PIETY, HONOR, AND THE STATE: STATE-SPONSORED FEMALE RELIGIOUS

AUTHORITY AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN MODERN MOROCCAN

SOCIETY

by

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Title: Piety, Honor, and the State: State-Sponsored Female Religious Authority and the Status of Women in Modern Moroccan Society

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This thesis examines the role and influence of state-implemented *'alimat* (female religious scholars) and *murshidat* (female religious counselors) in the modern Moroccan state. Specifically, it seeks to answer the question: can installing women into positions of religious authority liberate women in Moroccan society? I conclude that women in these positions are providing women with more resources to construct positive concepts of femininity apart from oppressive traditional dictations of what this gender role encompasses. This, however, will not completely liberate Moroccan women, because the reform actually strengthens the role of the state as the ultimate patriarchal figure for both men and women, and does not adequately provide men with more positive conceptions of masculinity. I argue that women in these positions are not adequately equipped to remove these sources of oppression, because they are intended to support the state's ultimate power and reach in the religious sphere, while appealing to a feminist audience.

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iii

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

In 2003, the Moroccan government introduced a state-sponsored religious reform, with the institutionalization of women into positions of religious authority as the defining characteristic. That year, female religious scholars (*'alimat)* were appointed by the state to serve on religious councils at various local, regional and national levels. The position of religious scholar is a high honor for Muslims, reserved for the most prestigious and exemplary scholars. A few years later, as a part of this same reform, the state implemented a new program to train female religious guides (*murshidat)* to work in mosques and various other community centers. This program has been hailed as groundbreaking, and one of the first of its kind in the Muslim world, as the Moroccan state is sponsoring the training of women to enhance the participation of women in the religious sphere.

King Mohammed VI stated that the role of this reform, and the women in these positions, is "to achieve greater equality between men and women."[1] This concern expressed by the King is certainly warranted. According to the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index, Morocco received a ranking of 0.460, ranking it 92 out of 149 countries. This is the lowest ranking for the North African countries.[2] While Tunisia's constitution has affirmed the equality of genders since the country's independence in 1956, Morocco's constitution did not include mention of equal rights of men and women until the 2011 amended constitution.[3]

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[1] Eddouada, 2010
[2] UNDP, 2014
[3] Consitution, Article 19

Upon closer examination of the proportions of women participating in social, economic, and political sectors of Moroccan society, it is evident that Moroccan women are represented in quantities lower than their male counterparts. While this disparity varies across socioeconomic and urban-rural divides, women do not appear to have the same access to services and sources of empowerment as men.

In 2014, male literacy rates reached 76%, while female literacy rates reached a mere 58%.[4] While primary education enrollment is almost equivalent with 98% of all school-aged males and 97% of all school-aged females enrolling in school,[5] rates of dropping out or failing to continue to secondary education are higher amongst female students than their male counterparts. In 2010, 84% of school-age males continued to secondary education, compared to 80% of females.[6] This disparity is more concentrated in rural areas. According to a report produced by the Understanding Children's Work (UCW) Project, a research initiative of the World Bank, UNICEF, and International Labor Organization, girls in rural areas of the country are one-third less likely to attend school than boys.[7] In the small rural village of F'quih Ben Saleh in Southern Morocco, while the village has its own primary school, the closest secondary school is outside the village boundaries, meaning a longer commute for all students. Girls recounted having stones thrown at them or being chased on this commute, and others recounted their parents' fear that they would be attacked or hurt during this commute as primary reasons why they either did not continue on to secondary school, or dropped out. Additionally, early marriage and the need to help support the family by going to work

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[4] World Economic Forum, 2014
[5] World Economic Forum, 2014
[6] Ahmed, 2011: 10
[7] OECD, 2014

are reasons for girls dropping out of school, or not completing their education, as these roles take priority for girls in traditionally patriarchal communities.

A 2004 study conducted by the UCW found that girls aged 7-14 years of age were 26% more likely than boys of the same age to conduct unpaid domestic work within the home, but boys were only slightly more likely than girls to be employed in paid work outside of the home: 4% more likely.[8] As of 2014, approximately 27% of women in Morocco are a part of the workforce, as compared to 79% of Moroccan men.[9] 60% of these women work in the agricultural sector.[10] Female participation in the workforce has decreased in recent years. In 1999, female participation in the workforce was 30%, but this percentage decreased to 25% by 2012.[11] It should also be stated that employment does not necessarily constitute economic security or empowerment for Moroccan women. As is seen in rural areas, women work in the fields to support their families, often while the men of the family go without work and take the money that their female relatives earn. Rural women describe being stuck in these situations, with no alternatives.[12]

Women are allotted the same rights to land ownership as men, but only own 7% of all land.[13] Scholars cite tradition for women seeking to own land as reasons that account for this low percentage.[14] Additionally, male relatives receive twice the inheritance that female relatives do, as stipulated by Islamic law.[15] Disparities also exist

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[8] OECD, 2014
[9] World Economic Forum, 2014
[10] World Economic Forum, 2014
[11] Achy, 2013
[12] "Casablanca Calling"
[13] OECD, 2014
[14] OECD, 2014
[15] Alami, 2014

in bank account ownership, as 27% of women compared to 53% of men have a bank account in his/her name.[16]

In 2002, King Mohammed VI's government implemented a gender quota of 10% of parliamentary seats to be reserved for women.[17] The gender quota became law in the constitutional reforms of 2011, which raised the proportion of gender quota seats in the House of Representatives to 15%.[18] The number of seats in the House of Representatives was increased in order to accommodate this percentage, and to preserve the seats of the incumbent male politicians.[19] According to the World Economic Forum, in 2014 women only held 17% of parliamentary seats, and 16% of ministerial positions. This ranks Morocco 98th globally for female political participation.[20] In the current cabinet of Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane, only one female minister holds a seat, compared to the seven female ministers of the 2007-2011 cabinet.[21]

Moroccan family law, known as the *moudawana,* is based on Islamic law. It underwent a dramatic reform in 2004, making it the paramount case of *ijtihad,* as Islamic law was revisited to reflect an Islamic feminist interpretation of women's rights as stipulated by Islam.[22] This was possible through the culmination of years of efforts put forth by secular feminists and Islamic feminists.[23] The reformed *moudawana* provides women with the right and ability to initiate divorce; extends Moroccan citizenship to children born out of wedlock; removes the requirement of male

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[16] OECD, 2014
[17] Darhour & Dahlerup, 2013: 136
[18] Darhour & Dahlerup, 2013: 137
[19] Darhour & Dahlerup, 2013: 137
[20] World Economic Forum, 2014
[21] El Haitami, 2013
[22] Edouada & Pepicelli, 2009: 1
[23] Edouada & Pepicelli, 2009: 1

guardianship for women in the marriage ceremony; extends of right of child custody to women, not only men, in cases of divorce; raises the minimum age of marriage from 15 to 18 years of age; prohibits marriage without consent; and places further restrictions on polygamous marriages. [24] While these reforms were hailed as a major step forward for women's rights, implementation within the judicial system differs widely among urban and rural communities. The government reported in 2010 that judges permitted 90% of marriages of minors that came before them.[25] Men remain the legal guardian of all children, and women only may act as a legal guardian if the father is absent or otherwise debilitated.[26]

As is evident from the examination of these subsections, Morocco has made improvements to the rights allotted to women. The issue of how to effectively implement and allow access to these rights, however, is an entirely different issue. This dichotomy raises the question of how to improve the status of women effectively within the context of Morocco, a question asked by activists, scholars and policy makers alike.

This religious reform, however, is much more complicated than simply enhancing gender equality throughout the country. The state was, and continues to be, pressured by political and economic challenges to state security and sovereignty, reasons which the King has also mentioned in being a central factor for the implementation of this roles. Upon initiation of the program, the King noted the unique way in which these women could dispel "invalid beliefs," and reduce "extremist tendencies."[27]

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[24] Moudawana, 2004
[25] OECD, 2014
[26] OECD, 2014
[27] El Haitami, 2012: 231

Economically, Morocco faced, and still faces, massive widespread

unemployment, especially for youth. Although the country has experienced economic

growth under King Mohammed VI, this has not translated into job creation for young

people. According to the OECD, unemployment amongst young people is more than

twice that of adult unemployment. [28] From 2004 to 2008, although unemployment

nationally dropped nearly 2.5%,[29] youth unemployment increased 3%.[30] In urban areas,

unemployment for 15-24 year olds was as high as 32.2% in certain cities, with rates of

unemployment five times as high for the educated population than the uneducated

population.[31] Underemployment is also prominent throughout the country, especially in

rural areas, resulting in low wages insufficient to live on and high poverty rates. At the

time of the 2003 reform, Morocco ranked the lowest out of all North African countries

on the UN Development Report's Human Development Index.[32]

According to a survey conducted by the World Bank in 2012, 49% of Moroccan

youth were neither in school nor the workforce.[33] Breaking this down further by gender,

for the entirety of North Africa, 22% of young men are not in any type of employment,

education or training, compared to 40% of young women.[34] This does not only include

the unemployed, who are seeking work, but also the discouraged worker population,

who has ceased looking for work due to various reasons. Within Morocco, after a year

of entering the workforce, 60% of men remained unemployed, compared to 75% of

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[28] OECD, 2012: 2
[29] Trading Economics, 2015
[30] OECD, 2012: 2
[31] Rivlin, 2013: 87
[32] Rivlin, 2013: 88
[33] La Cava, 2012
[34] OECD, 2012: 4

women.[35] Long periods of unsuccessfully searching for work, unsurprisingly, result in a growing discouraged worker population.

Unemployment and discouragement amongst youth result in feelings of alienation from their communities and country.[36] These feelings are much more pronounced in males than females, as is described by Gloria La Cava of the World Bank:

> Even though their unemployment rate is much higher, […] the young women all said that the greatest pressure for making an income is on the young men. This is because young men are expected to contribute money at home, and to save enough to start their own family. With the severe lack of opportunities they are capable of neither, and this failure has resulted in them becoming alienated within their own families. The psychological pressure that the young men face is huge. It's not a coincidence that, for the poorer ones, the coping mechanism is to use drugs and to drift in inactivity. Young women are all keen to work, but unlike the young men, being unemployed does not affect their core dignity. The theme of dignity is so important in the 'Arab Spring,' because it's not just about income, but what employment means for you as a human being, in your community and your family.[37]

These feelings of alienation and a lack of possibility are factors that have been linked to recruitment for extremist Islamist groups that can offer them a source of purpose and meaning that mainstream society was unable to provide. These economic issues are directly related to the rise of extremism within Moroccan borders, and thus, the political fear that the state also faced at the time of the religious reform.

In 2003 a group of young men from the impoverished slums of Casablanca carried out a series of suicide bombings throughout the city. They identified with *Salafia Jihadia,* a group rumored to have connections with al-Qaeda, and to be a part of the *Wahhabi* movement. *Wahhabism* has been characterized as an ultraconservative

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[35] Achy, 2013
[36] Rivlin, 2013: 87
[37] La Cava, 2012

7

movement stemming from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which seeks to strip

modernity and Western culture from Islam. *Wahhabists* claim that a return to practices

of the first three generations of Muslims is the only way to achieve purity. The

Moroccan government issued statements noting the influence of satellite television

channels from the Gulf as promoting extremist *Wahhabi* Islam amongst the perpetrators

of these attacks.[38] The kingdom feared its religious integrity and thus sovereignty was at

risk, and just a few short months later, the state enacted this religious reform to reduce

the spread of fundamentalist Islam.[39]

  The challenges facing the state, and the intentions of this program are much

more complicated than women's rights alone. Members of Islamist political parties

claim inserting women into these positions are merely an attempt by the state to further

extend the king's authority and to discredit political opponents. Some scholars claim it

does not go far enough in creating equality between the sexes because men in these

positions retain some abilities that women in these positions do not. Media channels

across the Western world praise the program for being a manifestation of the state's

commitment to improving the status of women in the country.

  This thesis seeks to examine the role and influence of state-implemented *'alimat*

(female religious scholars) and *murshidat* (female religious counselors) in the modern

Moroccan state. Specifically, it seeks to answer the question: can installing women into

positions of religious authority liberate women in Moroccan society? I conclude that

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[38] Eddouada, 2010
[39] Eddouada, 2010

gender role encompass. This, however, will not completely liberate Moroccan women, because this reform strengthens the role of the state as the ultimate patriarchal figure for both men and women, and does not adequately provide men with more positive conceptions of masculinity. I argue that women in these positions are not adequately equipped to remove these sources of oppression, because they are intended to support the state's ultimate power and reach in the religious sphere, while appealing to a feminist audience.

As I did not conduct my own interviews or collect my own data in Morocco surrounding these women, this paper depends on the validity of the work of other scholars, surveyors, and reporters.

II. Theoretical Framework

My basis for formulating how to answer my research questions is to divide my analysis into two categories: decreasing oppression, and increasing empowerment and positive resources. I have based these modes of analysis on the sociological piece *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* by Fatimah Mernissi. Mernissi is a Moroccan sociologist, best known for pioneering the Islamic feminist movement through her scholarly reevaluation of the *sunnah*, and history of life in Medina.

I chose this book as a basis because Mernissi intertwines Islamic feminist theory with her sociological studies of the current state of reality for women in Morocco. It is crucial to root Moroccan female liberation in Islamic feminism because this works from the context of Morocco's values after independence, rather than the Western conceptualization of female liberation expressed by universalist feminism. At the time of Morocco's independence, the state's priorities in establishing its identity were: 1) Sexual equality 2) Arab nationalism and 3) Islam. In short, Islamic feminism adheres and develops from Moroccan society rather than imposes itself upon it. I provide a more detailed account of Islamic feminism and its aims later in this paper.

The first part of Mernissi's book discusses the concept of female sexuality within Muslim societies. She distinguishes between two main societal conceptions of female sexuality: "In societies in which seclusion and surveillance of women prevail, the implicit concept of female sexuality is active; in societies in which there are no such methods of surveillance and coercion of women's behavior, the concept of female

sexuality is passive."[40] Muslim societies fall into the active female sexuality

classification. Mernissi expands on this to compare the Judeo-Christian concept of

sexuality, represented by Freud, with the Muslim concept of female sexuality,

represented by Imam Ghazali. She notes that, "it is culture which determines the

perception of biological differences and not the other way around."[41] Ghazali's

interpretations of female sexuality emphasize the concept of female *qaid* power, "'the

power to deceive and defeat men, not by force, but by cunning and intrigue,'"[42] which

social order is designed to reduce and dispel. Ghazali emphasizes the sexual needs of

women. It thus becomes the role of the husband to satisfy his wife "so as to secure her

virtue" and thus reduce the possibility of *fitna,* chaos, by enticing other men to commit

adultery.[43] Thus, the Muslim perception of active female sexuality "directly links the

security of the social order to that of the woman's virtue."[44] Muslim social structure is

thus dependent on the following assumptions: "the tightly controlled patriarchal family,

[…] the fear of *fitna,* the need for sexual satisfaction, and the need for men to love

Allah above all else."[45] In response, Mernissi claims, Muslim society developed a

number of rules to regulate the interactions of men and women to preserve the family

unit, and thus discourage *fitna.*

      The second part of Mernissi's book discusses her sociological research in

determining the modern case of gender dynamics in Morocco. Based on her research,

Mernissi concludes that, "sexual segregation, one of the main pillars of Islam's social

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[40] Mernissi, 1987: 30-1
[41] Mernissis, 1987: 34
[42] Mernissi, 1987: 33
[43] Mernissi, 1987: 39
[44] Mernissi, 1987: 39
[45] Mernissi, 1987: 82

control over sexuality, is breaking down."[46] This is facilitated by the desegregation of

schools, employment, and the street, all of which are factors of modernization. Thus a

disparity arises between reality and the idea of what life should look like, as dictated by

tradition. This disparity is what is dangerous. As Mernissi states, "The wider the gap

between reality and fantasy (or aspiration), the greater the suffering and the more

serious the conflict and tension within us."[47] This is especially emphasized in the

desegregation of the economy. Economic power assumes the same role as sex in the

Muslim order, as "the system of honor binds the reputation of men and women to their

genital apparatus" of men providing, and women consuming.[48]

Mernissi argues that at the time of her writing, the economic situation conflicted

greatly with ambiguities in the family law discussing the role of the husband and the

role of wife. Additionally, she states, sexuality takes a very different form in the

modern-day depressed economy than the traditional Muslim society. For fathers and

husbands, their female family members are out of the house much more frequently to

work and go to school, making the fear of *fitna,* and thus his own dishonor, a daily

possibility.[49] Young men grow up under the premise that they must be able to first

fulfill their masculine role as an economic provider, the mark of a good husband, before

they can satisfy their sexual desires with their wife. But as they are unable to provide

economically, due to widespread unemployment, young men find themselves "violently

discouraged and legally oppressed," and without an appropriate outlet for their

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[46] Mernissi, 1987: 107
[47] Mernissi, 1987: 149
[48] Mernissi, 1987: 149
[49] Mernissi, 1987: 161

frustration,[50] as they have been socialized "to expect full satisfaction of their sexual desires, and to perceive their masculine identity as closely linked to that satisfaction.[51]

Mernissi concludes by stating that the biggest impediment to these traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity is the state as the ultimate patriarchal figure. The state reinforces traditional notions of masculinity and femininity with a family law that does not provide women with the same rights to citizenship as men. At the same time, the state creates an economic system that demands the participation of women, and does not provide employment for men. This systematizes the rift between social realities and moral ideals.

I use Mernissi's concepts as a basis for what factors impede on female liberation in Morocco. These factors are thus: traditional conceptions of both female and male gender roles that do not reflect the current state of society, and an oppressive economic system failing to provide Moroccans with a substantial means to survive and straining the family structure. I additionally utilize Mernissi's finding that social desegregation has very much been a part of Moroccan life since the democratization of education.

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[50] Mernissi, 1987: 163
[51] Mernissi, 1987: 161

III. Overview of State Religious Authoritative Bodies

Morocco's religious and cultural identity is founded on four pillars: the *Ash'ari* doctrine, the *Maliki* path of Islamic law, Sufism, and the King's position as the Commander of the Faithful. According to the Moroccan government, these four pillars are instrumental in providing Morocco with a sense of unity.[52]

The most prominent *kalam* ("school" of theology) for Muslims globally is the *Ash'ari* doctrine. The *Ash'ari* doctrine dictates how Muslims theologically conceptualize their relationship to God, and the role of the divine in the material world. Developed by Abu al-Hassan al-Ash'ari in the tenth century, the essential characteristics that define *Ash'ari* doctrine are the following: the belief that human beings possess free will in determining their actions, and are thus responsible for their actions; the belief that all human plans are at the mercy of God's will; the belief that good and evil do not simply exist, as God declares what is good and what is evil; the belief that God defines what God is, and humans do not have the capacity to fully define what He is; the belief that the Qur'an and God are not "created" but rather "not He and no other than He"[53] to emphasize that God and the Qur'an cannot be imperfect, unlike human creations; the belief that reason reveals the existence of God, achieves revelation and refutes error;[54] the belief that if a Muslim commits great sin, she/he will be punished after death but will ultimately enter paradise; the belief that faith is based in the "affirmation in the heart, confession by the tongue and action by the limbs."[55] The

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[52] Rausch, 2012: 67
[53] Shepard, 2009: 141
[54] Shepard, 2009: 141
[55] Shepard, 2009: 144

14

Ash'ari doctrine thus dictates how Muslims conceive of the divine, and their relationship to God.

While a *kalam* discusses the theological doctrine of divinity within Islam, a *madhab* (path or "school" of jurisprudence) dictates the practice of Islamic law. In Morocco, the *Maliki madhab* is predominant. This is intended to guide Muslims through all aspects of human life that concern moral choices, by determining which actions or practices are permitted (*halal)* or forbidden (*haram*). A variety of different sources are utilized by each *madhab* to make this proclamation, and within the *Maliki madhab,* in addition to the Qur'an and the *sunnah* (the accounts of the Prophet's life and actions by his companions), the legal rulings of the first caliphs, the *ijma* (consensus of the scholars), *qiyas* (analogy), and *urf* (local practices of the people of Medina) are all utilized in determining God's will for human life. The *Maliki madhab* is notably characterized by it's ability to be "adaptable to people's changing realities"[56] and thus adaptable to modernity.

Sufism captures a different spiritual aspect of Islam. It in itself is not a different sect, but rather an additional spiritual path for Muslims to connect with God. The *Sufi* approach to Islam can be characterized by two major qualities: an allegorical and spiritual interpretation of the Qur'an,[57] and asceticism, referring to the absence of material comforts.[58] According to Sari al-Saqati, one of Sufism's early theorizers, a follower of *Sufism* "is he whose light of divine knowledge does not extinguish the light of his piety; he does not utter esoteric doctrine which is contradicted by the exterior

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[56] El Haitami, 2012: 229
[57] Denny, 2011:213
[58] Denny, 2011: 217-9

sense of the Qur'an and Sunnah; and the miracles vouchsafed to him do not cause him to violate the holy ordinances of God."[59] *Sufism* has its own saints, shrines, pilgrimages, and spiritual leaders known as *shaykhs*. The emphasis on *Sufism* in Morocco is further enhanced by Ahmed Toufiq's position as the Minister of Religious Affairs, as he is a practicing member of the al-Tariqa al-Qadiriya al-Boutshishiya *Sufi* order.[60]

With the institutionalization of the king as the Commander of the Faithful, politics and religion intersect. As the Commander of the Faithful, the king serves as the ultimate religious and spiritual authority in the country for all Muslims. This sacredness is founded in his being a *sharif* (descendent of the Prophet Mohammed*)*, the Islamic practice of *bay'a* in which followers swear allegiance to a leader, and the use of religious practices as a form of legitimacy.[61] Politically, this is affirmed by the 1962 Constitution.[62] The Commander of the Faithful enjoys "unchallenged temporal powers and religious sanctity."[63] Any comments against the king or discussion of Islam outside of the state-mandated doctrine are thus considered blasphemy.[64] According to a speech delivered by King Mohammed VI in 2004, this convergence of political and religious power was necessary "in order to avoid any conflict of interest that might arise from a politicization of religion."[65]

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[59] Denny, 2011: 224
[60] Al Ashraf, 2010
[61] Bouasria, 2012: 41
[62] Bouasria, 2013: 37
[63] Bouasria, 2013: 37
[64] Bouasria, 2013: 37
[65] Bouasria, 2013: 38

State power and religious identity are intimately intertwined as "the structure of the state is based on religion as a source of legitimacy."[66] Bouasria explains the dual purpose of the Commander of the Faithful position as: "that of defining the strategic field of action exclusively owned by the king, and that of controlling interstices of politics and religion."[67] This relationship of the state and religion is crucial to Moroccan identity, as El Haitami contests:

> By prioritizing the spiritual aspect of Islam, Morocco seeks to define its religious identity. This spiritual side of Islam is further endorsed by the king's status as the commander of the believers, which goes hand in hand with his political authority, serving as a means to protect the religious identity of Morocco and underscore the status of Islam as the official religion and thus guarantee its practice.[68]

The Supreme Religious Council

Prior to 2004, the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs supervised all regional *ulama* councils. In 2004, the King extended his power so that these regional councils came under his control and oversight. An *'alim,* singular form of *ulama,* is a leader in an Islamic society who attains this position as a "learned doctor of [Islamic] law"[69] through social recognition of their exemplary study of Islam. There are *ulama* at various local, regional and national levels, making up councils of seven *ulama* with the main function being "to remain in touch with the pulse of Islamic society in order to guide it in its real concerns, and to maintain lines of communication and understanding between central political authorities and the people."[70] In addition to the 2004 change in

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[66] Bouasria, 2012: 40
[67] Bouasria, 2012: 40
[68] El Haitami, 2012: 230
[69] Martin, 1996: 11
[70] Martin, 1996, 209

supervision, the King increased the number of regional councils from 30 to 70. This was an attempt to implement the policy of *taqrib al-idara min al-muwatin,* meaning "to bring the country's administrative apparatus closer to the citizen."[71]

In 2005, King Mohammed VI created the Supreme Religious Council in order to consolidate the power to create *fatwas* after a series of *fatwas* were passed by regional *ulama* which directly contradicted Morocco's religious tolerance.[72] The king appoints members of the *ulama* to serve on this council, which he himself heads. In his speech announcing its creation, King Mohammed VI stated:

> We have entrusted the Supreme Religious Council with the task of proposing *fatwa* rules to our majesty, as a Commander of the Faithful and President of this Council, concerning the religious novelties, to cut the road in front of the promoters of sedition.[73]

In 2008, the Moroccan state implemented the *Mithaq al-Ulama,* meaning "The Pact of *Ulama.*" This is a state funded and implemented program to intensively train all 80,000 members of the *ulama* within the country in courses focused on a respect for human rights and the need to adapt religious discourse to modern life.[74]According to Bouasria, this program has the "goal of raising the education level of Morocco's religious scholars so as to avoid a clash between tradition and modernity in the Islamic education curriculum in public schools [...and] in the promotion of 'spiritual security' by fortifying Morocco's Sunni Maliki Sufi doctrine."[75]

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[71] Bouasria, 2012: 44
[72] Bouasria, 2012: 40
[73] Bouasria, 2012: 43
[74] Kingdom of Morocco
[75] Bouasria, 2012: 44

The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs

The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs monitors and regulates how Islam is discussed and dispersed amongst Moroccan citizens. Through this ministry, the government monitors mosques, qur'anic schools, and university campuses to ensure the rhetoric and interpretations in discussions of Islam follow the government-approved doctrine of *Maliki* Islam.[76] The ministry oversees what occurs within mosques, and stipulates rules related to how mosques operate. Additionally, the Ministry runs state television and radio stations which air religious ceremonies and sermons, and publishes literature about Moroccan Islam.[77]

In 2004, the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs began to provide religious trainings for imams in *Maliki* Islam, and increased restrictions on Islamist political groups.[78] Since this restructuring, the Ministry administers guidance to imams regarding Friday sermons,[79] and some claim that this goes as far to write and disperse all Friday sermons to imams across the country.[80] Law also stipulates that the government must approve the construction of new mosques.[81] A report by the U.S. Department of State in 2005 on Religious Freedom in Morocco mentions the use of informants by the Ministry throughout university campuses and mosques to report Islamist activities.[82] These practices are not mentioned in the 2014 Religious Freedom

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[76] US Dept. of State, 2014
[77] Daadaoui, 2013: 26
[78] US Dept. of State, 2005
[79] US Dept. of State, 2014
[80] Laurenson, 2012
[81] US Dept. of State, 2005
[82] US Dept. of State, 2005

report, but reports by Human Rights Watch include mention of government informants in cases against members of Justice and Spirituality, a national Islamist association.[83]

The Ministry's power over mosques and imams exemplifies its political agenda. As Daadaoui writes: "Mosques are an integral part of the state's policy of bureaucratizing religion, serving as important channels through which the state disseminates its religious authority and consecrates the legitimacy of the monarchy. Thus, imams of mosques are all appointed by the state and part of its religious bureaucracy."[84] As such, the Ministry dictates public discourse of Islam.

Religious Authority as Patriarchal State Power

As is evident from the structures of religious authoritative bodies discussed above, the King has increased his presence and control of state religious bodies immensely in the past decade. He made himself the overseer of all *ulama* councils, a position maintained for the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs previously, increasing his own power and thus decreasing the power of the Ministry. While he did create the Supreme Religious Council to contribute to the conversation of religion, he also declared himself the head of the Supreme Religious Council, maintaining his ability to issue *fatwas* nationally and influence the conversation of the scholars he himself selects to serve on the council. Finally, as the Commander of the Faithful, he stresses his role in preserving social order through the intersection of politics and religion. These roles thus consolidate religious power into one patriarchal figure, who

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[83] Human Rights Watch, 2010
[84] Daadoui, 2013: 26

oversees and maintains all aspects of how the religious identity of the country is constructed.

The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs exists to promote, disperse, and contain all discussion of Islam. With the King as the ultimate patriarchal figure in declaring what interpretation of Islam is acceptable, this Ministry then ensures this interpretation alone is discussed amongst citizens. This combination of a patriarchal figure declaring what Islam entails, and this Ministry to ensure this discussion is followed, seeks to promote a pious, united citizenry under the King, and under God. This method of using state-sponsored religion is not unique to Morocco, as other nations, such as Iran, have also used this tactic of "the saturation of public space with piety, [as] a populist move undoubtedly meant to bind believers to the ruling party."[85] Morocco's patriarchal religious power thus conforms to how modern patriarchal states rely on ideologies, rather than economic welfare as previously done, to project the image of the state patriarch. [86]

Under the current global dominance of neo-liberalism, which removes the state from the role of provider of welfare and economic opportunity, ideological influence has replaced the role of economic provider as a source of power for the monarchy. [87] During a time of growing youth unemployment, the state has resorted to religion to resolve the growing issue, as Kandiyoti explains:

> At the domestic level, the male provider role, one of the bedrocks of male privilege, is under significant strain. High male unemployment rates and increasingly precarious forms of employment coincide with a period when women's aspirations and their public presence have never been higher. Notions

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[85] Kandiyoti, 2014
[86] Kandiyoti, 2014
[87] Kandiyoti, 2014

of female subordination are no longer securely hegemonic. Reliance on a new politics of masculinist restoration - a politics that requires systematic indoctrination (Islamic, nationalistic or mixtures of both), greater surveillance and higher levels of intrusion in citizens' lives- becomes essential to the maintenance and reproduction of patriarchy.[88]

The form and intensity of patriarchal power of the modern Moroccan state has come a long way from that which Mernissi critiqued in 1987. Hassan II and his reign known as the "Years of Lead" ended in 1999, when his son Mohammed VI came to power. Mohammed VI introduced his reign under the mantra "development and *ijtihad"* with a focus on modernizing the economy, enhancing social welfare and civil society, and democratizing politics.[89] Significant projects for women's rights and human rights were a distinct marker of the new state. The apparent successes of new recognitions of rights, however, are not necessarily a full picture, as Maddy-Weitzman and Zisenwine convey: "the progress by which boundaries of authority were renegotiated was profoundly uneven, and as time wore on, more a product of state desires for cooptation than of meaningful state-society dialogue."[90] The focus by the state to improve and acknowledge women's movements, Amazigh (Berber) movements, among others, all had a common factor: "the monarchy would pursue a dual policy of recognition and containment, support and co-optation, with an eye to creating another counterweight to the Islamists."[91] Thus, these reforms were carefully controlled and instigated by the state, without a substantial institutional structural reform.

Programs such as the instatement of female religious authority may appear progressive in bringing women's rights into the spotlight, but preserve and even extend

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[88] Kandiyoti, 2014
[89] Maddy-Weitzman and Zisenwine, 2013: 3-4
[90] Maddy-Weitzman and Zisenwine, 2013: 5
[91] Maddy-Weitzman and Zisenwine, 2013: 5

the role of the King as the ultimate figure of authority. Even though new projects exist to theoretically improve the female place in society, it is crucial to note who controls their situation and boundaries: are women becoming more in control of their own circumstances, or is a male patriarch still constructing the boundaries that dictate the female experience? With this question in mind, I now detail the implementation of female religious authority in the Moroccan state.

IV. Implementation of Women as Religious Guides and Religious Scholars

In the past decade, the Moroccan state has permitted women into two major types of religious authority: *'alimat* and *murshidat*. These positions are the female counterparts of the male positions of *'alim* and *murshid* respectively. Women in both of these positions are recognized as state officials, with wages equal to their male counterparts.[92]

'Alimat: Female Religious Scholars

In 2005, only 2 years after the 2003 Casablanca attacks, King Mohammed VI appointed 104 women to religious scholar positions. Of these, 68 were to local councils, 35 were to regional councils, and one was to the Supreme Religious Council.[93] As the King described, incorporating women into the religious sphere would help decrease "invalid beliefs and extremist tendencies."[94] Women scholars, he stated, would assist in combining Islamic revival with modernity in accordance with the four pillars of Moroccan Islam. With the bombings as a fresh instance of the dangers of "religious illiteracy," [95] *'alimat* were seen as a valuable source for developing an understanding of people's realities and concerns in order to better combat religious extremism. The state placed a heavy emphasis on how women are able to reach other women, and thus youth, as mothers transmit beliefs and perceptions on to their children. Increased female participation in the religious sphere would thus promote Morocco's moderate Islam, and work against un-Moroccan political Islam.

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[92] Rausch, 2012: 59
[93] Rausch, 2012: 64
[94] El Haitami, 2012: 231
[95] El Haitami, 2012: 230-1

Instating *'alimat* was seen as a way to increase the reach of Morocco's Islam to

a significant portion of the population previously not included in the religious domain,

thus reducing "religious illiteracy," while simultaneously portraying Morocco's

commitment to gender equality. Upon the introduction of this reform, King Mohammed

VI stated: "We wish to see women who are experts in the religious studies participate in

these Councils (of ulemas or theologians), because we hope to achieve greater equality

for them as well as equality between men and women."[96] This projection of the state's

dedication to women's rights was crucial in "guarding itself against the ascent of

political Islam – both within the country and in the world at large – at the point when it

involved itself in the international front against terrorism."[97] Thus, implementing

women as *'alimat* meant solidifying the identity of Morocco as a moderate modern

Islamic state, to unite the country under Moroccan Islam and portray to the rest of the

world Morocco's stance against political Islam in the "War on Terror."

Historically, female Islamic scholars are not a new phenomenon, especially

within Morocco's Sufi tradition of Islam.[98] Two such examples are Zahra bint

'Abdallah bin Mas'ud al-Kush, and Amina bint Khajju both of whom lived in Morocco

in the sixteenth century. These women were trained in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh)* and

each operated her own *zawiya* (Sufi center).[99] Both women used their formal legal

training to teach other women about Islamic and Sufi beliefs, and lead them in religious

practices.[100] In the eighteenth century, the female Sufi leader Hajja Khadija wrote about

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[96] Eddouada, 2010
[97] Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2009: 2
[98] Ennaji, 2010: 2
[99] Joesph, & Nagmabadi: 765
[100] Rausch, 2012: 60

Sufism, traced her lineage to the Prophet, and "initiated men into the order."[101] The Darqawiyya Sufi order officially had eight practicing *muqadammat* (Sufi religious leaders) in 1942, and other Sufi orders have systems for women to elect their own female group leader.[102] In the Sous region of Southern Morocco, in the seventeenth century women trained alongside men in *fiqh* and served as educators and experts for their communities.[103]

The education of religious scholars, both male and female, takes place within Islamic colleges. These intensive training programs provide comprehensive courses on a variety of subjects, in many ways reflecting an education from a modern university in the breadth and types of subjects studied. Religious studies and classical Arabic, however, are studied in much greater intensity.[104] *Ulama* and *'alimat* are not restricted only to scholars of Islamic law, and scholars of any field of study may be selected as a member of the *ulama* by the King.

Within Morocco, a number of prominent Islamic colleges exist to train *ulama* and *'alimat*, including Qarawiyyin in Fez, and Dar al-Hadith al-Hassaniya in Rabat. Founded by a Moroccan woman named Fatimah al-Fihri in the ninth century, Qarawiyyin is one of the world's oldest universities, and one of the most prominent Islamic colleges in the Muslim world. In medieval times, the college was one of the most respected institutions for Islamic higher education.[105] Upon independence in 1956, the college became a part of the state-sponsored education system, with the Islamic

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[101] Joesph, & Nagmabadi: 765
[102] Joesph, & Nagmabadi: 765
[103] Rausch, 2012: 61
[104] Eickelman, 2010: 142
[105] Lulat, 2005: 155

education temporarily removed from the Qarawiyyin mosque, and women permitted to enroll.[106] In 1988, King Hassan II reinstated Islamic education to the college's mosque, in order "to recreate a compliant body of ulama that would acquire legitimacy by going through a traditional Islamic system complete with its medieval trappings of both curriculum and physical space [… as] a traditionally educated cadre of ulama, it felt, would be a more reliable source of legitimacy for the current dynasty."[107] The following year, Hassan II built the Dar al-Hadith al-Hassaniya to also project this aim. This conservative Islamization of the state by Hassan II did not last long, as the Moroccan state, and thus its Islamic colleges, moved away from this promotion of conservative Islam in the 1990s and re-endorsed the moderate Maliki madhab, rather than the conservative Salafi madhab.[108]

Both male and female students undergo the same traditional *madrasa* education in Moroccan Islamic colleges. Utilizing the traditional model of the *madrasa,* Qarawiyyin and Dar al-Hadith al-Hassaniya courses are structured around the call to prayer. "Teaching circles" and small group discussions stress the interconnectedness of pupil-teacher relationships, and allow for a prominent focus on oral tradition and memorization.[109] *Sufism* is a prominent aspect of the Islamic education here as well. Asmae Lamrabet, a Moroccan Islamic feminist and the Director of the palace-funded Center for Women's Studies in Islam in Rabat, describes Dar al-Hadith al-Hassaniya's education as "very official, traditional, classical and orthodox. There is no progressive

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[106] Lulat, 2005: 155
[107] Lulat, 2005: 156
[108] Fakir, 2009
[109] Hardaker & Sabki, 2007: 107

ideal in this kind of speech."[110] These institutions are much less popular than modern universities, but students are able to earn the equivalent of a bachelor's degree from these Islamic colleges. The structure of the Islamic colleges and education did not change when women began to be assigned to positions of the *'alimat.*

Female scholars on religious councils are tasked with coordinating programs for women. This may include oversight of counseling programs, planning social activities for the community, visiting hospitals, prisons, and orphanages, and mentoring *murshidat* in their counseling abilities.[111] *'Alimat* also deliver lectures and sermons, much like their male counterparts, in instances such as the prestigious televised Hassania lecture series before the King.[112] Their sermons are only for female crowds in separate women's sections of mosques and, depending on the location, take place every Friday.[113]

Murshidat: Female Religious Guides

In 2006, the doors of Morocco's state-run Islamic training programs for imams were opened to women for the first time since independence. [114] These women were the first class of *murshidat* (female religious guides), and while they could not give sermons, they shared a number of similarities with the traditional role of the *imam.* Like the *'alimat, murshidat* were instated to preserve Morocco's religious identity and to discourage extremism. According to Ahmed Toufiq, Morocco's Minister of Religious Affairs, *murshidat* are to combat "the intrusion of foreign agents who may attempt to

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[110] Harington, 2013
[111] El Haitami, 2012: 231
[112] El Haitami, 2012: 231
[113] El Haitami, 2012: 227
[114] El Haitami, 2012: 230

violate Morocco's tolerant values and traditions."[115] They are tasked with preserving Morocco's religious identity by conveying to women how to translate aspects of *Sufism* and the Maliki madhab into their social interactions and religious practice.[116] While the *murshidat* program was designed in part by Dr. Rajaa Naji el-Mekkaoui, an *'alima* serving on the Supreme Religious Council, [117] the program appears to be initiated by the monarchy as a continuation and extension of religious reform.

The term *murshid* has two meanings in Arabic, depending on the context. In a general context, *murshid* literally means a guide or adviser, with connotations to he or she who "averts people from straying to ominous trails and shows them the righteous path, who awakens hearts to the Divine, who opens minds, feelings, eyes, and ears to certain truths, and thus who guides them to the horizons of the heart and spirit."[118] This *murshid* can take many forms, such as an imam, or anyone who instills knowledge of faith in to those who crosses his or her path. In a Sufi context, a *murshid,* also known as a *shaykh* or *pir,* is a spiritual leader who "is credited with great piety and an especially powerful sense of God's presence."[119] A *murshid*'s intimate relationship with the divine and spiritual journey led by his or her own spiritual teacher "justify his role as guide in disciplines of ethical reflection, supererogatory prayers and fasting, and special extended litanies (*dhikr*) that call constantly to mind the names and qualities of God."[120]

While the state heavily emphasizes Sufism as a defining characteristic of Moroccan religious identity, it is unclear how much the Sufi definition of *murshid*

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[115] El Haitmai, 2012: 229
[116] El Haitmai, 2012: 230
[117] El Haitami, 2012: 231
[118] Herkul, 2013
[119] Van Bruinessen & Howell, 2007: 6
[120] Van Bruinessen & Howell, 2007: 6

influenced the design of Morocco's *murshid* and *murshidat* program. In a statement

before the UN Security Council regarding efforts to combat extremism, Ahmed Toufiq,

Morocco's Minister of Religious Affairs and a member of the Sufi order al-Tariqa al-

Qadiriya al-Boutshishiya,[121] noted the Moroccan commitment to Sufism as one of the

primary attributes of the country's efforts to construct a positive, progressive

conversation about Islam, and the role of the *murshidat* program, in promoting the

"particularity"[122] of Moroccan religion. He does not mention the influence of Sufism in

the construction of this program in this address, nor in the other statements reviewed by

the author regarding the implementation of the *murshidat* program.

Women interested in becoming a *murshida* must complete a competitive

application process, which is reviewed by members of the *ulama.* In this process,

hundreds of applicants are narrowed down to form an annual class size of 150 *murshid*,

and 50 *murshidat*. To be eligible for the program, applicants must be under forty years

of age, hold a bachelor's degree, and be ranked in the top percentile of their graduating

class.[123] Men must have the entire Qur'an memorized to be admitted, but women are

required to only memorize half.[124]

Those accepted into the training program attend classes in a wide variety of

subjects including courses covering religious dogma, sociology of religion, psychology,

the sciences, computer skills, economics, law, business management, Arabic language,

Qur'anic chanting, Muslim history, geography, preaching, and women's law.[125] All

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[121] Al Ashraf, 2010
[122] Toufiq, 2014: 9
[123] Rausch, 2012: 68
[124] Rausch, 2012: 68
[125] Rausch, 2012: 68

together, this amounts to thirty-two subjects covered over the course of forty-five weeks.[126] The Supreme Religious Council coordinates and teaches the Islamic subjects, and professors from local universities teach the various non-Islamic subjects. Women and men are taught alongside each other in the classroom, with the only exception being an additional course for *murshidat* about women's law. The *'alimat* who train the *murshidat* are only permitted to discuss Maliki Islam, and no other *madhab*, as this would jeopardize the unity created by following one *madhab* and thus releasing *fitna*. Additionally, "controversial issues" are not discussed during their training.[127]

Those who graduate the program are assigned to mosques, schools, hospitals, youth centers, and prisons near to where they live. *Murshidat* are generally responsible for five to eight mosques in addition to a handful of other institutions, and *murshid* in contrast are assigned to predominantly mosques. This discrepancy is due to the higher demand for women's instruction owing to how women with a lower socioeconomic status are less likely to attend or complete school, which is a primary venue for religious instruction.[128] *Murshidat* may provide religious counseling on personal affairs, offer literacy classes, or lecture about Islam, but in all cases are meeting with women in their places of work, school, and even homes to establish relationships.

Murshidat are intended to complement the role of *'alimat* in reaching multiple levels of society, both with the same intent of promoting the teachings of Moroccan Islam. *Murshidat* are stationed within mosques across the country, where they teach classes for women regarding literacy and Qur'anic recitation, and provide counseling

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[126] Rausch, 2012: 67-8
[127] Eddouada, 2009
[128] Rausch, 2012: 69

services about various aspects of religious and social life.[129] In all of these settings, the

main focus of these conversations tends to be related to be the role of the woman in her

family and marriage.[130] In addition to their work in mosques, *murshidat* also provide

religious counseling in prisons, hospitals, schools and orphanages.[131] Due to the

different structures and tasks of each position, *'alimat* and *murshidat* have different

strengths and abilities in achieving the goals of the reform:

> Although the women serving on the High Council of Ulema have a superior
> official ranking within the religious hierarchy, the *murshidat* enjoy wider
> visibility and greater proximity to the recipients of their services, upon whose
> recognition and acquiescence their authority ultimately rests. This proximity and
> visibility expands their potential for reshaping individual interpretations of Islam
> and local understandings of women's right to exercise religious authority.[132]

The responsibilities of their male counterparts (*murshid*) are almost identical,

although they additionally lead prayers and sermons when the *imam* of one the mosque

they are stationed in is unavailable. *Murshidat* are barred from leading prayers or giving

sermons by a *fatwa* issued by the Supreme Religious Authority which forbids women

from leading prayer.[133] Women must pray in silence, it states.

Although implemented as a part of the same program, national and international

news surrounding the *murshid* and *murshidat* focus almost entirely on the female

counselors. Nationally, the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs funds

television news specials about their work. This news coverage is overwhelmingly

positive. Internationally, *murshidat* are flown to Western countries to "publicize this

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[129] El Haitami, 2012: 229-230
[130] El Haitami, 2012: 230
[131] El Haitami, 2012: 230
[132] Rausch, 2012: 60
[133] Eddouada, 2010

novel addition to the religious education system."[134] Remaining visible, both nationally

and internationally, thus also becomes a requirement of *murshidat.*

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[134] Rausch, 2012: 65

V. Profiles of *'Alimat* and *Murshidat*

To gain a better understanding of the role and impact of the *'alimat* and the *murshidat* in their respective communities, this section examines the work of two female religious scholars, Dr. Rajaa Naji el-Mekkaoui, and Dr. Fatimah Bouselama, and three female religious guides, Bouchra, Hannane and Karima.

Dr. Rajaa Naji Mekkaoui

Dr. Rajaa Naji Mekkaoui is an *'alima* on the Supreme Religious Council, and a professor of law at University Mohammed V in Rabat. Dr. Mekkaoui became the first Moroccan woman to receive a PhD in law from Mohammed V University in 1997, a state-run public university. She was also the first female head of the medical law department at Mohammed V University through her work surrounding organ donation and transplantation.[135]

In 2003, Dr. Mekkaoui became the first woman ever to address the king during the Hassania lecture, an important religious lecture performed during the Holy Month of Ramadan. The King, high-ranking officials, and figures of religious authority from across the Muslim world attend these lectures, which is broadcast on state-run television channels throughout Morocco.[136] This was not only the first time a woman spoke in the series, but also the first time a woman had entered the chambers where the lecture takes place.[137] Since her involvement, female scholars from a number of disciplines, not only limited to the religious sphere, have delivered lectures as a part of this series.[138] She had

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[135] Al Jazeera Encyclopedia
[136] El Haitami, 2012: 231
[137] Williams, 2008
[138] El Haitami, 2012: 231

the following comment about her lecture: "Many don't understand why I take part in this ceremony. Out of habit we think that religious laws don't allow women into the priesthood, but once a woman overcomes these obstacles, she will become more acceptable."[139]

Since her appointment to the Supreme Religious Council, Dr. Mekkaoui assisted in designing the structure of the *murshidat* program.[140] She notes the participation of women in the Hassania lecture series as crucial in orchestrating a place for the *murshidat* program: "[setting up the *murshidat* program] became less difficult, because people had this image of a woman in a religious context."[141] She worked with the Minister of Religious Affairs, Ahmed Toufiq, and a respected Islamic scholar, Professor Abdelhadi Boutaleb, in the design of the program.[142]

Dr. Mekkaoui speaks out about the need for reform of the conceptualization of the modern family unit. Mekkaoui acknowledges the necessity of combatting Western concepts of what constitutes a family, and the importance of formulating a definition of family to fit the Moroccan context. The family unit, she states, is in danger of "extinction."[143] She discusses the term *qiwamah,* which appears most famously in verse 4:34 of the Qur'an. This verse is at the forefront of the debate of gender relations in Islam, and translates as: "men are *qiwamanun* to women." While traditionalists interpret this term as meaning that men are dominant over women because they are preferred by

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[139] Williams, 2008
[140] El Haitami, 2012: 231
[141] Williams, 2008
[142] Williams, 2008
[143] Mekkaoui, 2003: 17

God,[144] Mekkaoui states this interpretation is derived from the monopolization of control and oppression.[145] Through her presentation of other verses in which the term *qiwamah* appears in the Qur'an, she concludes that the only possible and logical meaning for the term is financial responsibility. In exchange for providing financially for the family, the other family members are compliant with the provider, not subordinate as oppressive interpretations state. Additionally, this does not construct husband-wife dynamics, as children are an integral part of the family unit, and their relations to their parents are also thus discussed.[146] She concludes with a number of suggestions to rejuvenate the Moroccan family unit, including: encouraging family members to discuss family issues, prioritizing proper knowledge of Islam and its teachings, and establishing an institution alongside the court to support families.[147]

This interpretation gives women agency, as they are not restricted to subordination of their husbands, and rather are considered a valuable member of the family regardless of whether a part of the workforce, or a housewife. In her discussion, it is not the role that confirms one's masculinity or femininity, but rather the love and support family members offer each other. Mekkaoui's discussion of the modern family unit is thus not based in oppressive gender roles, and offers an alternative to this narrative.

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[144] Terraz, 2013
[145] Mekkaoui, 2003: 15
[146] Mekkaoui, 2003: 15
[147] Mekkaoui, 2003: 19

Fatimah Bouselama

Fatimah Bouselama has served as an *'alima* on a regional religious council in Casablanca since her appointment 2004. Her main tasks include training *murshidat* at the Dar al-Hadith Hassania*,* and providing religious guidance to those who seek it. She discusses how female scholars are more interested family law and have much more knowledge of women's issues than the men on these councils. She additionally noted how these councils are relatively isolated from their communities, a trend she seeks to change.[148]

Bouselama has published a number of pieces with palace-funded Center for Women's Studies in Islam regarding the significance and status of women in Islam, especially in the Medina, to the modern day situation. She states that although progress has been made for the family unit through the reform of the family law, law alone is not enough to solve issues within the family: this will only be achieved by a return to Moroccan culture and religion to rejuvenate morality and family values. She thus examines the actions of the Prophet Mohammed in constructing a narrative of what family life should entail in delineation of roles within the home, specifically regarding housework. She acknowledges the modern applicability of this issue between the spouses, and the frustrations of wives (displayed by Fatimah) when their husbands do not assist with household chores. [149] She concludes that the actions of the Prophet, such as fetching water and tending to the livestock, confirm that household chores ought to be shared.[150] For the husband who claims he is too busy to help his wife, she poses a

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[148] Eddouada, 2010
[149] Bouselama, 2014: 1
[150] Bouselama, 2014: 2

question for him: could it be that you are busier than the Prophet when he was building the first Islamic society and responsible for transmitting the teachings of Islam?[151] If the husband is concerned for his pride and masculinity, she stresses the words of Ibn Hajjar in describing a man as being he who leaves arrogance behind for the benefit of his family. Cooperation of the spouses, she states, makes for happy and just marriages following in the example of Prophet.

Bouselama's interpretation of the Prophet's actions counter oppressive gender expectations of the strict delineation of roles between husband and wife. By focusing on cooperation and justice in a family, Bouselama offers an alternative for both men and women in constructing their idea of what masculinity and femininity entail. Rather than relating gender roles to completing a specific type of task, she emphasizes promoting justice and cooperation across the family unit for a sustainable marriage free of injustice.

The same concepts discussed by Mekkaoui have become a part of government rhetoric. According to the current family law, men must "provide for their family's needs, while women can choose to contribute as their abilities allow."[152] Although the scholarly work developed by Bouselama was also published by a prestigious palace-funded religious research institution, I could not find evidence that the state took any steps to institutionalize her work into the family law as of yet.

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[151] Bouselama, 2014: 2
[152] Achy, 2013

Bouchra

Bouchra[153] is a *murshida* serving in the Northeast Larache region of the country. She is assigned to a rural mosque, and a dormitory for girls who attend secondary school from the countryside. Through this position, she meets with groups of women and girls to discuss issues in their lives and relationships. Common issues she discusses with women are restrictive fathers, abusive husbands, illiteracy, and poverty.

The girls at the dormitory are sent by their families from surrounding rural villages so that they can continue their education. Bouchra meets with the girls to lead them in prayer, give lectures about Islam and the importance of education, and to discuss issues that they face with their families. Restrictive, untrusting fathers are a large source of stress for the girls at the dormitory, an issue that drove one teenage girl at the dormitory to commit suicide. In her interactions with girls who are upset about overbearing fathers, an issue many girls report, Bouchra states: "There is a misunderstanding in our society that girls are the cause of troubles and if a girl is away from home she will get herself into trouble. These are the fears your father has. We will change his thinking. As women, we can do anything and as a girl you can help change your dad. We'll try lots of things and if one doesn't work then we'll try something else."

In addition to her role at the boarding school, Bouchra meets with women out in the fields, where they perform farm work. One young woman recounts her situation: "Around here, most men don't work. If you go to a house now you'll find the men sleeping. Women are working in the fields all day. First you work to support your

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[153] "Casablanca Calling"

family, then you work to support your husband and children. And so it goes on until God offers you a way out. I don't know how old I am. I never went to school. I always worked. […] Women are doomed and then they die. It is a hard life of labor." For these women, who never went to school, Bouchra states: "When I compare the girls working in the fields to the girls in school, I feel a crime is being committed against the girls in the fields. Islam doesn't forbid a girl to work, but that is not where a girl should be. A girl should be getting an education. […] Even though I believe in my work, sometimes I feel I can't do enough. In some situations there is little I can do to help. Girls are forced to work here because of poverty. They don't have choices in life and get mistreated by their husbands. It's a combination of ignorance and poverty. We can't get rid of poverty but we can try to change how people think."

For both of these groups of women, Bouchra stresses the importance of communication, and the female right to make her own choices regarding marriage. She encourages girls and women to speak with those who are causing them anguish about how it is affecting them, with the goal, in her own words, of helping people better understand each other. Bouchra also stresses that girls have the right to choose when and whom they marry. She encourages girls to stand up for themselves when their families pressure them to quit school to get married, or to marry someone they do not know well.

While Bouchra was able to meet with women in their homes, places of work, and schools, she had a limited scope outside of this circle. After a young girl at the dormitory committed suicide, although she considered calling a meeting for the parents of all of the girls in the dormitory, an overwhelming majority would not be able to

attend, nor could she reach them. In another instance, when a woman came to her distressed about her abusive son-in-law, Bouchra suggested a local women's organization may be able to intervene, but she herself could not meet with him.

Hannane

Hannane[154] is a *murshida* stationed in a mosque, secondary school, and prison in Rabat. Her roles take many shapes, including leading women in discussion groups, and teaching women to read and write, both of which are stationed at a mosque. Issues that arise in her discussions are those of harsh mothers-in-law, expressing love for children, the marriage of minors, and female illiteracy.

Through her women's group at the mosque, Hannane leads discussions amongst women about what their role in society is, and how to strengthen and improve personal relationships. She emphasizes the great influence women have: "What is your role is society? Society needs you, it is not just 'me, my husband and my children.' […] we must rebuild the ideas taught by Islam together." She recounts this during a confrontation with a shopkeeper who criticizes her for being a working mother: "Many people think that Islam forbids women to work but when you ask them for proof they can't find it. The problem is the social traditions passed from one generation to another. […] Islam gave women a really important role whether at home or in society."

Early marriage is a prominent discussion for Hannane and those she advises. When a grandmother conveyed concern regarding her young granddaughter's unhappiness, Hannane urged patience and compassion, rather than anger and physicality, in discussing this. She explained how dropping out of school early to work

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[154] "Casablanca Calling"

meant the girl had not been able to experience a lot of things, and that early marriage would only exacerbate this frustration. When meeting with a girl whose parents wanted her to drop out of school to marry a boy she has been promised to since she was four years old, Hannane stresses choice: "You have obeyed your parents in many things, but with marriage, God has given a woman the right to choose for herself. You must explain that you have the right to refuse this marriage. This is your right – Sharia law says so." It is interesting to note that in both of these interactions, although the legal age of marriage is eighteen, she never uses this as a reason why the marriage of young girls should be discouraged.

To combat the cycle of cruelty towards daughters in law, she asks women to "open our hearts to each other." One of the group participants states: "what is needed is this, to get together and talk to each other. If we are here and others are not, we will never understand each other." In a similar vein of encouraging communication and strengthening family relationships, Hannane encourages showing affection and being openly supportive towards children as crucial to fostering relationships: "You can build bridges with your children so you don't lose them. Many mothers push their children away without meaning to. They care about them but they never show that love."

Hannane also teaches women to read and write. For many, this is the first time they have been able to access such a class. She states: "Islam is a religion of learning. The Prophet told us that learning is a duty. The first word of the Qur'an is 'read' - its something every Muslim should do."

Karima

Karima[155] serves as a *murshidat* in Rabat, and is assigned to a school and mosque. Her husband, proud of Karima's role, remarks, "I don't think there are enough [*murshidat*] yet to support all the women who need them. And with the skills that women have, their skills should not just be used to help women but to help men as well, why not?"

Karima represented Morocco at an internal conference titled *Women Breaking Boundaries,* where she spoke about the importance of female representation in religion, and how Islam discusses gender. She stated: "Islam gave the opportunity for men and women to both participate and doesn't make roles exclusive to one or another."

She discusses the prominent role women played in the early developments of Islamic society, and actively translates this context to youth through field trips to historic sites such as the Qarawiyyin mosque in Fez. "Women were behind many developments in Islamic culture," she states. These trips to cultural sites are crucial not only in discussing the role of women in society, but also in celebrating Moroccan and Islamic culture. In her discussions with a group of teenage boys, they recounted concepts that Western youth their age are more mentally developed than they, and aspirations to migrate to the West. Karima always counters this: "It is good to learn things from developed cultures but we have forgotten to look at our own roots and the reason we don't communicate is because we don't follow our religion." She discusses the "empty space" that young people create when they migrate, causing rifts in their communities.

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[155] "Casablanca Calling"

Karima reaches both young men and young women in her service, and appears to have more interactions with young men than Hannane or Bouchra. One of the male students she counsels conveys his respect and appreciation for her work: "The *murshidat* try to help people through religious teachings. Since they started coming to our school it made a difference. They've had training and they really understand the true Islam. They use religion to teach about modern life and it's a really good way to deal with things because many of us don't have people to show us the right path."

Karima has high hopes for the future. She states: "My hope is that women will reach really high positions in Moroccan society. If we reach those positions then we can make decisions that give rights to every woman and to every man and child. As a woman I just feel that women understand what women need and we are the ones who know what to do to make sure we get our rights." She sees a foundation of understanding female participation in Islam as integral to making this possible in the future.

VI. Impact on Patriarchal Notions of Society

This section is divided into two sections: the impact of *'alimat* and *murshidat* in reducing sources of oppression, and increasing sources of empowerment.

Increasing Empowerment, Within Limits

Murshidat and *'alimat* are increasing sources of empowerment for women, but their efforts and scope are limited by the state. They are providing support, exposure, and new skills to Moroccan women, all of which are invaluable in enhancing female empowerment. While this type of visibility and participation are new to the religious sector, the content and initiation is conducted entirely by the King, rather than empowering women themselves to create their own reforms.

Although the King dictates what Islam encompasses, creating space for female religious scholars in a previously male environment does declare that the religion also belongs to women. Drawing from the writings of Islamic feminists, it is not Islam that oppresses women in the Muslim world, but rather patriarchal interpretations of the sunnah and Qur'an which have created a dominant, patriarchal narrative of what Islam says about the status of women. Female religious authority thus brings the unheard female interpretation into mainstream concepts of Islam. Zainah Anwar, a prominent Islamic feminist from Malaysia, describes the crucial role of female interpretations of Islam in the modern world:

> This decision of so many feminists and human rights activists to ignore religion has had detrimental consequences. It has left the field wide open for the most conservative and intolerant forces within Islam to define, dominate, and set the parameters of what Islam is and what it is not. They decide what a good Muslim is, they dictate how to be a good Muslim woman, wife and daughter, and then

prescribe laws and policies that keep women shackled as second-class Muslims, indeed, second-class citizens.[156]

Thus, at the most basic level, female religious scholars are able to contribute a female perspective to a previously male-dominated field. As Dr. Mekkaoui has stated, female scholars are more aware and concerned with women's issues as they are more exposed to such issues than male scholars. Whether or not they have radical ideas for reform, female scholars are more aware of issues plaguing Moroccan women, and can thus bring these issues to the light.

As depicted by Mekkaoui and Bouselama, female scholars do bring female concerns to the forefront. Both Mekkaoui's and Bouselama's discussions of the current status of the modern family raise multiple issues that Mernissi stresses to improve the status of women in the family unit: the importance of love and compassion in marriage, rethinking what *qiwamah* entails, and the concept of justice. Relating back to Mernissi's argument, emphasizing love between spouses directly opposes the limiting perception of sexuality that regulate the traditional idea of marriage. Rather than the relationship of husband and wife centering around bearing children and satisfying female sexual desires in order to prevent *fitna,* a marriage based on love does not rely on traditional concepts of sexuality. Both of these scholars also encourage the disintegration of traditional gender concepts based on separate roles for man and wife: by emphasizing the importance of sharing housework duties, and financial responsibility, Mekkaoui and Bouselama are both emphasizing justice instead of gender roles. As described by Eddouada and Pepicelli, "justice is a means to avoid the confusion of gender roles and

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[156] Anwar, 2013: 114-5

thus to recognize the value of the role of the woman as a wife and mother."[157] As such, emphasizing justice places great worth on the contributions of both husband and wife, rather than one above the other. By working within the context of Islam, and focusing on issues facing women, these scholars are thus creating an Islamic feminist narrative within some of the highest ranks of Islam in Morocco. This depicts the dedication of the 'alimat to liberating Moroccan women.

These positive concepts of gender, however, appear to be only partially institutionalized. According to the Family Law, men must "provide for their family's needs, while women can choose to contribute as their abilities allow."[158] While this may appear to give women a choice in pursuing economic means, it presents a dichotomy: men are still noted as the primary provider, thus reinforcing a traditional notion of masculinity as the economic provider. This statement, then, simultaneously adheres to the traditional concept of masculinity, while providing a more nuanced depiction of femininity. For the Moroccan youth excluded from the current economy, they are unable to achieve this economic depiction of their masculinity as conveyed by the state. Thus, although some of the findings of the 'alimat do appear to be integrated into state rhetoric, prevailing family law currently preserves oppressive concepts of masculinity.

Murshidat translate these concepts of a new form of femininity through their interactions with women. In discussions with young girls whose fathers are afraid to let them leave the house, Bouchra describes this as: "a misunderstanding in our society that girls are the cause of troubles and if a girl is away from home she will get herself into trouble." She then concludes this interpretation by saying: "As women, we can do

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[157] Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2009: 7
[158] Achy, 2013

anything." This effectively explains the traditional concept of femininity as something that unfortunately exists, but that women do not have to submit to.

Another way that positive concepts of femininity are integrated is through the *murshidat* program itself. Religious counseling is a crucial aspect of Islam, and the prominence of mystical healers and cults in Morocco depicts just one way that women have come to cope with the lack of formal religious counseling prior to the *murshidat* program. The popularity of spiritual possession cults and rituals "compensate for subordinate status and powerlessness" with the "body constitute[ing] the battlefield for disputes about power and functions according to the division and use of space."[159] This fits in with Mernissi's narrative of the deep intertwining of power and sexuality plaguing both men and women. Where the *murshidat* program and these spiritual cults appear to differ is how empowerment is depicted. These spiritual cults emphasize the relationship of power with the body, which is appropriate in the traditional perception of gender roles and sexuality. *Murshidat,* however, steer away from the relationship of power and sex by emphasizing knowledge and education as a source of empowerment.

Through the *murshidat's* emphasis on promoting education for girls and women of all ages, and the *'alimat's* prominent positions of scholarly accomplishment, this reform is exposing the Moroccan woman to new forms of female literacy and scholarly success. Equipping women with knowledge, including knowledge of their rights, is crucial for female liberation. A young man from a rural village in the Larache region describes how this lack of education leads to exploitation: "women here work like this because they have no education. Without skills or qualifications, they are under men's

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[159] Rausch, 2000: 35

control. If a man makes a demand and his wife doesn't obey he can divorce her, so she

just has to work and carry on. Even though she's the one working, he will still beat her

often for one tiny thing."[160] Thus, female illiteracy enhances ignorance of rights, only

serving to deter female liberation. Through encouraging a more in depth knowledge of

the religious rights women hold, *murshidat* and *'alimat* are equipping women with a

means to better grasp their rights and abilities. This is a very specified education,

however, as religious rights are discussed, without mention of legal rights.

Not only do *murshidat* stress the importance of learning and knowledge of

religion in their interactions with people, it is precisely their education that gives them

their respect and qualifications to assert their authority and status with men as well.

Murshidat state that it is the combination of their bachelor's degree and their religious

education (imams are not required to have a bachelor's degree) that allows them to

assert their authority to their male colleagues and the general public, and be treated with

respect in return.[161] A male teenager in contact with Karima acknowledges her

extensive knowledge of Islam and training as reasons why he trusted her.[162] Here,

again, the education and knowledge of the *murshidat* is noted as what gives them

legitimacy.

This combination of a religious education coupled with a bachelor's degree

further exemplifies the role of women in positions of religious authority in bridging the

religious sphere with the social sphere. As discussed in detail by Mernissi, the

democratization of education desegregated Moroccan society: "Schooling has dissolved

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[160] "Casablanca Calling"
[161] Rausch, 2012: 74
[162] "Casablanca Calling"

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traditional arrangements of space segregation […] simply because, to go to school, women have to cross the street! Streets are places of sin and temptation, because they are both public and sex-minded. And that is the definition of *fitna,* disorder!"[163] While education and employment for women desegregated the social sphere, traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity continued, creating what she refers to as a "sexual anomie" as "the moral system which has prevailed for centuries is shaken, and fails to respond to new conditions of human life, without any new system having yet been formed to replace that which has disappeared."[164] Thus, women in these positions are not creating a drastic desegregation of society, as that has already occurred; they are creating a consistent narrative of what women are permitted to do throughout society, thus serving to heal the "anomie" that Mernissi discusses.

According to Morocco's most recent report to CEDAW in 2006, Morocco has put forth a number of initiatives to combat the representation of gender in the country. In addition to projects aimed at removing sexism from education and media, the report outlines new guidelines and support for imams in emphasizing "human dignity and moderation"[165] in sermons, the state religious trainings for *ulama, murshid, murshidat,* imams, Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs delegates and religious television and radio program hosts must all take part in. The state also notes revision of the Family Code in regards to the principle of equality of the sexes as "another initiative in the drive to change mentalities."[166] The inclusion of these programs in Article 5 of the report, titled "Modifying Social and Cultural Patterns," thus acknowledges the

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[163] Mernissi, 1987: xxviii
[164] Mernissi, 1987: 150
[165] Government of Morocco, 2006: 19
[166] Government of Morocco, 2006: 19

impact of these sources in conceptualizing gender roles throughout the country. It also reveals an instance of *ijtihad,* in which the state revised the Family Law to conform to and reflect the modern reality of the country.

While *murshidat* and *'alimat* may provide quality empowerment, there are a number of factors which deeply limit their reach. First, *'alimat* and *murshidat* are only implemented at a fraction of the rate of their male counterparts. The graduating class size of *murshidat* is only one third of the graduating class size of *murshid,* and that does not even take imams into account. Thus, while the services and perspectives provided by these women are evidently in high demand, there are simply not enough of these women to effectively reach all who would benefit from their services.

Second, *'alimat* and *murshidat* exist to promote Moroccan Islam explicitly, not necessarily to address the concerns of women. These positions serve the King. Because they go through state training facilities and programs, tools developed by Hassan II to create a docile and allegiant *ulama,* these women are trained to promote a singular form of Islam. While *'alimat* are trained in a wide variety of disciplines and thus discussion styles, *murshidat* are trained to not question or partake in religious debate, as this would cause *fitna.* [167] Thus, these women promote a specific form of religion, dictated by the monarchy, which creates a limited scope of what can be discussed and how.

Third, as is recounted by Bouchra, Hannane, and Karima over and over, there is only so much *murshidat* can do to intervene. The advice the *murshidat* give to young girls in difficult situations is to tell their family members what they want, and to stand up to their fathers or husbands. While I have no research to support that this tactic does

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[167] Eddouada, 2010

or does not work, I see this as potentially dangerous for the women in these situations. More research would be necessary to investigate the effectiveness of this tactic.

Reduced or Enhanced Oppression?

When asking the question of whether or not modes of oppression are decreased, the answer will depend on two main items: is the discussion of traditional masculinity reduced in favor of a less rigid definition removed from the intertwining of economic and sexual success? Are patriarchal forms of governance being restructured to give women more ability to establish their own religious realities?

While *murshidat* and *'alimat* are finding new ways to change the discussion of femininity away from oppressive concepts of dangerous sexuality, the same does not appear to exist for refining the discussion of masculinity. Although Bouselama's work does note how masculinity is not lost by assisting in domestic tasks, this narrative of changing roles of the husband is not translated into the family code like the changing role of the wife is: men are still listed as the primary provider, while the woman has a choice.[168]

The perception of the stark divide of gender roles is culturally entrenched. A young unemployed man from the rural Larache region explains: "What can we do? If I found work, my wife would not have to work but God knows we are poor. I wish I could keep my wife at home. What should I do, women's work? It would be shameful to be seen doing housework. If the neighbors saw me sweeping the floor I'd be the laughing stock."[169] Without the resources to reconstruct concepts of what work is

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[168] Moudawana Section 1, Article 51
[169] "Casablanca Calling"

socially acceptable for a man to partake in, this perception will continue to leave both

men and women with narrow options in how they conceive of their roles within the

family unit. Men also require new spaces developed for conversations about what

masculinity and femininity entail, like those that the *murshidat* are able to construct for

their female constituents.

Considering the economic climate of growing youth non-involvement, this thus

presents a strain on the traditional concept of the male as the economic provider. As

Mernissi discusses, economic power and sexual power are intimately related, and for

frustrated males in a depressed economy, "the psychological function of female

oppression [works] as an outlet for male frustration and aggression."[170] She argues that

in times of economic depression, as marriages occur later and married men are unable

to economically provide for their families, men become more sexually frustrated.

Starting from boyhood, males are taught they should "expect full satisfaction of their

sexual desires,"[171] and are not socialized to cope with not receiving immediate

satisfaction. Rather than allowing open conversations about this frustration, mean are

socialized to not speak about what is considered perversity, and "the family offers the

sexually and politically oppressed Moroccan male a natural outlet for his

frustrations."[172]

By maintaining rather than challenging these conceptions of manhood, the

Moroccan state is using a religious revival to simultaneously enhance the importance of

male purity and economic success, while reforming the way femininity is discussed.

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[170] Mernissi, 1987: 160
[171] Mernissi, 1987: 161
[172] Mernissi, 1987: 163

Thus, this lack of support for males in Moroccan society is linked to a greater intensity of oppression against women. Female scholars and religious guides are limited to mostly interacting with women, and as such it is not in their capacity to have these discussions with men.

In terms of the economic state of the country, entrenched patriarchal power also severely limits the ability of the government to be held accountable for economic decisions. According to the World Bank, the impediments to Morocco achieving job creation for youth include how "Morocco is still very centralized,"[173] even after the 2011 constitutional reform which promised a change. In addition, the educational system is not preparing students well for the work force. Public school classes are in Arabic, while most jobs require knowledge of French. As the World Bank attests:

> Given that reform in public education is going to take a long time, it is important to find other means to facilitate the school to work transition in the meantime. The report looks at ways to provide opportunities outside the school system that would have a quick impact on skills and job placement. There are things that can be done without having to go through another degree, such as apprenticeships, and encouraging and investing in micro-entrepreneurship and self-employment.[174]

Religious authority remains a narrative controlled entirely by the state rather than these individual women. In contrast to these reforms inspired and requested by the demands and proposals of civil society and the people, the religious reform which implements women into positions of religious authority appears to be proposed by the palace. During my research, I did not come across any demands or requests by Islamists, secular feminists, or other civil society organizations to incorporate women into these positions of religious authority. Rather, the efforts and concerns voiced by

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[173] La Cava, 2012
[174] La Cava, 2012

these groups center on items such as providing more protections for repudiated women, different rights to inheritance, the rights of Moroccan women abroad, and eliminating the marriage of minors once and for all.[175] Thus, women do not appear to be championing for their inclusion in religious authority. This was rather a program initiated and carried out by the state, depicting an instance of patriarchal power.

The differences in media coverage of the family law reform and the *murshidat* program further exemplify how the state prioritizes its own patriarchal power over women's rights. The state funds a number of television stations that have immense influence in dispersing information throughout the country. These stations provided "extensive news coverage [of the *murshidat* program and] broadened public awareness of the state's recently initiated strategy to expand women's participation in the religious domain."[176] This program was highly publicized and visible, due to the funding and efforts of the state.

In a different vein, the 2004 family law reform was a huge success for women's organizations, secular and Islamist alike, who had worked with policy makers for two decades to ensure the concerns of women were accurately represented in the new law.[177] In other words, another aspect of the progressivity of this reform was not only the contents, but that the contents came from women's groups rather than the patriarchal figure of the state. Since the family law reform in 2004, however, the state has still not put forth the same informative effort as done with the *murshidat* program. One Moroccan woman recounted that the only way she learned what new rights she was

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[175] KVINFO Conference, 11/21/13
[176] Rausch, 2012: 65
[177] Edouada & Pepicelli, 2009: 1

allotted by the reform was to purchase a physical copy of the family law from a bookstore.[178] Over a decade after the reform, the state has not initiated any widespread educational efforts to inform women of their rights. Judges, spokespersons for civil society organizations, and journalists have all blamed each other for not doing enough to reduce the lack of knowledge of what the reform encompasses,[179] but the state ultimately has the capacity to disperse knowledge of these changes with its television and radio stations. Why the state has chosen not to publicize female legal rights is unknown, but it is evident that the failure to do so depicts a prioritization of the role of the state as the ultimate patriarchal figure rather than women's rights.

Some of the additional tasks of the *murshidat* suggest that these women are intended to also play a role in Morocco's foreign and domestic policy. It is a requirement for *murshidat* to report any suspicious behavior, making some women feel as if they were engaged in "spy work," and thus fearful for their safety.[180] This is a curious aspect of the role of *murshidat* because it is a blatant issuance of a political obligation in an otherwise seemingly religious position. This thus enforces that the women in these positions are employees of the state above all else, directly involved in the fight against terrorism.

Additionally, *murshidat* are sent on visits by the palace to the United States and Europe. In terms of foreign policy, Morocco's "top priority" is solidifying ties and pleasing the EU and United States to establish itself as a liberal ally in North Africa. Politically, Morocco has strategically situated itself in a "zone of political

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[178][178] Interview with the author, Participant A: 4-Dec-2013
[179] KVINFO Conference, 11/21/13
[180] Rausch, 2012: 73

liberalism."[181] Projecting this image to the West is critical for Morocco's "sunshine offensive"[182] to "convince Westerners that the country is freer and more modern than ever"[183] with the intent of inviting more foreign aid. Sending *murshidat* to Western countries to spread the news of another way Morocco promotes human rights and modernity thus fits into this public relations campaign to project Morocco as a free and liberal state. This has worked, as the innovative role of the women peppers Western media outlets. Thus, it appears that *murshidat* play a political role as promoting Morocco as a liberal state outside of the country as well.

'Alimat and *murshidat* thus have a limited role in reducing sources of oppression. Bouchra acknowledges the limits of her role: "Even though I believe in my work, sometimes I feel I can't do enough. In some situations there is little I can do to help. Girls are forced to work here because of poverty. They don't have choices in life and get mistreated by their husbands. It's a combination of ignorance and poverty. We can't get rid of poverty but we can try to change how people think."[184] The issues plaguing Moroccan women, and standing in the way of female liberation, thus continue despite the efforts of these women.

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[181] Sater, 2013: 10
[182] Fakir, 2009
[183] Fakir, 2009
[184] "Casablanca Calling"

VII. Conclusions

Murshidat and *'alimat* are providing Moroccan women with new sources of religious knowledge in a way that is attainable, by conveying female perspectives and reducing the strict boundaries of the traditional concept of femininity. While this is offering women much needed empowerment and support, this same program further enhances the patriarchal power of the King without addressing the oppressive factors on Moroccan masculinity. Because these women are powerless in addressing sources of female oppression, the status of women in Morocco will not change with this program alone. Three main impediments to female liberation continue: the patriarchal power of the King, prevailing oppressive concepts of masculinity, and the lack of access to legal rights and protections.

Morocco's commitment to women's rights is intended to benefit the state in return. This becomes a way for the state to withhold and increase religious power. It additionally strengthens the state's image politically as a liberal ally to the United States and Europe, which thus also benefits the state's political agenda. This produces a dichotomy, as the state will support women's rights only so far as strengthening its own political power and religious reach in the country. The goal, as with other patriarchal states, is to create loyal citizens committed to a strong central power. This position of the state as the ultimate authoritative figure is detrimental to women's liberation because, in the words of Kandiyoti, "as long as the patriarchal social order is taken for granted, naturalized and not opened to question, citizenship must remain imperfect and democracy truncated."[185]

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[185] Kandiyoti, 2014

Why the state has not promoted legal rights, but has written them into law, is another question. This could possibly be because the reform did not strengthen political power for the state in any way, thus making it a low priority. The 2004 reform appears to oppose patriarchal power in its construction as civil society organizations, rather than the King, instigated it. Perhaps this was also a way of seemingly enhancing women's rights, and thus committing to the political image of liberalization while keeping power within the hands of the King, as it rests with him whether or not the law will be known amongst the majority of the population as he can easily influence media.

The lack of focus on legal rights is especially troubling. Despite a reformed family law providing a multitude of new rights that have been made available for over a decade, 90% of the marriages of minors that come before judges are permitted.[186] Additionally, economic empowerment amongst women is not increasing. In fact from 1999 to 2012, female participation in the workforce decreased by 5%.[187] Although access to religious guidance is beneficial for bettering the way women and girls perceive themselves and their role in the community, this empowerment does not appear to be leaving the religious sphere. Women still do not know which legal rights they possess, an issue the state in no way appears to be addressing, and economic empowerment amongst women is dwindling. These examples suggest that this religious reform is just a way to mask the injustices and inequities existing in Moroccan society, as legal and economic empowerment are not improving nor supported by the state.

Moroccan men cannot be left out of the equation for female reform. If the expectations and changes in how men think about their daughters and wives do not

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[186] OECD, 2014
[187] Achy, 2013

59

change, in addition to how they consider themselves, women will remain oppressed by male family members. For this reason, more research is necessary into the influence of the *murshid* program, and how *imams* discuss masculinity and femininity with their male constituents. From my own research, I found nothing regarding the *murshid,* or how they discuss gender roles. Bouselama's discussion of masculinity is promising, as it raises the involvement of justice in marriages with how men conceptualize their roles. In order to truly see a change in the situation of women and men, this will be crucial to continue.

Additionally, the state needs to revisit Section 1, Article 51 of the *moudawana* that states that men are the primary provider. Restrictive notions of what it means to be a man in Morocco prevail, and are only reinforced with this article. Morocco's 2006 CEDAW report states, "The integration of the principle of equality between men and women in the new reform of the Family Code is another initiative in the drive to change mentalities."[188] This statement reveals the interest and commitment by the state to reform through the means of *ijtihad,* a process that can also be applied in the instance of article 51. Bouselama's research and discussion of these issues, namely the division the roles within the family, provides the Islamic science evidence to accurately and appropriately instill this change in the Family Law. There is much work to be done at all levels to make justice and conceptions of masculinity apart from economic performance a reality, and this reform would pave the way for a multitude of other efforts to follow.

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[188] Government of Morocco, 2006: 19

The nature of job creation for youth needs to improve as well. Even if the discussion of the male provider role were to change, the fact that the family unit is a crucial aspect of Islam and Moroccan society, starting families and having the economic ability to provide for them will remain critical. Thus, sufficient job creation for youth is necessary to provide them with some sort of sustainable income and economic ability. As it is currently, "young men are expected to contribute money at home, and to save enough to start their own family. With the severe lack of opportunities they are capable of neither, and this failure has resulted in them becoming alienated within their own families."[189] Following the suggestions of the World Bank, this could include state investment in self-employment or micro-entrepreneurship.

At the core of this discussion of economic empowerment, however, is the transfer of power by the King to the prime minister. If the prime minister is not responsible for economic decisions, parliament thus cannot hold him accountable. Although the King did promise to transfer powers to the prime minister in 2011 under a constitutional reform, more research is necessary to delve into how much of these reforms are actually in place, and how much power the King truly released.

It is also worthy to note that although these discussions are beginning, changing the way people view themselves and others is an incredibly difficult process. Providing a platform for these conversations to take place is a task in itself, but actually changing minds is a very slow and unpredictable process. Hannane understands the difficulty of this process, "Any new idea we try to introduce to change life for the better – it will take time. Our goal is to plant the seeds. We may not see the fruit ourselves, maybe it

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[189] La Cava, 2012

will be our children maybe the next generation of *murshidat*. They will see the results insha'Allah."[190]

Thus, while Morocco's religious reform does offer new forms of empowerment for women in the form of reformed concepts of femininity in the modern world, improving the situation of women requires a much more multi-faceted approach including the decentralization of power, a focus on changing restrictive narratives of masculinity, and increasing empowerment in all sectors of society for both men and women.

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[190] "Casablanca Calling"

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