was addressed in a different manner through a second question.

Table 3.7. Desired Location of Permanent Residence of Respondents in France

Do you expect to move to Morocco permanently?

Moving permanently	Yes	No	Other
	3	20	2

Table 3.7. shows less ambiguous responses. Asked if they actually expected to relocate to Morocco, the number who said “yes” dwindled to three while 20 out of 25 respondents said “no.” Those classified as “other” explained that such a decision depended on the circumstances, particularly professional opportunities. They felt a French education gave them an advantage over Moroccan applicants for certain positions, so if their careers in France did not take off the way they envisioned, they would look into finding a position in Morocco yet not necessarily with the intention of settling there permanently. Professional opportunity was thus the prime reason for a possible move. When asked if marriage might be a factor, for instance if their future husbands wanted to relocate to Morocco or were offered a position there, respondents were less sure that this was a good enough reason to turn their back on their lives in France.

The response to the first question indicates that second generation women in the sample still feel an emotional bond with the country of their heritage but ultimately pragmatic reasons are the prime factor in deciding where to settle. Under any circumstances, a move from one country to another is a major undertaking and therefore such decisions are not taken lightly and require a lot of advance planning and an above average sense of mobility.

Table 3.8. Family Ties to Morocco of Respondents in France

Do you have family in Morocco?

Family in Morocco	Yes	No	Other
France	25	0	0

Table 3.8. shows that all women in the French sample did indeed have close family in Morocco but the extent of their contact with those family members varied. Most said that as children, they had visited Morocco on a regular basis during the summer months. Upon becoming adults, these visits had become less frequent. Respondents admitted that their first-hand understanding of life in Morocco was based on these holiday family visits and not on an experience of everyday life. The majority of the women in the French sample hailed from typical immigrant backgrounds, i.e. their parents came from small, rural or impoverished places situated on one side of the rural/urban divide that characterizes Moroccan society. They had left Morocco as low-skilled workers in search of better opportunities to provide for their families. Thus, their daughters' emphasis on going - to put it bluntly - where the money is, is in keeping with the family tradition.

Table 3.9. Understanding of Moroccan languages of Respondents in France

Do you speak Arabic and/or Berber?

Language	Dereja/Berber	Classical	Read/write	French only	Total
France	22	3	3	3	31

Table 3.9. shows that the majority of respondents in the French sample said they could communicate in *derjea* (Moroccan Arabic) or one of the Berber languages but acknowledged they were not entirely fluent. Classical Arabic is different from the local

Moroccan dialect and only three women said they also had some competency in classical Arabic. Among those who said they spoke either classical Arabic and/or *derjea*, only three said they were able to read and write Arabic. Of those who spoke one of the Berber languages (Tamazight, Tachelhit, Tarifit), most spoke Tarifit, indicating their families came from the Rif mountain region in the north of Morocco², a part of the country known for its rebellions against the central political authority and in the past often neglected by the national government and therefore particularly poor. In the table, *derjea* (Moroccan Arabic) and Berber are grouped together because the purpose of the question was to ascertain proficiency in a language spoken in Morocco. To distinguish further between *dereja* and Berber would have required a differentiation of the three Berber languages spoken in Morocco which exceeds the scope of this study.

The three women who said they were proficient in classical Arabic or could read and write Arabic fluently had learned this either in Qu'ran school as children or learned it on their own initiative as adults. This was the case among veiled, more religiously inclined respondents. The prevalent lack of knowledge of classical Arabic also meant that respondents could not read the Qu'ran in its original version. As the Qu'ran is believed to be the directly revealed word of God to the prophet Mohammed, any translation is considered an interpretation and therefore inferior. In the part of the interview schedule that pertains to conceptions of Islam, this lack of proficiency was cited by several respondents as one of the main reasons why they had never read the Qu'ran. There was some inhibition towards reading the Qu'ran in French translation. Respondents also said that their parents, even though they had immigrated from an Arabic-speaking, Islamic country, had not been educated enough to read the Qu'ran. Those who spoke Tarifit with their parents said their only option was reading the Qu'ran in French as Arabic was not one of the languages they understood anyway. Most said they wanted to keep up their Arabic/Berber language skills. Aicha, a teacher near Paris, said: "It is fun to have sort of a secret language, when I am in the subway with my friends, and we don't want people around us to understand what we are saying, we can switch to *dereja*." With very few exceptions, respondents said that French was the language they were most comfortable

² The Rif mountains is the largest hashish growing region in the world and whatever wealth there is in this region was created through the drug trade. Cannabis is cultivated openly and the fields grow right by the roadside in plain view of every traveler through this region.

with because their schooling was in French. All respondents considered French their native language.

Respondents in Morocco

Table 3.10. Desire to Move Abroad of Moroccan Respondents

Have you thought of the possibility of moving elsewhere?

Moving elsewhere	Yes	No	Other
	20	9	1

Table 3.10. shows that the majority of respondents in Morocco had thought about the possibility of moving elsewhere³. The category “elsewhere” meant respondents were given the option to name any place in the world. I wanted to see which country would be cited most frequently. Given that the majority of respondents had family in France or another country of the European Union, coupled with the geographical proximity of North Africa and Europe, one might have expected that Europe would be the destination of choice. However, Canada was the most frequently cited country. This response is interesting for a variety of reasons. First, it indicates that the Moroccan sample was not singularly focused on France, its former colonial master - or Europe for that matter - as its external reference point. Secondly, Canada shares many social, cultural and economic traits with the United States, its immediate neighbor. Third, despite the similarities with the United States, Canada offers the advantage of having a substantial francophone region. Considering the geographical distance between Morocco and Canada and the expense involved in trans-Atlantic travel, it is unlikely that respondents who said they had thought of moving, would actually ever get there. However, the choice of Canada shows a remarkable skill in negotiating a balance between public Moroccan discourse -

³ Ten per cent of the Moroccan population of ca. 30 million resides abroad, thus immigration is a concept present in the minds of many.

which in the wake of the invasion of Iraq is decidedly anti-American, and personal preferences.

As expected, France, Great Britain, Belgium, the United States were also mentioned. Mostly these choices were connected to the fact that respondents had either close or distant relatives in one of those places and had received favorable reports from them. None mentioned another Arab country, though one said she had lived in Saudi Arabia for a year and another said she once had received a job offer from Kuwait but had decided against moving there. As with the French sample, the most often cited reason for thinking of relocating abroad was “professional opportunity,” followed by “financial security,” and some said “the possibility of being myself.” Asked to clarify this statement, respondents said they felt that in their home country they were bound to abide by traditions and customs, even those they did not agree with. Especially women who had briefly lived abroad to pursue university degrees said they felt more at ease in a foreign society where they could express themselves more freely and evaluate their own habits and beliefs by comparing them to others. Some said they thought it might be easier to find a husband overseas because in their understanding, Western men were not as prejudiced against marrying women over a certain age as are their Moroccan counterparts. Some respondents said they had already lived abroad, either in France, the United States, Brazil, or Saudi Arabia but had come back to Morocco because, “this is my home and where my family lives.”

The women who had thought about moving abroad were decidedly oriented toward the West. None mentioned another developing world country, for example an African country, none another Arab or Islamic country. The citing of European countries might be in part explained by the geographical proximity of Morocco and Europe and in part by the historical relationship between Spain, France and Morocco; the most important factors, however, were economic affluence and real or perceived abundance of opportunities relative to respondents’ home country.

About a third of the Moroccan sample stated they had not seriously thought about moving elsewhere, regardless of imagined enhanced opportunities. They wanted to stay where they were. Their thinking reflected a Moroccan proverb that states: “The tar of my country is better than the honey of others.”

Table 3.11. Visits to France of Respondents in Morocco

Have you ever visited France?

Visited France	Yes	No
	14	16

Table 3.11 shows that slightly more than half of the women interviewed in Morocco had never visited France whereas slightly fewer than half had been to France, either for a visit or an extended stay to obtain an advanced university degree. Again, this finding is of interest primarily due to the comparative nature of this study. All women in the French sample had been to Morocco at least once, the majority more than once. Therefore, women of Moroccan origin in France did have some personal, first-hand experience of life in Morocco, even if these visits occurred chiefly during a holiday season. Respondents in Morocco did not have the same degree of experience with France. Those who had lived in France for an extended period had pursued higher education there and those who had gone for a visit, rarely spent more than a fortnight - if that much - in France.

Table 3.12. Visits to other Countries of Respondents in Morocco

Have you visited countries other than France?

Visited other countries	Yes	No
	23	7

Table 3.12 shows that the majority of the women in the Moroccan sample had visited a foreign country other than France. This comparatively large number reflects the fact that the sample selected for this study is not representative of the entire national population. It is a sample drawn from a small minority of women, to whom the criteria for selection apply: young, educated, professional and urban, criteria that rule out that vast majority of the female population. Their travels had taken them anywhere from

neighboring Algeria to Norway and Malaysia, from Spain to South America and the United States. Those who had been to Saudi Arabia had been there for the *haj*, the pilgrimage to the Muslim holy sites in Mecca and Medina. Women in the Moroccan sample were more cosmopolitan than women in the French sample. This is partly attributable to social class, i.e. young, educated professional women in Morocco generally hail from middle- to upper-class families and so have been provided with the means for international travel. Another factor lies academic scholarships that offer eligible candidates an opportunity to study abroad.

Women of Moroccan origin in France had for the most part had only been to Morocco; only a few had been to other countries. Some had gone on school field trips to Great Britain or Germany and some had visited different countries as part of their jobs.

Table 3.13. Family in France of Moroccan Respondents

Do you have family in France?

Family in France	Yes	No
Morocco	22	8

The majority of the women in the Moroccan sample did have close or distant family in France. From the comparative data, it is evident that women of Moroccan origin in France had visited their family in Morocco more frequently than their Moroccan counterparts had gone to France.

A table absent in this study is one that shows educational level. As one of the sample criteria was educational level, such a table might be expected. However, tabulating educational level was complicated by the differences between educational systems in Morocco and in France. Though the two countries have similar educational systems, they are not identical. Several of the women in this study had received their university education in the United States, Great Britain or at a Moroccan university that uses the American system. All respondents in both samples had completed at minimum the BAC. Most had pursued a Bachelor's Degree, *DEUG* or *licence*. Some had obtained

Master's Degree *maîtrise* or *DEA*. Several women in Morocco and one in France had earned a Ph.D. When relevant, individual respondents' highest educational degree is mentioned in the following chapters. As this research focuses on educated women, respondents do have a higher than average level of education in both countries. This is particularly the case in Morocco, where no more than 36 per cent of women are literate.⁴

Conclusion

The core biographical features show that women in the Moroccan sample and women of Moroccan origin in the French sample have important attitudinal traits in common. These commonalities pertain primarily to issues concerning family matters. Living with family is preferred over living alone, living alone is considered a necessity but not the preferred situation. No one in either sample said she was living with partner to whom she was not married, none had children out of wedlock. Women in both samples regard professional opportunities as an essential aspect of their lives and therefore they were willing to consider relocating to another country should such opportunities present themselves elsewhere. In their self-description, women in both samples said they considered it possible to be “practicing” and “progressive” or “conservative” and “progressive” at the same time. Most differences could be observed *within* each sample and not *between* samples. For example, women with strong religious inclination in both countries described themselves as “practicing” and “progressive,” i.e. they perceived a link between leading a religious life with supporting social change. This reflects the position of Islamist groups according to which contemporary societies in the West as in Islamic countries are morally bankrupt because they do not address basic social inequities

⁴ UNICEF statistics for 2000 for Morocco: Adult literacy rate for females: 36 percent, for males 62 percent

and uphold power structures that betray - in France - the ideal of *fraternité, égalité liberté* for all citizens and - in Morocco - the ideal of the brotherhood of the *umma*, the community of believers as envisioned by the prophet.

Overall, despite the very different social and cultural environment in France and in Morocco, young, educated, professional and urban women share remarkable attitudinal similarities. Certainly one never does justice to the uniqueness of each individual when generalizing, thus these similarities are based on certain, limited factors. Data obtained from the interviews allow for several conclusions, most notably that as far as young, educated, professional women are concerned, the differences between those living in a North African, Islamic, Arab country such as Morocco and those living in a European, secular, Western country such as France are commonly exaggerated or that the force of globalization touch the lives of women in both countries in a comparable fashion.

The single largest aspect women of Moroccan origin in France and women in Morocco have in common, is the religion of Islam. In the following chapter, I will turn to conceptions of Islam among the two samples.