Anas Askar

Article Review

“Global Contexts and the Veil: Muslim Integration in the United States and France.”

<http://search.proquest.com.jproxy.lib.ecu.edu/docview/216754250/fulltextPDF?accountid=10639>

Kristine Ajrouch discusses differences in Muslim women that veil in America in comparison to Muslim women in France. The author notes the differences between the two countries thereby suggesting the reasoning for veiling will differ from one locality to another. The author says that two important research inquiries include “the ethnic stratification systems within each country, and the significance of gender in identity development” (Ajrouch 2007:321). The author notes that while the percentage of Muslims in France are higher than Muslims in America, the backgrounds of Muslims in America are more diverse in nationality than the Muslims in France (Ajrouch 2007:321). Ajrouch notes a common trend in both countries which Muslim women veil is that the veil itself is a symbol of control of their own lives (2007:322). Ajrouch wrote: “when faced with the prospect of being the cultural other, it is not uncommon for the second generation to resist subordination by making women and girls the point at which power is declared via traditional, ideal norms of appropriate behavior” (2007:322). The author notes the difference between France and the United States is that in France there is an emphasis on “national French character rather than ethnic differences” (Ajrouch 2007:322). The opposite is the case in America because diverse backgrounds are respected and tolerated by the law itself (Ajrouch 2007:322). There is also a difference in the definition of secularism as in France it means that religion is separate and is not displayed publicly (Ajrouch 2007:322). While in America, secularism is understood as a freedom to practice one’s faith (Ajrouch 2007:322). There are differences in socioeconomic status of Muslims in France and America, as more Muslims in France live on a lower standard compared to Muslims in America (Ajrouch 2007:322). Ajrouch believes that these differences lead to “exaggerated” attitudes towards gender expectations (2007:323). Other researchers have concluded that these conditions result in attempts to control Muslim women by men demanding their female family members to wear the veil (Ajrouch 2007:323). Other researchers have noted that immigrants who are less educated accepted rules against the veil more readily, but the younger generation see new laws as unjust (Ajrouch 2007:323). For this reason, the younger generation are more likely to wear the veil as a political protest to the rules that originally intended on imposing a French nationalistic attitude on foreigners in general (Ajrouch 2007:323). In contrast, the veil worn in the United States is seen as a symbol of “American identity” and as an expression of their religious autonomy (Ajrouch 2007:324). With this understanding, Muslim women see the veil as both part of religion and being American (Ajrouch 2007:324). Other research looks into immigrants from Lebanon in America and Somalians in Canada from a racial perspective (Ajrouch 2007:324). “Specifically, Somalis used their religious identity to negotiate an alternative identity to the racial status accorded them via the visible minority hierarchy in Canada which categorized Somali immigrants as black. Lebanese Muslims, on the other hand, entered the U .S. legally classified as "white" and used that privileged status to raise an Islamic identity to the same status as the Judeo-Christian mainstream. When a decision was made to wear the veil, it was based on the American ethos of religious freedom” (Ajrouch 2007:324).

The interesting research that Ajrouch presents leads to further questions. Throughout many of the articles is the concept of nationalism and behavior that contradicts the social norms of a particular culture are bound to stir discussions. I would be interested to see in other countries the effect of nationalism on attitudes towards the veil and if it differs or agrees with French perceptions. This will lead to studying whether the veil is worn or not by the Muslims in those particular countries and if there is a generational difference. Other research questions would include a comparison of one’s country of origin and their political situations respectively. Education, family, socioeconomic status, age, and other factors would be important to study further to understand similarities and differences from one area to another to get a better understanding of the veil.

Reference:

Ajrouch, Kristine J. 2007. “Global Contexts and the Veil: Muslim Integration in the United

States and France.” *Sociology of Religion* 68 (3): 321-325.