



Ruba Salih. *Gender in Transnationalism: Home, Longing and Belonging Among Moroccan Migrant Women*. New York: Routledge, 2003. xi + 192 pp. \$114.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-26703-8.

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### Solitude, Isolation, and Marginalization

Scholarship on migrants and diaspora populations increasingly has been concerned with the issue of simultaneous participation in home and host countries, as people find themselves neither fully assimilated into their adopted country nor at home in their country of origin. A recent push to replace the concepts of emigration/immigration (implying a break from origins and settling in the host country) and diaporas (stressing the displacement from one's home country) has led to the spread of the concept of transnationalism. Transnationalism is not just a new word for an old phenomenon; it emphasizes the dynamic process of nation-making as anchored across nations (and states), privileging neither place of origin nor adopted land, and collapsing time and space into a single social field (Glick Schiller et al 1992: 1 in Salih 5). Salih raises the important theoretical issue of the role of gender in transnationalism, a neglected domain of research. Her ethnographic focus is on Moroccan women in Italy, however, more than the mutual construction of maleness and femaleness through interaction. In this and other respects, the book seems partitioned into thoroughly researched theoretical passages and sparser interview-informed sections. From an ethnographer's perspective, the book suffers from a lack of integration between theoretical foci and ethnographic data. Nevertheless, there remains much to recommend this text.

Salih takes up such questions as Moroccan women's relations with the new places they inhabit and their changing conceptualizations of home. How are women's identities and cultural practices shaped by the transnational dimension of their lives and by living in a world supposedly increasingly interconnected? What are the relations between marginalization and lack of recognition in Italy and transnationalism? How are migrants represented by the Italian state and how in turn do they respond to these representations (p. 3)? Despite the ample literature on Moroccans and other North Africans in

France, little has been written about these emigrants to Italy, in part because their arrival began in earnest only in the late 1980s, and in part because, as Salih notes, Italians are more accustomed to considering their country an exporter of labor rather than a draw for emigrants. The dominant themes that emerge from the accounts of women Salih interviewed are solitude, isolation, and marginalization. Structurally this makes sense, as there are few conglomerations of Moroccan emigrants sufficient to be considered a community in its conventional sense in the region of Emilia Romagna, where research was based. But even those emigrant women familiar with other Moroccans tended to avoid them, critical of the ways in which other emigrants adhered to competing discourses of secularism and Islamic piety. The state and Italian society, for their part, put up obstacles to women's integration, simultaneously endorsing discriminatory discourse against Moroccans as a whole and embracing an essentialist image of Moroccan female personhood that revolved around her honor, restraint, and modesty in the service of her husband's reputation, qualities inherently compromised by her immigrant status. Salih's Moroccan informants longed for the food, clothes, and companionship they knew growing up in Morocco, yet many felt isolated by their domestic and public lives that offered neither the benefits of European citizenry nor the familiarity of Moroccan residence. In an effort to stress the dissimilarity between emigrant women, Salih refuses to characterize them as a type of community. This makes it difficult, however, to assess the ways in which her informants' experiences are particular to Moroccan emigrants, shared by other emigrants in Italy, or shared by Moroccans in other diasporic locales. However, one argument that emerges from the particularities is that discrimination in social service contexts is gendered: headscarved women complained of being denied acknowledgement of their personhood apart from male protectors, especially husbands. More analysis of

the women's profiles—indeed, more people in the text in general—would better flesh out this and other arguments in the book.

Indeed, while the theoretical arguments and scholarly literature on modernity, globalization, migration, diaspora, and transnationalism are amply discussed in this book, the ethnographic portions are limited to interview excerpts and sparse descriptions. One facet of women's experience is clear: the respects in which emigration, even when first perceived by women as emancipation, turns out not to be liberating because of the ways in which the nation-state is an extension of male domination (p. 50). Thus whether the women migrated to Italy to join husbands, or instead to free themselves from men and restrictions, they faced many of the same constraints once settled in Italy. Yet their sense of home while living in Italy, and during return visits to Morocco, was rooted less in their structural position in a family network, as female head of household, and more in their engagement with commodities that reminded them of the other home (p. 78). Despite such insights, the areas of most interest to North Africanists and anthropologists

are not adequately addressed. Some of this is a problem of sloppy editing and awkward phrasing. For instance, in the first profile introduced on p. 40, the reader learns that Samia's mother basically lives between Casablanca and Reggio Emilia. What does this mean, exactly? In a book on this kind of transnational practice, the reader expects more probing into the texture of transnational lives. Ultimately, however, the reader is left yearning for more about the women and their lives, and less about the scholarly literature.

Salih's book may interest scholars of transnationalism, gender studies, Italy, and North Africa, but ultimately it falls short of contributing significantly to regional studies or social anthropology. There are many threads that may interest specialists even if they are not tightly woven into a neat whole. Its most valuable contribution may be in raising questions about the ways in which subjectivities are shaped by belonging to multiple locales that are collapsed in time and space, and the ways in which our conventional models for understanding personhood and place-making are inadequate to capture the complexity of contemporary migrations.

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