MOROCCO'S ISLAMIC FEMINISM:

HOW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, POLITICAL REFORM, AND

REINTERPRETATIONS OF THE QURAN SHAPE GENDER

JUSTICE IN MOROCCO

by

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In the western world, the discourse surrounding Islam is often oversimplified
and prejudiced, falsely portraying Muslim women as the symbol of oppression and
leading to other damaging consequences. Because of this, it is important to deepen the
conversation about feminism and Islam, decentering hegemonic western feminism that
excludes those outside of the categories of white, secular, liberal feminists. This thesis
seeks to understand why a dominance of western feminism exists, how theories of
transnational feminism support the realization of local feminisms, how Islamic
feminism functions in the Moroccan context, and what obstacles Islamic feminism faces
towards reaching peace and equality between genders in Morocco.

In order to do so, this research examines the background of the Islamic feminist
movement through the Moudawana (The Moroccan Family Code), the UN Convention
on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Arab
Spring, and interpretations of contentious verses of the Quran through an Islamic
feminist lens. Using both literature and the perspectives of Islamic feminist scholars
interviewed in Morocco, this study provides a basis of understanding about women's

movements in Morocco and the obstacles Morocco faces. This thesis concludes that,

through Morocco's recent political reforms, social movements, and the work of

nonprofits (which seek to reinterpret the Quran and involve the collective family unit in

solutions toward equality to encourage independent religious interpretations), the

Islamic feminist movement is valuable in improving gender justice in Morocco through

a culturally compatible framework.

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Introduction

As I prepared to study abroad in Morocco, friends and strangers alike offered their unsolicited advice: "dye your hair brown," they said, "you don't want to stand out." "Will you wear a veil over your face so you don't draw attention to yourself?" they asked me. I was surprised. I had chosen to study abroad in Morocco because I wanted to live somewhere that would help me gain perspectives outside of the ones I carried as a white, middle-class, US American from a small town in Oregon. I had chosen Morocco so that I could begin to learn Arabic, practice my French, and take courses on multiculturalism and human rights through seminars focused on Morocco's participation in the Arab Spring uprising – a movement that I knew almost nothing about but was eager to understand and learn how it shaped current global politics. But was I being naïve? "Aren't you worried about how you'll be treated as a woman there?" People asked me over and over again. "Isn't it dangerous?" "Be careful!"

I boarded the plane to Rabat with my blonde hair untouched by any dark-hued dyes and a backpack filled to the brim with clothes, medicines, and journals. The echoes of my neighbors' warnings lingered in the back of my mind, but I was confident that I had made the right decision. Within a few days of landing in Rabat I would be living with my host family, adjusting to a life that was simultaneously so very different and so very similar to the life I led back home. Despite being awoken by the call to prayer as the sun rose each morning, and the fact that I required an introductory demonstration on how to use my host family's Turkish toilet, I settled into a routine.

After school I would go to a café to use the internet, and in the evenings I would come home to watch "The Voice" with my family. My 13-year-old host brother would

help me with my Arabic alphabet and I would help him with his English grammar worksheets. I looked forward to Friday couscous with my host family and weekly visits to the hammam (public baths). In the mornings before school, I would share bread and tea with my host parents as we watched the news in Darija (Moroccan Arabic). My host dad would ask me about my dreams from the night before as a way to start conversation. One morning, breaking news flashed on the TV about the most recent terrorist attack committed by ISIS (Daesh), and my host dad expressed the pain he felt in watching a group commit acts of terror in the name of Islam. *Ce n'est pas l'Islam. Ils ne sont pas musulmanes*, he would say to me. *This is not Islam. They are not Muslim.* My host family taught me what being Moroccan and being Muslim meant to them.

Within a few weeks, I was interning as a research trainee at the Center for Study and Research on Women in Islam, where I was exposed to meaningful discussions that challenged my stereotyped perceptions of Islam and informed a more nuanced view on what it means to be a Muslim woman in Morocco. I thought back to the people in my hometown who told me that I would not be comfortable in Morocco because it is a Muslim country and women there are not treated fairly. This made me even more eager to investigate the women in Morocco who defy this notion, and who view Islam as a source of strength and empowerment rather than oppression. Through this internship, I gained access to the resources to begin my thesis on Islamic feminism in Morocco. Through my coursework I gained a deeper understanding of the social movements and political policy that have shaped Morocco's sociopolitical environment today.

My experiences in Morocco helped to knock down my own prejudices and confront the implicit biases that I carry unwittingly but that pervade my worldview.

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Conducting this research for my thesis was also an exercise in expanding my understanding and complicating my perspective on the nuanced subject of feminisms that exist in cultural contexts outside of the US. In writing this thesis, it is impossible for me to remove myself from my identity as a US-based feminist who originates culturally and geographically from what is considered "the West." Throughout my research, I have endeavored to de-center my own perspective as a western feminist by listening to and learning from the lived experiences and informed theories that differ from those that I have grown up knowing.

Through my interviews with religious scholars and Islamic feminists, I had the opportunity to inquire and learn with a particular intention to avoid imposing my own assumptions and bias. Islamic feminist scholar Saba Mahmood (2012) maintains that in exploring these subjects, we cannot "assume that the political positions we uphold will necessarily be vindicated, or provide the ground for our theoretical analysis, but instead hold open the possibility that we may come to ask of politics a whole series of questions that seemed settled when we first embarked upon the inquiry" (p. 39). Similarly, according to Mahmood (2012), understanding feminist dynamics in cultural context requires "self-scrutiny and skepticism regarding the certainty of my own political commitments, when trying to understand the lives of others who don't necessarily share these commitments" (p. xi). I have found that, with the privilege I hold based on my geopolitical positionality, I must choose to be open to the possibility of expanding and changing my perceptions of the cultures outside of my own. I propose that a certain extent of self-scrutiny is beneficial in understanding all diverse forms of feminisms, and this is a useful lens through which to read this thesis.

This is a critical time for both discussions surrounding feminism and discussions surrounding Islam. In the western world, the discourse surrounding Islam is often oversimplified, leaving Muslim women portrayed as *the* symbol of oppression and Muslim men portrayed as extremists. Because of this, it is important to deepen the conversation about feminism and Islam, moving away from the over-simplification that our western society forces on the Muslim world by centering the study on people who break this stereotype - highly educated Muslim women, Muslim men who identify as feminists, and feminist leaders in Morocco – who are striving to find solutions for the social issues their country faces.

Through local analyses of Islamic feminist theory, this thesis strives to provide insight into the struggles for equality and justice that exist within Islam for Moroccan women, and will demonstrate how Morocco's recent social movements and political reform have made way for an Islamic feminist movement that provides interpretations of the Quran through a feminist lens.

Research Design and Methodology

Much of my research on Islamic feminism, its nuances, complexities, and controversies, was obtained through interviews that I conducted while I was living in Rabat, Morocco in the spring of 2016. As the capital of Morocco, Rabat was an apt location to perform a study on legislative reform and social movements affecting women's rights in the country. To conduct this research I relied on interviews with scholars and experts on the subjects of what Islamic feminism means to them, how it impacts Moroccan society, and critiques on Islamic feminism. The interviews were all

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conducted with professionals or experts in the areas of Islamic feminism, Islam, or nonprofits that work towards women's rights in Morocco, in order to gain an academic understanding of the subject.

Choosing to interview mostly scholars puts the spotlight on voices that are underrepresented in the western world, and also breaks the stereotype that the western world imposes on the Muslim world. By featuring the perspectives, work, and research of Moroccan men and women who identify with the Islamic feminist movement, I seek to avoid imposing western perspectives on a story that is not mine to tell. These are men and women whose work and ideology go against the stereotyped image of Muslims that is generated in the US. My hope is that highlighting the voices of these scholars will inform the western public about the diversity of the Muslim world and Muslim people, and create a narrative based from the people themselves.

In Morocco, I interviewed six people for this thesis. Two of my interviewees are from the Center for Study and Research on Women in Islam (CSRWI): Asma Lamrabet, a highly regarded Islamic feminist scholar and director of the CSRWI, and Ilyass Bouzghaia, a lead researcher at the CSRWI. I interviewed a government official who preferred his name remain confidential about the role of the Mourchidats (female religious guides) in representing women in positions of authority in mosques throughout Morocco. For his privacy, I have obscured his identity and will refer to him under the pseudonym, Adil Marjouane. In order to learn more about the nonprofit organization Musawah, a global movement for equality and justice in Muslim family law, I interviewed Coordinator of the Secretariat for Musawah, Houda Zekri. I interviewed Stephanie Bordat, a US American lawyer who heads the nonprofit organization

Mobilising Rights Association (MRA), to gain her perspective on women's rights in Morocco from a legal perspective. Lastly, I interviewed Manal Dao-Sabah, a PhD candidate with an in-depth knowledge of Islamic feminism in Morocco, about Islamism and the misconceptions and obstacles she observes in the movement.

The use of human subjects in my research was approved by the UO Institutional Review Board with exempt status, meaning that my interviews posed no risk to the subjects who are all scholars or experts in their field. Since I interviewed my subjects about their research or area of professional expertise, I was not concerned about receiving skewed information. I worked hard to construct neutrally worded questions that minimized bias in order to further avoid skewing the responses. All interviews were conducted in person, except for one, which was conducted over the phone. All interviews were conducted in English. Each interviewee signed written Informed Consent Forms to consent to participating in the study. Each interviewee was given the option to have their identity remain confidential, and all but one agreed to disclose their full name and professional title in the study.

The rest of my research draws from primary and secondary academic sources that provided me with complex discussions about understanding research in different cultures and communities than my own, and nuanced presentations of Islamic feminism in Morocco and other parts of the Muslim world. Other texts informed my discussions on Morocco's law, social movements, political reform, and culture.

It should be noted that Islamic feminism only represents one of the many feminisms that exist in the Moroccan context. Also, this thesis focuses specifically on the intersection between Islam and feminism in relation to Morocco's recent legal

reforms and social movements. Since this dialogue is very much rooted in the role of women in public and private spheres, the topics are often limited to heteronormative discussions of men and women within Islam and society. That is not to say that broader discussions of gender outside of a male/female binary do not exist, but rather that these concerns are not central to the current theological discussions within the Islamic feminist movement in Morocco as identified by the scholars and activists with whom I spoke.

With Chapter 1, I begin this thesis by examining how the dominance of western feminism is rooted in orientalism, and how theories of transnational feminism can subvert the dominance of the west by advocating for local feminisms. This discussion produces a framework that strives to center Morocco's Islamic feminism in an exploration of the intersection of Islam and feminism in the Moroccan social and political context.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the background of the Islamic feminist movement through legislative reform such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the reformed Moudawana (The Moroccan Family Code), the reformed constitution of 2011, and government mandated reform that created a role for women as religious leaders called Mourchidats.

In Chapter 3, I delve into the current efforts towards grassroots women's movements and Islamic feminist research that are taking place in Morocco. Specifically, I focus on Musawah, a nonprofit that works for equality in the Muslim family, and the Center for Study and Research on Women in Islam (CSRWI), a theological research center that focuses on reinterpreting the Quran from a feminist perspective.

In Chapter 4, drawing from the context of recent reform and movements, I closely explore what Islamic feminism means in Morocco. Through the work of the CSRWI, I discuss the diverse interpretations and definitions of Islamic feminism. An integral part of the Islamic feminist movement is in the fact that there are religious scholars providing their feminist interpretations of Quranic verses to justify gender equality through Islam, and Chapter 5 of this thesis I present examples of reinterpretations of such verses. Activists and scholars argue that these readings can be used to promote progressive change through Islam.

My thesis will conclude that Islamic feminism is valuable in improving gender justice in Morocco through a culturally compatible framework. However, I will also point out the areas in which Islamic feminism in Morocco can expand its reach through further progressive reform and more inclusive language. Overall, my thesis will open up a deeper analytical and conscientious discussion of women in Islam.

My research in Morocco began as an exploration of Islamic feminism in response to western critiques of it being inherently contradictory or impossible; judgments based on uninformed prejudices. Through my research, I seek to deepen the conversation about feminism and Islam in Morocco, decentering hegemonic western feminism. In reviewing feminist literature and intersectional feminist theory, and through interviews I conducted with Moroccan scholars and Islamic feminists during my semester in Morocco, the methodology provides a basis for understanding women's movements in Morocco, the role of Islamic feminism in social, political, and religious spheres, and the obstacles faced thereof.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework and the Politics of Feminism Globally

Many assumptions exist about Islam that affect the way westerners perceive Muslim women. Prejudice and stereotypes are learned ideas, which can lead to socially constructed perceptions about what is true about the "other." So, what can explain the false assumptions that westerners hold against other cultures or groups of people? What started the cultural dominance of the west? While literature illustrates that there are many ways in which Muslim women are stereotyped, it is also clear that these stereotypes stem from colonialism and western dominance.

This chapter seeks to answer these questions by examining the roots of western superiority and discussing transnationalism. In doing so, this chapter will decenter hegemonic liberal feminism and open a discourse about Islamic feminism that does not rely solely on what are considered western values. First, I will use Edward Said's theory of orientalism and cultural dominance to discuss the prevalence of stereotypes and prejudice that pervade modern perceptions of Muslim women in the US and other western cultures. Drawing from authors Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Lila Abu-Lughod, among others, I will deconstruct the idea of using women as a category of analysis, and address how such stereotypes and generalizations relate to the assumptions made about Muslim women historically and contemporarily – including the idea that Muslim women need saving (Abu-Lughod, 2002). I conclude this chapter with an analysis of the varied definitions of the concepts of agency, freedom, and empowerment, which have their own significance in Muslim culture and are valuable to

locate in specific cultural contexts in order to form a study on Islamic feminism in Morocco.

Stereotypes and Cultural Superiority

In his book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978), Edward Said addresses the broad systems of stereotyping and cultural dominance, and how they originated in our global society. Said describes orientalist scholars as those who sought to study the Middle, Near, and Far East and then decidedly lumped each culture together into one homogenous group. This practice of orientalism began during European colonization, during which time Europeans exoticized the "lesser-developed" countries they overtook. Said argues that Europeans defined themselves by defining the "Orientals" who they considered their inferiors. To Europeans, Orientals were simply subjects of their study and thus deemed inferior "others" of the East (Said, 1978). In this way, the colonizers were "Orientalizing" the people and the land they colonized. In other words, colonizers created their own definitions of who these people were based on the colonizer's own sense of western superiority. This produced a paternalistic view of Orientals as naïve, pure, ignorant, uncivilized people in need of the guidance of the occident, which was used as a justification for colonization.

Following WWI, Orientalism's center shifted to the US, and those studying Orientalism did so to create policy for dealing with "oriental" countries. The idea of "the Occident and the Orient," "civilized and uncivilized" persisted even after Europe lost many of its colonies following WWII (Said, 1978, p. 216). Despite globalization, prejudice was just as prevalent. This prejudice existed perhaps most clearly with regard

to Islam even as western countries started to perceive other "Orient" countries more liberally and with greater tolerance.

Today, these generalized characteristics attributed to "Orientals" persist presently as Arabs are viewed as uncivilized and Islam is associated with terrorism. Leela Fernandes points out that US military campaigns in the Middle East, and western media portrayals of Muslim women, have perpetuated these longstanding colonial narratives (Hesford and Kozol, 2005). Fernandes discusses the ways in which US politicians and news commentators used investigations of torture in Iraq and Afghanistan during the "war on terror" as a "proof of the superiority of the American identity" (Hesford and Kozol, 2005, p. 70). Through such examples, Fernandes confirms Said's notion that "despite its failures, its lamentable jargon, its scarcely concealed racism, its paper-thin intellectual apparatus, Orientalism flourishes today" (Said, 1978, p. 322). That is to say, though Orientalism has roots in colonialism, it still exists in today's neocolonial and post-colonial constructs and international relations.

This contemporary form of Orientalism appears in present-day discourse that engages Islam through sweeping generalizations, employing "edifying use of the word Islam to signify all at once a society, a religion, a prototype, and an actuality" (Said, 1978, p. 299). In what started during colonization and continues today, there is a pattern of thought whereby all actions of individuals in Muslim cultures are associated with the culture as a whole and reduced to Islam. This is what Nigerian feminist author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) would describe as the danger of the single story: in this case, Islam and individual experiences of Muslim women are used to signify and define the whole, when in fact Muslim people are as diverse as the people of any other

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identity category. While there is such a thing as common identity, representation of such identities must be careful to think of identity as a "production which is never complete" rather than as an "already accomplished fact" (Hesford and Kozol, 2005, p. 8).

Much of contemporary literature about the "Orient" illustrates the ways in which assumptions about women, particularly Muslim women, reflect and constitute the dominance of western feminism, which in many ways relies on such dangerous single stories. Western feminism itself is quite diverse, and exists in response to inequalities and challenges that occur in contexts of the west (that Said critiques as being dominant). Thus, western feminism has become a dominant notion born from the sense of superiority of the west because of "a coherence of effects resulting from the implicit assumption of 'the west' (in all its complexities and contradictions) as the primary referent in theory and praxis" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 61). In defining western feminism, Mohanty argues that "assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of a world system dominated by the west on the other, characterize a sizable extent of western feminist work on women in the third world" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 63). Western feminism, on one hand, constructs a set of issues around which all women are expected to relate, yet also suggests that secular and "liberated" women have utter and total control over their only bodies and lives, which is also explicitly untrue (Mohanty, 1988, p. 62). These assumptions are often uncritically culturally constructed.

Similarly, depictions of Muslim women in the west imply a western superiority in the idea that Muslim women are in need of help from western governments, nonprofits, or other institutions. Many of these notions come from stories of women in highly conservative regions of the Middle East (i.e. women banned from driving cars or forced to wear the burka). These "single stories" are used to generalize the whole of the Muslim world in a dangerous way, causing harmful misperceptions and perpetuating the idea that "Muslim women need saving" (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 783).

Anthropologist and author Lila Abu-Lughod maintains that the idea that Muslim women need saving is what has caused dangerous consequences in Arab countries where women *don't* actually need to be saved. In fact, this causes an opposition between Islam and the west, between fundamentalism and feminism, which in turn forces "those who might want to refuse the divide and take from different histories and cultures, who do not accept that being feminist means being Western," to decide between the two (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 788). Consequently, if these people decide against prioritizing values of liberal western feminism, they are seemingly forced towards radicalism because western feminism does not always create space for other forms of feminism with non-western cultural contexts.

Within the western notion that Muslim women need saving, global development efforts of governments and NGOs deem women as victims, using a "colonial appropriation of women's voices" to justify their invasion or even best intentioned projects in other countries (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 785). While these initiatives claim to be liberating women, Abu-Lughod argues that we need to be suspicious of this rhetoric, which has been especially pervasive since the US invaded both Iraq and Afghanistan,

and the tensions surrounding Islam post-9/11. Not only has the US government repeatedly portrayed women abroad as victims as an excuse to invade another country (and then failed to improve the lives of women in the ways they were marketed as promising), but this rhetoric causes us to forget to consider these women as parts of reality; as subjects in their own history, not just objects of the west (Mohanty, 1988).

This rhetoric is what has led to the creation of what Chandra Talpade Mohanty calls the "Third World Woman." Similar to how early colonizers created "Orientals" based on their own biased perceptions, the west has created the "Third World Woman," perceived by the west as Mohanty describes: "Religious (read: 'not progressive'), family oriented (read: 'traditional'), legal minors (read: 'they-are-still-not-conscious-of-their-rights'), illiterate (read: 'ignorant'), domestic (read: 'backward') and sometimes revolutionary (read: 'their-country-is-in-a-state-of-war; they-must-fight!')" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 80). This "woman" (purposely singular to illustrate how one depiction is used to represent a whole) bears all of the assumptions about women of developing countries in an arbitrary construction that "nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of western humanist discourse (Mohanty, 1988, p. 62).

In this vein, Mohanty describes how problematic it is to refer to women as one assumed group with implicitly coherent identities, priorities, struggles, and needs. Using women as a category of analysis implies "the crucial presupposition that all of us of the same gender, across classes and cultures, are somehow socially constituted as a homogeneous group identifiable prior to the process of analysis" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 65). It implies universality solely on the basis of a common oppression as a woman and assumes a stable category of analysis, without taking into account the varying histories

and forms of oppression that exist within this category. It also, again, creates the perception of the "woman" – or women – as objects rather than "material subjects in their own history" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 65). Lastly, this analytical strategy is both "historically reductive and ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions. All they do is reinforce binary divisions between men and women" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 73). Assuming men as exploiters and women as exploited is a simplistic and generalized formula that should be replaced with consideration of patriarchal systems and institutions as the oppressor in order to more effectively target the problem.

Mohanty further argues that these considerations are especially relevant when reading the work of western feminists. Because a universal patriarchal structure does not exist globally the way western feminism implies, this framework cannot be used to analyze feminism outside of the west. Feminisms, and western feminism in particular, cannot avoid the challenge of being situated in a global economic and politic framework in which one ideology dominates others (Mohanty, 1988, p. 63).

So how can those grappling with how to understand and speak about a culture different from their own deal with these discrepancies? Abu-Lughod suggests the first step is to accept the possibility of difference, and the fact that women of different cultures might want things for themselves that do not align with what westerners want for them (Abu-Lughod, 2002). And furthermore, another step is to not simply justify or dismiss any aspects of culture through cultural relativism; rather than excusing potentially problematic differences as being "just their culture," one should actually recognize differences "as products of different histories, as expressions of different circumstances, and as manifestations of differently structured desires" (Abu-Lughod,

2002, p. 789). Abu-Lughod cautions westerners against using the rhetoric of white saviorship because of the implications that makes about western superiority: "Can we use a more egalitarian language of alliances, coalitions, and solidarity, instead of salvation?" (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 787). In this framework, it becomes possible to recognize how the progress of any culture, including that of the US, can be improved as part of ongoing history, not a stagnant perception of culture.

Transnational Feminisms

The broad understanding of western dominance provided by Edward Said, and the arguments presented by authors Lila Abu-Lughod and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, among others, help to set up a framework with which to discuss localized feminisms such as Islamic feminism in Morocco. This section examines how globalization and cultural differences play a role in understanding feminisms in a global context.

While there are many ideas and definitions of transnational feminism, anthropologist Aihwa Ong argues that transnationality should "highlight the 'cultural specificities of global processes'" in order to problematize the role of power within globalization (Hesford and Kozol, 2005, p. 14). Feminist scholar Minoo Moallem argues that "the survival of feminism…will depend on embracing transnationalism rooted in the recognition of various intersecting social relations" (Hesford & Kozol, 2005, p. 14). The idea of transnational feminism emphasizes the interdependence of local and global, and how cultural differences play a role in the function of specifically located feminisms.

Another important concept when analyzing diverse forms of feminism is the idea that intersecting identities cannot be disentangled from one another, and that shapes the way that feminisms function in distinct cultures. In their book *Global Feminism: Transnational Women's Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights* (2006)*, Myra M. Ferree and Aili Mari Tripp acknowledge this by writing that "intersectionality means that privilege and oppression, and movements to defend and combat these relations, are not in fact singular. No one has a gender but not a race, a nationality but not a gender, an education but not an age" (p. 10). Ferree and Tripp point out that, in relation to stereotypes about Islam, "global terrorism and 'national security' are also increasingly recognized as being intertwined and gendered issues" (p. 13). That is to say, also, that women's rights and national security have become entangled in religion. However, within the global 'war on terror' rhetoric (that, through western media, largely focuses on Muslim populations), western democracies co-opt feminism as solely their own when in fact sexism thrives in all contexts:

> The oppression of women is framed as religious, family-based, and a threat to (Western) civilization, which is now defined as the champion of secular modernity and the value of equal rights for all. Diverting attention from the way that women continue to be far from liberated in Western capitalist democracies is one discursive accomplishment of this strategy, and if it succeeds, it could be a demobilizing factor for feminist women's movements. (Ferree & Tripp, 2006, p.14)

Re-framing these concepts outside of ethnocentrism and gaining broader perspectives on transnational feminisms can shed light on the diverse ways in which women interact with their own intersecting identities.

According to Ferree and Tripp, feminism can be defined as "a broad goal of challenging and changing gender relations that subordinate women to men and that

thereby also differentially advantage some women and men relative to others" (Ferree

& Tripp, 2006, p. vii). In this definition, it is important to recognize that Ferree and

Tripp make note of the inherent superiority that exists in broadly termed feminism,

which implies the dominance of what I have previously referred to as western feminism.

In their discussion of feminism, the authors decenter western views to focus on

culturally specific feminisms. Considering the history of colonization and orientalism

that led to cultural dominance, not all women who possess feminist core values choose

to identify as feminists for fear of aligning with this context of exclusion and prejudice.

Nonetheless, Ferree and Tripp believe that women "who are struggling to change

women's subordination…and [work towards the] goal of empowering women should be

considered feminist" (p. vii). This distinction sets the definition of "feminist" as

inclusive of various identities and values, for the purposes of this thesis.

Feminism and Piety

The topic of religion is a less examined social dimension of mainstream

feminism, but is an important factor in relation to culturally specific feminisms such as

Islamic feminism. Saba Mahmood broaches the question of the relevance of Islam in the

complex relationship between feminism and religion in her book *Politics of Piety: The*

Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject (2012). In an exploration of piety and

feminism within Egypt's social movements, Mahmood questions the western

conviction, however well intentioned, that other ways of life are "necessarily inferior to

the solutions we have devised under the banner of 'secular-left' politics" (p. xi).

In Mahmood's discussion of Egypt's Mosque Movement, she notes that this movement and the women involved in it occupy what she calls:

> An uncomfortable place in feminist scholarship because they pursue practices and ideals embedded within a tradition that has historically accorded women a subordinate status…have come to be associated with terms such as fundamentalism, the subjugation of women, social conservatism, reactionary atavism, cultural backwardness, and so-on – associations that, in the aftermath of September 11, are often treated as 'facts' that do not require further analysis. (Mahmood, 2012, p. 5)

In exploring the role of piety within feminist movements, it is necessary to recognize assumptions and find ways to eliminate them.

Many such assumptions are born from stereotypes of Orientalism, as described by Edward Said (1978). First of all, what are some assumptions that westerners hold about groups of Muslim women? When considering the common question that (secular, western) feminists focus on in relation to Muslim women, one may ask: "why would such a large number of women across the Muslim world actively support a movement that seems inimical to their 'own interests and agendas,' especially at a historical moment when these women appear to have more emancipatory possibilities available to them?" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 2). This question holds the assumption that "there is something intrinsic to women that *should* predispose them to oppose these practices, values, and injunctions that the Islamist movement embodies" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 2). But is this assumption valid? Raising these questions makes room for a mindset that moves away from making assumptions about a group of people from a strictly secular lens, and avoids placing our own biases in the analysis of another culture. It is then easier to consider other analytical tools that do not center western values.

In much scholarly work from the west about women in Islam, the hijab is a central concern, and it is often assumed that the number of hijabi women in a societal context directly correlates to women's oppression in that culture. However, Chandra Talpade Mohanty points out that this is an analytically reductive assumption that homogenizes and systematizes Muslim women's experiences in a way that "erases all marginal and resistant modes of experience" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 80). We must be careful not to assume that this symbol of modesty and respectability universally stands for a lack of agency. In western scholarship, there is a notable focus on the hijab. To this, Abu-Lughod (2002) notes that "we must take care not to reduce the diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing" (p. 785). Abu-Lughod also notes that "veiling signifies belonging to a particular community and participating in a moral way of life in which families are paramount in the organization of communities and the home is associated with the sanctity of women" (p. 785).

Just as in any community, Muslim or otherwise, people wear the appropriate form of dress that aligns with social standards of the culture, religion, or morals, unless purposefully transgressing from any part of those categories (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 785). Moroccan scholar Fatima Sadiqi notes that Moroccan women wearing the hijab during the 1990s, a period of increased Islamism in Morocco, was in fact a transgression from the trend towards western custom in Morocco. According to Sadiqi, for these Moroccan women "the veil is a token of liberation – an indication that they have engaged with the Moroccan public in ways that reflect their own sense of religious

practice" and was used as a "mechanism for making their presence felt publicly and gaining credibility within religious debates" (Sadiqi, 2006, p. 2).

Understanding that there are varied reasons for which women choose wear the hijab, including as an exercise of their own religious expression, helps to underscore the importance in analyzing women's movements within specific localized contexts. Some such areas that require deeper analysis when discussing local feminisms are the notions of agency, liberty, freedom, and empowerment. These are terms that might not mean the same thing to a secular feminist and an Islamic feminist, and the next section elaborates on what that difference looks like.

Agency, Freedom, and Empowerment in Cultural Contexts

A common critique of western feminism is the way in which the western feminist movement exports its ideas of individual liberties internationally (historically through colonization, invasion, capitalism, etc.). This is problematic because ideas of liberty and agency have different meanings based on cultural contexts. Agency, according to Mahmood (2012), is "not simply as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that specific relations of *subordination* create and enable" (p. 18). In congruence with the value of locating oneself within culturally specific theories of feminism, "the theory of agency must be explored within the grammar of concepts within which it resides" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 34). This means that agency will vary for women depending on their cultures and traditions. It also means that agency is often forced into the binary of subordination and liberation that ignores complexities of real human interaction. In relation to women in Islam, the idea of

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agency as centralized in the moral and political autonomy of the subject seems to be in contrast with women belonging to groups related to "patriarchal religious traditions such as Islam" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 7). Thus, it becomes important to challenge "the overwhelming tendency within poststructuralist feminist scholarship to conceptualize agency in terms of subversion or resignification of social norms" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 14).

According to author and human rights lawyer Leti Volpp, certain strands of feminist thought depict women of "the third world" as more subject to gender subordination than women of the west. This depiction also links women wearing the burka or hijab to subordination by men rather than considering other important social issues, such as the ways in which western intervention in many Arab countries contributes to the levels of poverty (Volpp, 2006, p. 1635). This idea of gender subordination versus freedom is, in many ways, a western ideal bound up in a focus on gender relations to the exclusion of other issues that might be of more importance to women in this context. Often, what is prioritized is the value of individualism, which does not apply to all cultures that might center their values on the collective family unit rather than individual autonomy.

Mahmood suggests that we question the universality of women's desire to be free from relations of subordination or structures of male domination, avoiding the assumption that freedom is a social ideal that is prioritized in illogical ways depending on the context – or that there is only one version of freedom (Mahmood, 2012, p. 10). That is not to say that subordination is an accepted norm for women in Islam, it is simply to caution against relying on western assumptions, or values prioritized by

dominant cultures. Furthermore, it is meant to note that subordination and freedom are culturally rooted and have meaning in context. This analysis is not meant to diminish the power of liberal feminism's discourse on freedom and agency, and the positive impacts this has had on women's empowerment in its own context, but rather to point out that these ideas are shaped by social and cultural ideas and take on meaning in context.

Mahmood demonstrates the diverse notions of freedom in an example from the US in the 1970s. Mahmood argues that during this time, many white feminists viewed the institution of the nuclear family as their oppressor and thus chose to reject it, while African American and Native American women's sense of freedom was centered on being grounded in their nuclear families – an act of revolt in itself because of their histories of separation through genocide, slavery, and racism that "operated precisely by breaking up their communities and social networks" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 13). This is just one example of how an idea can hold very different significance when culturally located. Both of these versions of freedom aid the progress of feminist values but through very different notions of freedom. This realization expands feminist understandings of freedom and reframes the idea of autonomy as shaped by the dynamics of race, social class, and ethnicity.

Discrepancies in the notions of freedom and agency make up part of the reason western cultures view some cultures (Muslim cultures) as stuck in tradition. "What may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency," one that can only be understood within the context of those cultural norms and traditions, whether they be religious or societal

(Mahmood, 2012, p. 15). One view of agency is not better than the other – to address the value and necessity of a specific sect of feminism in the Islamic context is not to proclaim it as superior. This is the complexity of global feminisms, and in the context of this thesis, the complexity of Islamic feminism in Morocco.

In her own book, *The Politics of Piety* (2012), Mahmood's objective is to make her ethnographic study of Egypt's Mosque Movement

> …speak back to the normative liberal assumptions about human nature against which such a movement is held accountable – such as the belief that humans have an innate desire for freedom, that we all somehow seek to assert our autonomy when allowed to do so, that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms and not those that uphold them, and so on. (Mahmood, 2012, p. 5)

And, while the women's movements in Morocco differ widely from those in Egypt, the framework of exploring diverse notions of "self" and "agency" still helps to "denaturalize the normative subject of liberal feminist theory" (p. 33).

In alignment with the body of work that questions the reliance on western feminism and subverts it by placing discussions of feminism in local contexts, the term "empowerment" deserves similar deconstruction as the ideas of agency and liberty. To frame the conversation about Islamic feminism in Morocco, it is also important to develop a definition for the word "empowerment" and discuss some of the varied cultural perceptions about the terms from the side of both Islamic feminists and secular feminists in Morocco. For some Islamic feminists, the term "empowerment" is often viewed as part of the discourse of western feminism that is rejected by Islamic feminists due to the connotation of its meaning, and the direct translation of the word into Arabic. Because the Arabic word *tamkeen*, the translation of empowerment, is also directly synonymous with the word "enablement," the word itself has disempowering

implications and it is often thought that the word implies the assumption that women are weak and henceforth require an outside source to give them power. In an interview with Ilyass Bouzghaia of the Center for Study and Research on Women in Islam, he explains that empowerment is not a common term within the Islamic context, since it creates a relationship between the man and woman that is centered around power and competition rather than mercy and compassion, which are the basis for relationships in Islam (I. Bouzghaia, personal communication, April 20, 2016).

On the other hand, Stephanie Bordat, lawyer and founding director of the Rabat-based nonprofit organization Mobilizing Rights Associations, MRA, which works for the legal rights of women in Morocco, creates her own definition of empowerment. Her notion of empowerment of women, from a secular feminist point of view, is that it is directly related to financial and legal rights, but comes down to "the capacity to make elective decisions and to convert them into desired outcomes" (Bordat, Kouzzi, & Schaefer Davis, 2011, p. 4). Empowerment, the authors claim,

> …refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. Changes in the ability to exercise choice can be thought of in terms of changes in three inter-related dimensions which make up choice: resources, which form the conditions under which choices are made; agency, which is at the heart of the process by which choices are made; and achievements, which are the outcomes of choices. (Bordat et al., 2011, p. 5)

The authors argue that women's empowerment can be viewed on an individual level as well as a collective one. In the individual sense, women's empowerment can allow a woman to gain control over her own life and decisions. On a broader level, empowerment can allow "women as a group [to] work together to overcome structures that limit them in society, such as in community mobilization for advocacy campaigns"

(Bordat et al., 2011, p. 5). In speaking with Bordat in a phone interview, she stated that "you cannot have a definition of empowerment based on the principle of someone being weaker" (S. Bordat, personal communication, April 29, 2016).

These definitions allow for a more positive understanding of empowerment, which is the one I will be referencing in this study. With this definition, we can view empowerment as a constructive opportunity for women; one that neither implies female weakness nor relies on the connotation of the word "empowerment" as relating to a sense of competition between man and woman, or hierarchal values in the relationships of husband and wife. Instead, empowerment for women can mean making societal changes that allow women the ability to make their own decisions, and make a positive impact on country's development and progress towards justice, equality, and equity.

While these notions are challenging to deconstruct within inclusive and diverse contexts, we cannot ignore the political framework of feminism and the importance of considering the complexities of feminism on the global scale. We also cannot ignore the answers to issues women face that we find challenging as western feminists – as Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) points out, "we may want justice for women, but can we accept that there might be different ideas about justice and that different women might want, or choose, different futures from what we envision as best?" (p. 788). Similarly, what does freedom mean when we realize that freedom exists within varied social and historical contexts, and thus freedom exists in a wide range of meanings and experiences?

Understanding transnational feminisms and the various forms of agency and empowerment aid us in decentering the dominant forms of western feminism, which often center only liberal, progressive, white women. These concepts are important to

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understand in order to continue with the exploration of Islamic feminism in this thesis. Similar to how we know that western feminism involves varied ideologies, and just how any category as large as "western feminism" cannot be assumed to be homogenous, the same is true for Islamic feminism. As this thesis will elaborate, we cannot assume that every Moroccan who aligns with Islamic feminism agrees on everything. Using this lens, this thesis presents the complexity and diversity of feminism in the context of Morocco, keeping in mind that there is no single story.

Islamism, Feminism, and Islamic Feminism

Islam cannot be viewed as an ideology outside of or separate from social relations or practices, but should instead be studied as a discourse that guides social, economic, and political settings that vary in complex ways depending on the community (Mohanty, 1988, p. 70). For this reason, using Islam as a starting point for social reform in Muslim countries that seek to challenge injustices is a logical approach, and Morocco is no exception. In the Moroccan context, discussions of social justice are closely tied to discussions of religion, especially in regards to gender and women's rights.

In relation to reform efforts about gender and women's rights in Morocco, scholarly work will often refer to Islamism, secular feminism, liberal feminism, or Islamic feminism. While some are much harder to define than others, it is important have a general understanding of each term. Saba Mahmood defines secularism as "separation of religion from issues of the state, and as the increasing differentiation of

society into discrete spheres (economic, legal, educational, familial, and so on) of which religion is one part" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 47). Secularism is an important term in modern Morocco's political and social reform. Moroccan scholar Souad Eddouada and Renata Pepicelli define liberal feminists as "the organizations that strive to institute equality between the sexes by legislative means" (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 87). For example, Eddouada refers to groups in mid-1980s Morocco that devoted activist efforts to influencing public policy "towards secularization and the equalization of the legal status of men and women," such as the Union for Feminine Action (UAF) and the Democratic Association of Women in Morocco (ADFM). Islamism is often discussed in contrast to the various forms of feminism, and is also often equated to Islamic fundamentalism or militancy, though it has varied definitions and does not requisitely manifest itself in extremism. According to the Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics, Islamism at the very least "represents a form of social and political activism, grounded in an idea that public and political life should be guided by a set of Islamic principles" (Polijarevic, 2015, p. 1). In some scholarly work it is also referred to as "political Islam."

Lastly, Islamic feminism is a discourse that requires an interpretation of gender and Islam through *ijtihad*, or independent analysis, of Islam's holy texts (the Quran and the hadith) (Badran, 2009, p. 26). However, according to historian and scholar of gender in Islam, Margot Badran, "Islamic feminism is not simply a reform of religion and society; it is in fact a fundamental alteration towards an egalitarian Islam, which in fact makes it distinctly different from secular feminism" (Davids, 2014, p. 313). This is a

complicated notion considering Islam and its interpretations and practices vary widely from country to country.

In the Moroccan context, there are no significant disconnects between the goals of Islamic feminism and the theories laid out in this chapter. There are, however, some tensions between the various parties within Morocco's women's movements (i.e. secularists and Islamists). Islamic feminism in Morocco is shaped by the country's practice of moderate Islam, as well as Morocco's recent history of social movements and political reform. Before analyzing the specific nature of Islamic feminism in the Moroccan context, the following chapter provides the background of women's movements and reform in Morocco that have influenced Islamic feminist discourse in Morocco.

Chapter 2: Contemporary Historical Contexts of Social Movements in Morocco

The turn of the 21st century has seen dramatic social reform in Morocco that has advanced progress through both feminist and Islamist efforts. Islamist movements have gained contemporary relevance despite their centuries-old existence and religious significance, which has now "marked the era of competing liberal and 'Islamic' feminism" (Salime, 2012, p. 104). With the strong influence of international movements as a result of globalization, as well as internal shifts in power with the death of Morocco's Hassan II to his son Mohammed VI, questions of social reform are on the forefront of Moroccan law, politics, and social consciousness. This era brought forth issues such as women's rights within marriage, divorce, inheritance, the workplace, and religious authority, among other areas that were met with activism and movements that catalyzed this social reform.

This chapter will cover what researchers identify as some of the principal events in recent Moroccan history that influence the way gender relates to religion, and vice versa, in Morocco. The first entry point into this discussion is the historical context of King Hassan II and subsequent King Mohammed VI's roles as Morocco's commanders of the faithful, during which time Morocco saw an increase in female participation in the political sphere. This chapter will then discuss the ratification of the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and what that meant for Islamic feminism, the reform of the Moroccan Family Code (the Moudawana), representation of women with religious authority (in the form of Mourchidats, female religious guides), and Morocco's role in the Arab

Spring uprising – much of which formed as a response to political movements and activism.

Recent Historical Context

Rapid social and economic advancements have marked Morocco's recent history under the rule of King Mohammed VI, who gained power after the death of his authoritarian father Hassan II in 1999. Before Hassan II, French colonial rule of Morocco ended in 1956 under the rule of Hassan II's father Mohammed V, who reigned until his death in 1961. Hassan II's reign was known for human rights abuses in unlawful incarceration, torture, exile, and forced disappearance of critics or opponents of his rule (Amine, 2016). The current king, Mohammed VI, has made himself known for progressive reform, in contrast to Hassan II's conservative and authoritarian so called "Years of Lead" (Amine, 2016).

By the 1990s, nearing the end of Hassan II's life, Morocco began to feel the global after-effects of the Iranian Revolution and the end of Cold War, both of which shifted international power relations – with one giving power to political Islam, and one leaving the US as the main global superpower (Sadiqi, 2006). Along with many other Muslim countries during this time, Morocco began to shift towards political Islam, or Islamism. This led to multiple changes. On one hand, it undermined the power of King Hassan II as the sole religious authority, and it also put into question the efforts of western feminists who sought to change the then-conservative Moroccan Family Code. This period (the 1990s) saw the rise in participation of highly educated hijabi feminists who focused on the importance of religious values in shaping political and social efforts

in Morocco. As the number of these women taking action in Moroccan politics increased, "the veil became a mechanism for making their presence felt publicly and gaining credibility within religious debates" (Sadiqi, 2006, p. 3). It was during the 1990s, also, in which Morocco's liberal feminists and Islamic feminists began to find ways to compromise on issues that often divide them, such as through increased use of Arabic rather than French in official documents (moving away from western colonial forces), and rooting discussions in a true knowledge of Islamic scripture (Sadiqi, 2006).

All of this came at a time of greater democratization in Morocco, with the new, young King Mohammed VI in 1999 who is considered Morocco's "first feminist." The Moroccan state, King Mohammed VI, created efforts towards democratization and a quota mandate that saw 35 women take seats in parliament in 2002 (Sadiqi, 2006). Asma Lamrabet describes Morocco as a "relative exception" to Muslim countries that lack democratic processes and other such factors that she notes lead to radicalism and extremism in the name of Islam – something she also notes is doubly challenging for Muslim populations: "[extremists] are certainly committed in the name of an ideology in complete contradiction to the ethics of Islam, yet the explicit religious claims of their perpetrators remain extremely painful for the majority of Muslims" (Lamrabet, 2016, p. 1).

Some scholars reference the influence of globalization on the rise of Wahhabism (ultraconservatism) in Morocco. During the end of Hassan II's reign in the 1980s-90s, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) implemented structural adjustment programs, international lending policies that caused painful alienation of developing countries. The subsequent vulnerability in Arab countries, like Morocco,

made it easier for extremists to disseminate their conservative ideas (Solfrini, 2016).

Although today King Mohammed VI has used his religious authority to encourage a

more tolerant, moderate Islam in Morocco, Wahhabi messaging still reaches Moroccan

families through conservative television programs, particularly targeting rural, lower-

income areas (M. Dao-Sabah, personal communication, April 28, 2016).

The 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca, in which a group of teenage boys from

the slums of Morocco set off five suicide bombs around the city, caused widespread

concern about possible radicalization in Morocco. Following the attack, Moroccan

Interior Minister Mustapha Sahel noted that these bombings bared resemblance to

international terrorist efforts (Terror Blasts Rock Casablanca, 2003). Morocco began to

crack down on national security as speculation about how to avoid such radicalization

internally became a serious topic.

More recently, Morocco has taken its concern for national security to an even

greater length by banning the sale and production of the burka (Alami, 2017). While

this is a seemingly highly controversial legislative decision, a very small minority of

Moroccan woman wear the burka (Alami, 2017). Similarly, while the hijab was, for

many years, a growing trend for Moroccan women, fewer millennial woman dawn the

hijab (Alami, 2017). Some argue that the burka is not a part of Moroccan tradition or

culture, the way the hijab, niqab, or djellaba are (Alami, 2017). While some view the

ban as justified for the sake of national security, others view it as a breech of women's

freedom (Alami, 2017).

These events, from the increased democratization of Morocco, to the influence

of globalization and possible threat of religious extremism, are representative of this era

of significant social changes in Morocco. Globalization has also influenced Morocco in the sense that Morocco has ratified United Nations agreements that hold the country accountable to universal law. In the context of women's rights, the most notable agreement that Morocco has ratified is the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, or CEDAW. The following section details the contentious decision for the country to ratify CEDAW.

Ratification and Reservations on CEDAW

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a United Nations Treaty adopted by 187 countries in 1979. Signatories commit to enforcing international human rights laws for women (international laws that only six UN countries, including the US, did not sign). In 1993, Morocco originally ratified the treaty with a list of reservations that claimed that some of the articles went against Islamic law in the ways they defined gender equality in the domestic realm. The reservations submitted were for Article 9(2) which grants equal rights for men and women in proclaiming the nationality of their children, and Article 16 which outlines the principles of gender equality within the family and marriage (Zvan-Elliott, 2014). Perhaps most notably, Morocco entered declarations to Article 2, which specifically defines the purpose of the Convention by requiring "signatory states to institute gender equality in their legal orders, including their national constitutions, and urges countries to foster a culture of equality-as such it is recognized as defining the object and purpose of the Convention" and Article 15(4), which "specifically regulates the individual's right to freedom of movement and the freedom to choose her residence

and domicile" (Zvan-Elliott, 2014, p. 18). These declarations, along with the other reservations, confirmed the priority of Islamic Law over international law in interpreting inconsistencies in CEDAW and domestic law (Zvan Elliott, 2014).

It important to note that there are CEDAW articles that address values based on assumed biological differences between men and women in the provisions for maternity protections and reproductive rights for women (CEDAW articles 4(2), 5(b), 11(2)). Professor at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Katja Zvan-Elliott, points out the merit in this deliberate wording in the CEDAW treaty that addresses biological needs of women while making it clear that equality does not requisitely denote identical treatment of the sexes. Zvan-Elliott writes:

> Women do not have to be more like men to be equal because human rights are not androcentric, in which men would be made to be the standard of human experience. In other words, to demand to be treated like a human does not mean to be treated like a man. Equality, therefore, is not understood as the 'mechanical equality.' (Zvan-Elliott, 2015, p. 93)

This discussion about regulating women's rights within the family unit is hugely important in the Moroccan cultural context. Because of this, the question of valuing equity as opposed to equality in women's rights is a frequent point of contention. I will delve into a wholesome discussion about equity and equality in Chapter 4.

In 2008, the monarchy withdrew the CEDAW reservations, a move praised by progressive liberal feminists in Morocco. However, the declarations on Article 2 and 15(4) remain (Zvan-Elliott, 2014). Now, CEDAW is meant to be the standard that informs human rights and treatment of women in Morocco, and commits the country to uphold these international standards. However, some would argue that these standards have not been adequately upheld. Zvan-Elliott, for example, also makes a case for the

ways in which Morocco has failed to uphold the CEDAW standards to which it has committed. By keeping the declarations to two key articles of the Convention treaty, Morocco has granted itself leeway in following the international women's rights agreements (Zvan-Elliott, 2014).

Similarly important for women's rights is the Moroccan Family Code, or Moudawana, which was reformed in 2004. Unlike CEDAW, however, the Moudawana is written in the context of Muslim culture and takes into account the teachings of the Quran in structuring the laws for fair treatment within the family unit. Nonetheless, the reform of the Moudawana opened up conversation between secularist and Islamists on the topic of women's rights within the Muslim family structure.

The Moroccan Family Code (Moudawana)

In Morocco, the relationship between secular feminists and Islamists has shaped and influenced national legislation and social change. For example, the Association Démocratique de Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), one of the feminist organizations that originally based their political positions on international documents such as CEDAW, now evaluates matters such as inheritance from an Islamic perspective (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010). Similarly, feminist movements influenced some Islamist groups to alter their conservative stances on marriage, women in the workplace, inheritance, and divorce, which largely affected the Islamists moves to reform the Family Code of 1957 in the beginning of the 21st century (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010). Following its reform, the Family Code is often pointed to as a pillar for the advancement of women's rights from a religious perspective in Morocco.

The Moudawana is a Moroccan law that defends women's rights in the home, but not in the public sphere. Reform of the Family Code in 2004, which "institutes gender equality, removes the marital guardian and obedience laws, provides women with the right to initiate divorce and gain custody of children, abolishes repudiation and restricts polygamy" (Salime, 2012, p. 103), made it so that the law is considered to be "one of the most progressive codifications of women's rights in the region" (Salime, 2012, p. 103). The reforms to the Family Code in Morocco were implemented after twenty years of action and discrepancy between feminists and Islamists, including the launch of One Million Signatures Campaign in 1992 that fought in favor of the reform of the Family Code (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 201). The proposed reforms of the One Million Signatures Campaign would have established the equal status of spouses, women's right to initiate divorce proceedings, and the abolition of guardianship and polygamy, all of which were based on *maqasid al-shari'a* (final purposes of Sharia; laws based on texts of Islam) in addition to strict adherence to international laws such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010). However, the eventual ruling on the part of King Mohammed VI to put forth the reformed Moudawana to parliament took into consideration both parties' concerns to present a "the egalitarian spirit of Islam and the universal principles of human rights," according to the King's royal statement. It did not, however, implement all factors laid out by the liberal One Million Signatures Campaign (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 1).

In my interview with Dr. Asma Lamrabet, of the Center for Study and Research on Women in Islam, she explains that this time of reform, in the early 2000s, was very

dangerous for the country because of the separation is caused between the two forces in Morocco: Islamists and secularists. King Mohammed VI then had to step in as a mediator, creating a committee of experts from fields of economy, sociology, theology, nonprofits, and human rights to debate the matter and decide on reforms in a consensus. This committee was composed of people with different ideological, religious, social values, and took into account a collective *ijtihad* of religious scholars. Lamrabet stated in our interview that this was the "first step for a second life for Morocco," that culminated in one of the most emancipated laws in the Arab world.

Lamrabet explains that both secularists and Islamists were able to reconcile some of their differences, at least temporarily. "They are not friends, I'm not going to say that they are friends," Lamrabet clarifies, "but what I want to say is - since I am not part of the Islamic movement, I am just an independent intellectual and I want just women's rights, equality, dignity, emancipation - both the universal perspective and Islamic perspective, for me, are not incompatible" (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016). Lamrabet continues, saying that the problem between the two groups is not religion, but rather political ideology; with a reformist reading of the Quran, religion is no longer a problem. This is proven through the reform of the Moudawana and the apparent consensus between secular and Islamic feminists in the agreement on a reformed law that is considered "*the* paradigm case of recent legislation based on the *shari'a*. It puts into practice, at least in part, the ideas of social justice and gender equality advanced by Islamic feminists on the basis of a new reading of the Qur'an" (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 1).

However, similar to how CEDAW could not solve all human rights standards for discrimination against women, the Moudawana has also not been able to solve domestic gender issues. Zvan-Elliott argues that "while the law gives family a more democratic and just appearance" after the reform, "the reformed Family Code reproduces the traditional idea that women need protection, which denies them individuality and autonomy" in the way that it defines the husband's duties within the family structure, particularly as the breadwinner and legal authority (Zvan-Elliott, 2014, p. 24). In this way, even with the reforms, the Family Code reinforces a patriarchal family structure and "operates as a protective and corrective document rather than non-discriminatory in the sense of CEDAW's definition" (Zvan-Elliott, 2014, p. 24).

Furthermore, domestic violence and general violence against women is a rampant issue in Morocco that the Family Code has failed to prevent or protect. Stephanie Bordat notes that in 2015, a study from the previous year indicated that over 62% of women experienced some form of violence in Morocco, much of it perpetrated by their husbands (S. Bordat, personal communication, April 29, 2016). In many cases, women lack awareness of their rights under both CEDAW and the Moudawana, and family courts have proven insufficient and cater to conservative judges who try cases based on traditional Islamic values rather than the moderate laws set in place.

These reforms of the Family Code, along with other agendas presented by the monarchy and influenced by such movements, have caused progressive reorientation of the Moroccan government in terms of gender equality and women's rights. Unfortunately, many activists would argue that these reforms have not accomplished enough in terms of women's rights. Additionally, however, the reforms have also

fostered a state that is much more rigidly structured around sharia law in order to satisfy

the needs of Islamist groups (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010). As a result, the Moroccan

government has moved towards what Souad Eddouada and Renata Pepicelli would call

"Islamic State Feminism." Eddouada and Pepicelli also argue that, "while it opened up

immensely beneficial prospects for women…the 'Islamic state feminism' that has

resulted from this process does not necessarily share the objectives of either party"

(Islamists or secularists) (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 13).

While the Moudawana clearly outlines women's rights in the home and within

the family structure, women have not been traditionally granted leadership roles in the

mosque. This is based on traditional interpretations of the Quran. However, this is

another aspect of Morocco's women's movement that has seen advancement in the last

decade.

Implementation of Mourchidats Throughout Morocco

Following the 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca, Morocco, in which

Moroccan extremists set off multiple bombs throughout the city, it became clear to the

Moroccan state that it was necessary to "occupy (or re-occupy) the field of religion" in

order to uphold its stance as a moderate Muslim state (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p.

2). To fend off this radicalization of Islam that was building, the Moroccan monarchy

pushed another reform of the religious sphere whose main focus was "opening

recruitment to women for posts of authority in state religious institutions" (Eddouada &

Pepicelli, 2010, p. 2). This reform, adding posts for female authority within the religious

field throughout Morocco, led to the creation of institutions for the training of

"mourchidats," or female religious guides in 2006. These training institutions are organized as a code of the Moroccan Ministry with the purposeful reorganization of the field in order to support women, give them answers to questions they have about Islam, and empower their position in society (A. Marjouane, personal communication, April 16, 2016).

This reform helps maintain Morocco's position as a tolerant Muslim country, and advance the efforts in alignment with the US "war on terror" and international fights against terrorism (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 2). Additionally, allowing space for women to have some form of religious authority made it possible for Moroccans to have "autonomous action in the field of Islam," which is most formally represented through *fatwa*, religious opinion on Quranic texts that is officially by the Moroccan Council of Oulema (the highest scientific council) in the vision of unity and of god (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 2).

According to Adil Marjouane, the government official I interviewed who has experience with training both male and female religious guides, he noted that the training for mourchidats is extensive; the position is highly competitive. Before entering the institute for training, the women seeking to become female religious guides must pass an oral exam of 30-40 minutes that involved oral recitation of parts of the Quran (A. Marjouane, personal communication, April 16, 2016). The women must then be evaluated based on their oral recitation skill, and knowledge of the religious sciences (prophetic tradition, Islamic Jurisprudence called *fiqh*) (A. Marjouane, personal communication, April 16, 2016). Along with the requirements of being under 45 years of age and being Moroccan, the women also must have a bachelor's degree at

minimum, and have one-third of the Quran memorized (A. Marjouane, personal communication, April 16, 2016). Unlike men, who must memorize the whole Quran in order to become an *imam*, or male religious guide and preacher, women must only know a third of the Quran. This is because women will never be asked to recite the whole Quran, which happens during "Prayer of Night" during Ramadan, the way men do, since it is forbidden for women to do so (A. Marjouane, personal communication, April 16, 2016).

According to Marjouane, there are now over 500 mourchidats who have been trained since the implementation of this reform, and now practice as female religious guides throughout Morocco (A. Marjouane, personal communication, April 16, 2016). Along with these women, there are also 36 female theologians who are appointed by the King and serve on national councils (A. Marjouane, personal communication, April 16, 2016).

Marjouane highlighted that the common questions mourchidats answer are about how women should behave in the mosques during prayer time while menstruating, since in Islam it is forbidden for women to pray or touch the Quran during menstruation (according to some interpretations) (A. Marjouane, personal communication, April 16, 2016). In these instances, and with these questions, women can go to the mosques to seek out a mourchidat, female guides who are spread throughout Morocco to guide women in their religion. Additionally, Marjouane pointed out that you can actually call the Council of Oulema, set up by the monarchy for the purpose of creating the formal and official opinions of the Quran in alignment with Morocco's Islam, and speak to a

female religious guide if requested (A. Marjouane, personal communication, April 16, 2016).

The roles of the female religious guides are highly valuable in removing barriers of knowledge of Islam and proper practice to Muslim women, which liberates these women within their religion by allowing them access to safe spaces for open conversation about womanhood in Islam. In relation to the mourchidats, Morocco's Minister for Islamic Affairs, Ahmed Taoufiq is quoted as saying: "their presence was a powerful symbol that should encourage other women to become involved in public action and debates relating to Islam" (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 8). Not only does the training of these women promote Sufism, a form of tolerant Islam that is in line with "Morocco's Islam" and rejects radical extremism, but they also allow for the use of religion to advance gender equality in an Islamic Feminist way (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010).

Nonetheless, it is clear that secular feminism would reject some of the restrictions on female religious guides. While, on one hand, there are verses of the Quran that encourage men and women to work together in preaching Islam, or *da'wa*, mourchidats face limitations in their roles based on Islamic law (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010). According to Marjouane, it is forbidden by texts of Islam for a mourchidat to actually guide the prayer in Islam due to the biological cycles of women, which, according to some interpretations of Islam, prevents women from being able to conduct prayer (A. Marjouane, personal communication, April 16, 2016). According to Marjouane, if a woman were to recite the calls to prayer or preach in the mosque, she would be forbidden from doing the prayers for at least seven days of each month

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because of her menstrual cycle, which would not be conducive to the roles of an imam (A. Marjouane, personal communication, April 16, 2016). Additionally, while the accepted role of the man is to be the financial provider within the family, verse 228 of Sura 2 (the Cow) states that "Men are more responsible than they," provides Quranic textual evidence as to why the responsibility of imams, to lead the prayer, can only be assumed by men; because this verse is interpreted to mean that men have "superior intellect and ability" (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 10).

In my interview with Asma Lamrabet, she pointed out that the value of mourchidats lays mostly within rural parts of Morocco where women have very few other female models. She explains that it is "symbolically very important to have a woman leading other women inside the mosque. It's revolutionary, but for a category of women" (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016). This category of women includes women without access to school, women who are illiterate, or women who have social problems, while "for women who are going to university, modern women, emancipated women, I don't think that the mourchidats have a very important impact" (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016).

In the modern and urban cities of Morocco, with educated women who now have a reformist perspective on Islam, the mourchidats would have to change their speeches in order to have a great impact on women's rights because their teachings are based on classical, traditional discourse. While female religious guides clearly play an important role in removing barriers to women in Islam in rural parts of Morocco, some would say that their work is not progressive enough to make impactful advancement

towards women's rights in the grand scheme of the country (A. Lamrabet, personal

communication, April 29, 2016).

Despite the many victories for women's rights, including the ratification of

CEDAW, the Moudawana, and the implementation of mourchidats, the times still called

for deeper reforms. Moroccans took to the streets in February of 2011 to voice their

needs in what became known as the 20th of February movement, Morocco's stake in the

Arab Spring uprising. The following chapter discusses what effect this movement had

on the women's movement in Morocco.

The Arab Spring and Constitutional Reform

Despite the progressive reforms of the Moudawana in 2004, Moroccans

followed the wave of the Arab Spring in 2011, a people's movement against systemic

injustices in the Arab world, which started in Tunisia and spread to other Arab

countries. While Morocco claims to be one of the most progressive governments in the

Muslim world, especially after the reform of the Moudawana, Moroccan citizens,

mostly youth, were riddled with dissatisfaction and the need to air grievances about

unjust treatment of women and LGBTQ communities, the economic situation for recent

university graduates, the undemocratic state of Moroccan government, etc. (Salime,

2012). Unlike the movements that spread from Tunisia to Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and

Syria, which centered on anti-government protest, Morocco's uprising called for more

substantive reform by the government than what had been seen in the pervious decade

and a more genuine constitutional monarchy (Salime, 2012). King Mohammed VI put

together a constitutional committee that was meant to quell civic dissatisfaction and respond to the people's needs. However, the committee still came forward with amendments that did not fit the peoples' demands, as they were not proposed through total democratic processes (Salime, 2012).

The Moroccan government, as a monarchy reigned by King Mohammed VI, gives authority to the king as commander of the faithful, head of the Military, and head of the state (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010). With these titles, and power that is constitutionally protected by articles 19 and 23 of Morocco's constitution, the King has both religious and secular authority over the country, which activists of the 20th of February Movement addressed as "the main obstacle to the rise of truly democratic institutions and political accountability" (Salime, 2012, p. 102). This is part of what prompted a call by the people to reform the constitution following the 20th of February Movement. The movement, with a diverse front, required groups to unite in a way that forced compromise and unification of the people. The movement itself allowed Islamic women's activists and secular feminists to work together on certain fronts (Salime, 2012).

One of the main conflicts between the Islamists and secular feminists was the "obvious sign of elitism and co-optation by the state in the [secular] feminist position. To several of [the political groups], one cannot speak of women's rights in the context of a constitution that puts religion and the King's authority above international law" (Salime, 2012, p.106). Feminist groups built their activism around a legalistic framework that necessitated the involvement of state agents and the King, as "arbitrator." Conversely, other activists groups vouched for the belief that gender

equality could only be achieved through the combined efforts of men and women as well as the institutions that are accountable for them, since "gender equality 'should not be isolated from the general struggle for democracy and justice for all'" (Salime, 2012, p. 107). Within the 20th February Movement, there was pushback against the government and the dependence of secular feminism on government entities: "to these activists, the feminists' emphasis on the specificity of 'women's issues' isolated their movement and channeled their efforts to state bureaucrats, foreign funds, and, not to mention, consultancy and expertise" (Salime, 2012, p. 107).

Because of these ideals and the goal of the 20th of February Movement to have a united front, the movement forced Islamists and secular feminists, both with agendas to promote women's rights in Morocco, to collaborate in order to meet their goals. Islamists and secularists consistently disagreed on whether women should be treated with "equity" or "equality," a discussion that will be investigated further in Chapter 4. The meaning and importance of "equality" continued to be a point of contention between the two groups, and it even forced debate over the slogan "men and women have equal rights" which was rejected by Islamist groups, and eventually was changed to "men and women are equal in the struggle" (Salime, 2012, p. 109). This continued discussion forced broader understanding and discussion of equality in the contexts of all of the projects within the 20th February Movement (Salime, 2012). Nonetheless, these discussions allowed opportunity for Islamists, some of whom had strong ideals that limited their attitude toward working with secular women's groups, to change their perception of secular feminists and come together while still "accepting the parity" (Salime, 2012, p. 109).

Despite the movement's emphasis on the relation and compromise between Islamists and other groups, Salime notes that, following the 20th of February Movement, there began a shift in how the youth of Morocco started to identify. According to Salime, this could be considered what is called a "post-Islamist era," which "marks the shift from Islam as a political project to Islam as a site for individual identification" (Salime, 2012, p. 104). This marks a unique outcome of the movement, but this shift in the self-identification of Morocco's youth has yet to present a clear impact on today's sociopolitical context.

Despite Salime's claims that this movement shifted Morocco towards a post-Islamic era, it is undeniable that Islam is directly connected to Moroccan politics. Among other outcomes of the movement, activists succeeded in voicing their demands for constitutional reform. In March of 2011, directly following the 20th of February, King Mohammed VI announced plans for constitutional reform through creation of a Royal Council for constitutional amendment. In this televised announcement, he emphasized the needs for "the institution of equality and gender parity" (Salime, 2012, p. 106). Some of Morocco's leading feminist groups supported this reform, including the Association Marocaine des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), the Ligue Démocratique des Droits des Femmes (LDDF), and the Union de l'Action Feminine (UAF) (Salime, 2012, p. 106).

In this chapter, I have outlined the ways in which social movements have influenced Morocco's political reforms, such as in the case of the Moudawana, implementation of Mourchidats, and constitutional reform. This discussion has also shown the ways in which these progressive reforms help to define Morocco's human

rights standards and treatment of women, both according to international law (CEDAW) and sharia law (Moudawana). Nonetheless, as I have pointed out in this chapter, there are limitations to the full progressive impact of these laws and reforms. Some scholars and activists note that they are not progressive enough, while others say that their impact cannot be felt by all of Morocco's people because many communities are restricted by traditional views or are simply unaware of their rights under these laws. The following chapter examines the work of two organizations that work to further disseminate Islamic feminist interpretations of the Quran and implement women's rights efforts at the grassroots levels.

Chapter 3: Grassroots Efforts Towards Gender Equality

Musawah: For Equality in the Muslim Family

A strong basis for social change exists in Morocco based on the intensive efforts to restructure national policy and reinterpret the Quran. However, tensions remain between Islamists and secularists in relation to feminism, and there is some disconnect between civil society and the political and religious reform. Musawah is an international feminist movement that strives to be a middle ground between the legislative reform and civil society. While there are many nonprofits and community organizations that work towards women's rights and equality in the Moroccan family, Musawah serves as an overseeing organization that partners with local efforts.

Musawah, which means "equality" in Arabic, launched in 2009 as a global movement that reevaluates Muslim family law and centers the rights of women in the context of Islam. Musawah started in Malaysia and was hosted by a local Malaysian NGO Sisters in Islam. Since then, Musawah has expanded its work as an umbrella organization in many other Muslim countries in an effort to advance women's rights in Muslim family law. Musawah serves as a platform for women's rights in the context of the Muslim family unit, and aids local efforts to do so rather than interfering with what efforts are already in place (H. Zekri, personal communication, May 5, 2016). The movement expanded to the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region by locating an office in Rabat, Morocco, in an effort to strengthen ties to Arab women's movements as a continuation of pre-existing international support that now exists at closer proximity (H. Zekri, personal communication, May 5, 2016).

Houda Zekri, Coordinator of the Secretariat for Musawah, acknowledges that, despite Morocco's strong civil society and the compromises made between women's rights groups, there are still feminist NGOs that focus on international conventions that butt heads with the conservative wing of activists. Musawah strives to serve as the middle ground between the people and legislation, offering an international platform for Muslim countries and does not interfere with local NGOs or efforts, but presents a common idea that all of these women share: laws and values informed by Islamic tradition. Musawah holds a very holistic approach, and "builds its arguments on Islamic tradition, constitutional guarantees of equality and nondiscrimination, international standards of human rights, feminist values, and lived realities of Muslim women and men" (H. Zekri, personal communication, May 5, 2016). These five elements are the basis of the organization's work.

Musawah's work in Muslim countries, including most recently in Morocco, relies on progressive interpretations of the Quran and international standards on human rights as its two main tools. Musawah operates under the understanding that the teachings of Islam are not inherently sexist; they are only seen as sexist because of the patriarchal readings traditionally disseminated by male interpreters. Thus, Musawah also encourages independent interpretation of the Quran through *ijtihad* so that women can create their own understandings of Islam's teachings.

One primary focus of Musawah is to create harmony within the Muslim family, which is vital everywhere but is an essential factor for peace and justice in Morocco, where family is the "core of society" (H. Zekri, personal communication, May 5, 2016). "If you heal the family, you heal society," Zekri explains. This is also part of the reason

Musawah works hard to include men in their efforts for women's rights and equality. The organization's focus on the Muslim family requires inclusion of men (fathers, husbands, brothers, etc.) in the discussion of women's rights, which is valuable because gender equality cannot be achieved without the participation of men. If men are not educated on the importance of women's rights and empowerment through the context of the Quran, the more conservative tradition of keeping women in the house and out of the public sphere will continue and inhibit positive development for women's rights in Islam. These discussions surrounding women's roles in the home and in society will not only improve women's rights but also economic development, as women in the workforce prove to be valuable assets as innovators, achievers, and workers (H. Zekri, personal communication, May 5, 2016).

Musawah works as an academic and civil society organization, producing research on women in Islam, as well as on-the-ground efforts such as international advocacy plans and "knowledge building." Its international advocacy includes working with the implementations of CEDAW in the Muslim world, helping NGOs in these countries complete shadow reports on issues related to women's rights that some governments use to avoid implementing the articles of these international conventions (H. Zekri, personal communication, May 5, 2016).

Equally important are Musawah's efforts towards "capacity building," which it prioritizes, knowing that the knowledge it gains as an organization is not useful if it does not reach the grassroots level. Through "I-nGEJ" courses (an acronym that stands for Islam, Gender, Equality, and Justice, and is pronounced "I engage"), Musawah creates the opportunity to link the impressive academic work of the organization with

people of civil society, building a bridge that will allow the gender-equal values of Islamic feminism to reach the people. During Musawah's "I-nGEJ" course in November 2015, participants from multiple countries of the MENA region gathered to discuss these subjects related to Islamic feminism, and sparked interesting debates (H. Zekri, personal communication, May 5, 2016).

Zekri states that Morocco is currently on a strong path towards gender equality, and has served as a leader for gender justice in the Muslim world through its reforms of national legislation such as the Moudawana and the Moroccan constitution that apply progressive use of jurisprudence. Nonetheless, there are limitations to the progress. There is continued room for improvement, and Musawah strives to serve as a catalyst for that.

Much of the basis for Morocco's specific form of Islamic feminism is put forth by the theological research center that has been mentioned throughout this thesis: the Center for Studies and Research on Women in Islam. The following section will examine the specific role of this center, how it was started, and what it strives to achieve for Morocco's Muslim population.

The CSRWI and the De-colonial Approach to Islamic Feminism

In 2006, following the Casablanca terrorist attacks in 2003, the Moroccan monarchy created the Rabita Mohammedia al Oulema, or the Mohammedia Association of Scholars, a center for religious studies consisting of liberal Moroccan theology "associating the ideals of Islam and the egalitarian spirit of universal human rights in an effort to reconcile faith and modernity" (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 8). In 2010, the

Rabita Mohammedia al Oulema announced its partnership with a study center for women in Islam, which became the Center for Study and Research on Women in Islam (CSRWI). This group, headed by theologian and scholar Dr. Asma Lamrabet, presents distinct notions of Islamic feminism based on the center's reinterpretations of Islam's holy texts (Center for Study and Research on Women in Islam [CSRWI], 2015a).

The CSRWI was established with the objective of creating a "unified front against aberration, negligence, extremism and lethargy," and holds great potential for spurring progressive social change in Morocco (Center for Study and Research on Women in Islam [CSRWI], 2015b). More specifically, the CSRWI's goals include reinterpreting Islamic traditions through a feminist lens, using "jurisprudential reasoning (ijtihad) and final purposes (maquassid)" to reshape Islamic view of women, revising concepts of women's issues in Islam in consideration of contemporary human rights standards, correct stereotypes of Muslim women, and construct reformist scholarship in the field of women's studies in Islam (CSRWI, 2015a, p. 1).

By prioritizing contemporary women's issues and applying the Quran and hadith to a changing reality, the center is able to "evaluate and revise ideas and concepts on women's issues in Islam in the light of contemporary conceptions of justice and human rights" (CSRWI, 2015a). Through seminars, publications, and journals created to encourage discussion and debates by the public on these important subjects, the center aims to use their studies and research to disseminate the values of a tolerant version of Islam, and openness to the "advancement of human knowledge" (CSRWI, 2015a).

The center acknowledges that there are many challenges that come with their efforts to re-read the Quran. Through their research and seminars, the center works to

counteract these challenges. One challenge is that Islam and the Muslim world is "dominated by traditional interpretations and overlooked the potential of renewal within Islam," and that there is a "disparity between the Quranic prescriptions of justice and equality on the one hand and cultural practices of patriarchy on the other hand" (CSRWI, 2015a). Another aspect that the center recognizes as a hindrance to the equality of women in Islam is the presence of stereotypes about Muslim women that present obstacles in creating space for woman in Islam (CSRWI, 2015a). In an increasingly globalized world, where "Islamophobia" (fear of Islam and Muslims) is rising, many non-Muslims view Muslim women as oppressed and conservative figures, so many outsiders view the objectives of the center as futile or paradoxical. This alone hinders constructive action that allows space for Islamic feminism (CSRWI, 2015a).

However, rereading the Quran through a feminist lens and positioning the traditional teachings in a modern context, helps to reduce these obstacles. This reinterpretation of the Quran is one of the main objectives of the Center for Study and Research on Women in Islam and is the foundation of center's construction of Islamic feminism. This feminism is also known as "Third Way Feminism," a term coined by the director of the center, Asma Lamrabet, which will be discussed in the following chapter. The "Third Way" combines religious thought with secular ideals of equality, "associating the ideals of Islam and the egalitarian spirit of universal human rights in an effort to reconcile faith and modernity" (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 8). In this way, the center has filled a gap that was left by Islamists with limited interest in feminism, and liberal feminists with little interest in religion (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010).

The CSRWI counters the common assumption that feminism is a solely western notion by presenting a form of feminism that aligns not only with ideologies of the Muslim world, but also stems from the theology of Islam. By reanalyzing the Quran through this Islamic feminist lens, and examining feminism through an Islamic lens, the center proposes ways in which Islam and the Quranic texts promote gender justice, and in turn promote positive societal change within the Muslim world (CSRWI, 2015a). In this way, the center can work against "confusion" that might exist within interpretations of the Quran. This can mean presenting alternative interpretations of the Quran that specifically address patriarchal viewpoints, but it can also mean addressing the disparity between what the Quran says and what is actually practiced in contemporary society (CSRWI, 2015a).

This is an approach that Ilyass Bouzghaia, a lead researcher at the center, refers to as the "decolonial" approach to feminism, which is the idea that western notions of feminism are not compatible with the whole world. Decolonization does not mean to reject western thought completely, but rather to deconstruct and inspect those values that were implemented and forced upon the developing countries either during colonization or by the growing influence of the western world. Because European colonialism and US imperialism presume superiority of west and inferiority of the east, it devalues the perspective brought forth by those communities. Because of this, Islamic feminism in this sense takes on a "decolonial approach" (I. Bouzghaia, personal communication, April 20, 2016).

The center also serves as a tool for cooperation between Islamist and secular feminist groups in Morocco, and proves that the two can reconcile their differences and

work together in their movements. Asma Lamrabet's work with the center strives determine how far the Islamic feminist perspective can take Moroccan social issues in compatibility with universal rights (i.e. those set out by the United Nations CEDAW). From Lamrabet's perspective, the two are compatible. She says: "I see it now, with my work in our center and the contact I have with the Islamic movement and with the secular movement: they all want to work with us. So this means that it's possible" (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016).

The role of the center in the academic world is much needed, as there is a gap in this type of scientific and theological work about Islam. The center works to fill this gap through its reformist approach to Islam based on egalitarian Quranic concepts (CSRWI, 2015a). Through this research and dissemination of their findings that demonstrate equality and ethics within the sacred Islamic texts, the Center for Study and Research on Women in Islam has begun to promote positive social change for gender justice in Morocco.

Together with Morocco's social movements and progressive political reform, the center has helped to shape Islamic feminism in Morocco. The following section explores how Islamic feminism can be defined in the context created by Morocco's reforms and social movements.

Chapter 4: Understanding feminisms in the Moroccan Context

What is Islamic Feminism in Morocco?

In her article "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism," Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2006), a legal anthropologist and activist, writes:

> It is difficult and perhaps futile to put the emerging feminist voices in Islam into neat categories and to try to generate a definition that reflects the diversity of positions and approaches of Islamic feminists…They all seek gender justice and equality for women, though they do not always agree on what constitutes justice or equality or the best ways of attaining them (Mir-Hosseini, 2006, p. 642).

Instead, it is easier to define Islamic feminism by what it is not, which Mir-Hosseini argues falls into three categories based on the opponents of Islamic feminism: "Muslim traditionalists, Islamic fundamentalists, and secular fundamentalists," all of whom share "an essentialist and nonhistorical understanding of Islam and Islamic law" (p. 641).

In her article, Mir-Hosseini (2006) asserts that many of the challenges of defining Islamic feminism come from misconceptions of Islam itself. She claims that what is often missing from western discussions regarding feminists within Islam "is a recognition that gender inequality in the old world was assumed and that perceptions of women in Christian and Jewish texts are not that different from those of Islamic texts" (p. 643). Christianity and Judaism have had little problem translating into the contemporary contexts, aside from some more conservative sects. However, critics of Islam cannot seem to transfer Islam's sacred texts into modern times without scrutiny of its literal meaning. Islamic feminism strives to show the ways in which present day social contexts can shape modern understandings of Quranic texts.

On one hand, for some Islamists whose values align with those of common definitions of Islamic feminism, the term "Islamic feminism" is itself a redundant phrase. For example, Islamist author Asma Barlas argues that Islam and feminism are so diverse that it is impossible to make a combination of them both (Barlas, 2002). Barlas' main argument, however, is that Islam does not need feminism, because the religion is inherently feminist; if you follow the path of the prophet, you do not need an external element for women's rights (Barlas, 2002). The reinterpretation of Islam that many Islamic feminists fight for, to Barlas, brings on a notable debate.

On the other hand, Dr. Asma Lamrabet, the director of the CSRWI, is one of the main religious scholars in Morocco who calls for the rereading of the Quran from a feminist lens in order to create what she calls Islamic feminism, or the "Third Way" (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016). Lamrabet believes in the importance of interpreting the Quran pragmatically rather than reading the text as static, arguing that reinterpretations of Quranic verses that some view as conservative can shed light on their progressive meanings. This is where the rereading of the Quran through a feminist lens comes into play; religious scholars provide their feminist interpretations of Quranic verses to justify gender equality through Islam. These re-readings can be used to promote progressive change through Islam.

Ilyass Bouzghaia, a lead researcher for the CSRWI, describes Islamic feminism as a branch of feminism, in the sense that feminism is an umbrella term that includes diverse forms of advocacy for women's rights whether based on ideology (liberal feminism), ethnicity (black feminism), or religion (Islamic feminism) (I. Bouzghaia, personal communication, April 20, 2016). In the 1990s, women who are now

considered Islamic feminists began investigating the role of women in Islam, and the potential of Islam to bring forth women's rights. Bouzghaia defines Islamic feminism as "the claim or demand of defending women's rights with Islamic religious texts in order to reread them …showing something different from patriarchal readings, which constitutes the foundation for egalitarian potentials for women" (I. Bouzghaia, personal communication, April 20, 2016).

Mir-Hosseini (2006) goes on to argue that, while "secular feminism in the Muslim world fulfilled its historical role by paving the way for women's entry into politics and society in the early twentieth century," the conflict that emerged, and still exists for women in the Muslim world, between tradition and modernity, made it necessary for these discourses to be "conducted in a religious language and framework, where jurisprudential constructions of gender can be reexamined and the patriarchal mandates of *fiqh* can be challenged" (p. 644).

Islamic Feminism: Equity, Equality, and Justice

Much of the value of Islamic feminism in the Muslim world relates to its "local legitimacy," as stated by Julie Elisabeth Pruzan-Jørgensen in the DIIS Report on "Islamic Women's Activism In The Arab World: Potentials and Challenges for External Actors" (2013). This term of "local legitimacy" refers to the incompatibility of secular or western feminism in the Muslim world, which brings forward the value of feminism in an Islamic context, taking into account Islamic principles and Quranic interpretations. At the beginning of the movement for women's rights in Morocco, secular feminists based their demands on international human rights laws and principles, largely in

relation to reforms on the Moroccan Family Code (Moudawana), which linked "the notion of women's rights in public opinion with the abandonment of Muslim culture and its replacement by a supposedly egalitarian western one" (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 3). This idea that secular feminism was the only route for women's rights in Morocco was limiting and incompatible with Moroccan culture, and Islamist activists for women's rights began to push back. In reference to Islamic women's rights activists, Pruzan-Jorgensen (2013) notes that "they oppose their inherent secularism, individualism and aspiration towards equality (as opposed to equity) – and they strongly oppose attempts to have it imposed on them" (p. 6). This relates back to the idea of varied denotations of agency in different cultures, and the fact that not all cultures view women's rights as synonymous with individual liberties, etc.

One of the biggest discrepancies between Islamic feminism and secular, western feminism is the value of equity versus equality. For many Islamic feminists, though not all, equity and complementarity are valued above equality, which is considered a secular concept that would require "the renunciation by women of their biological and social roles" (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 10). Merieme Yafout, one of the past leaders of Morocco's Justice and Spirituality Organization, along with many other conservative Islamic feminists, prefer to use the term "justice" even over equity, insisting that "the solution to women's suffering is in bringing about justice and not equality" (Zvan-Elliott, 2015, p. 91). Yafout defines justice as when "'a woman has respect, dignity, to have the right to participate in all areas of society – in the economic, political, associational areas, in all fields" (Zvan-Elliott, 2015, p.91). Zvan-Elliott points out that "the Islamists continue to 'biologicize' the social, and it is for this reason that

for them women cannot escape their reproductive capacity, which decidedly distinguishes them from men and invalidates the issue of gender equality" (Zvan-Elliott, 2015, p.93). On the topic of motherhood, Yafout argues that the demand for gender equality trivializes the roles of mothers, whereas it could be argued that some secular feminists view the focus on women within the home as devaluing their roles in society as a whole (Zvan-Elliott, 2015).

Many criticisms of sexism in the Quran point to the roles of men and women in the home and the apparent superiority of men over women in certain interpretations. However, as discussed previously in this thesis, women's roles in the home do not necessarily equate to women's oppression or subservience. For many Islamic feminist scholars, this question calls forth the discussion of complementarity, in that the role of the woman as the caretaker of the family is a responsibility to be proud of, not a denigrating role that forces women to stay inside the home (Pruzan-Jorgensen, 2013). The duties of child rearing and taking care of the family and home are often "the most cherished and central unity of Islamic society" (Pruzan-Jorgensen, 2013, p. 8), which shows that the role of the woman as a mother and wife can be culturally important. The idea is that the woman can also engage in society as she is not confined to the home.

While many Islamic feminists argue for equity over equality, Nadia Yassine, also one of the leaders of the Justice and Spirituality Organization who considers herself "an intermediary" between western and Moroccan cultures, argues that while many Islamic feminists use the idea of complementarity and equity in discussion of gender roles, "they are in fact talking about equality" (Zvan-Elliott, 2015, p.90). While Yassine prefers the idea of equality over equity, and hopes for Morocco to seek a path towards

this ideal, she stated in an interview with author Katja Zvan-Elliott that she thinks "'there should be absolute equality, but as an intermediary we need to convince people [about this] by using our own words…because words are dangerous in our culture and because people are very sensitive towards them'" (Zvan Elliot, 2015, p. 90). Perhaps, Yassine is implying that, with time, Morocco will accept the secular idea of equality over equity.

In my interview with Asma Lamrabet on the issue of equity versus equality, she states that while she uses both terms, she does not use the term "complementarity," as many Islamists do, "because for me it is subordination; when you say 'we are complementary,' it means that one of the couple is going to be subordinated" (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016). Lamrabet adds that, above all, there is "another concept that is very important, and we can't talk about equality or equity without it. It's 'justice.' So we have equality, equity, and justice. These three concepts have to be together. Because you can have equality but not justice. Justice is the core concept" (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016). With this notion, she explains that to her, both sides are wrong when they choose to use just one of the terms, because both are valid and both are necessary.

Lamrabet uses the term of "positive discrimination" to explain the reasoning for times when women require more rights than men in a way that is unequal but is just still just. For example, when a woman gets pregnant and requires extra time off of work, she requires more rights than the man in this situation. To this, Lamrabet states that "this is not equality; you can't have equality with the men in this field. He is the man, he must have a responsibility, but the baby needs the mother. So equity and justice here is more

comfortable" (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016). Nonetheless, Lamrabet maintains that in most political issues, equality is most necessary and most just. In response to those caught up in the conflict between the two terms, Lamrabet argues that "they have to understand that our contexts are complex, and our lives are complex, and women's rights are complex, so we need equality, we need sometimes equity, we need, always, justice" (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016).

From a secular feminist perspective, the focus on equity over equality limits the woman to her role in the home. Zvan-Elliott goes on to argue that "seeking justice and fairness – or equity – should not be the end goal because compared to equality, equity is a subjective notion not associated with human rights, which can have different meanings according to context and does not require state intervention" (Zvan-Elliott, 2015, p.92). Within the Moroccan discourse on feminism, both socially and legislatively, this is a common theme: women are often only referred to through their role in the home and not as their role as human beings in society.

While in some ways this reliance on defining women within the household can appear damaging to women's role in society, it is also true that many Moroccan women find empowerment in their role as wives and mothers. Chandra Talpade Mohanty elaborates on women's role in the family unit, describing how "while on the one hand women attain value or status within the family, the assumption of singular patriarchal kinship system (common to all Arab and Muslim societies, i.e. over twenty different countries) is what apparently structures women as an oppressed group in these societies!" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 70). The role of women within the home alone should

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not qualify them as an oppressed group. However, many Islamic feminist scholars maintain that while women's roles within the family unit are valuable and can be empowering, the lack of consideration of women's roles in the public sphere can be disempowering.

Conflict between secular feminists and Islamic feminists about equity versus equality seems to be all about semantics of language and definition. As Nadia Yassine points out when she describes how many Islamic feminists who favor equity are often also describing equality without knowing it, it is possible that there are fewer differences than it appears and that the two movements (secular and Islamic) can have positive effects on each other (Zvan-Elliott, 2015).

Some scholars within Islamic feminism argue that finding a common ground between secular and Islamic feminism could be an important factor in the progression of women's rights movements and female empowerment on a global level. There are many contemporary historical instances in which feminists have influenced Islamists in Morocco, and vice versa. For example, feminist movements influenced Islamists to alter their positions on marriage, women in the workplace, inheritance, and divorce, which largely affected the Islamists more progressive reforms of the Family Code in the beginning of the 21st century (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010). Additionally, as previously mentioned in the discussion of the Moudawana, the feminist Association Démocratique de Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) that originally based their political platforms on international legislation like CEDAW now evaluates some central concerns from an Islamic perspective (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010).

While both are valuable in their own cultural setting, the culmination of the two as movements, while still separate, can positively impact the other. As an advocate for how Islamic feminist activists can positively influence western movements in the Arab world, Julia Elisabeth Pruzan-Jorgensen (2013) states that Islamic women's activists also constitute "potentially important future partners for external actors (bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, women's organizations etc.) working to contribute to Arab women's empowerment, participation, agency and authority" (p. 5). She also describes Islamic women's activism as "an important complement to traditional liberal/secular women's activism," largely in part because of its "wider local legitimacy," which shows how Islamic feminism can make liberal feminism more inclusive to pious women (Pruzan-Jorgensen, 2013, p. 5).

Islamic feminism is a valuable tool for progress in women's rights in the Muslim world and Morocco, because it is embedded in Islam and Islam's sacred texts in a way that promotes gender justice without trying to eliminate Islam's role in some aspects of Moroccan culture.

For the theologians at the Center for Study and Research on Women in Islam, one of the main tools for interpreting the religious texts from a feminist perspective is that of *ijtihad*, or independent interpretations of the Quran and Hadith. This practice is what allows the interpretations of the CSRWI to center women in their readings of the sacred texts. The following chapter explores what the concept of *ijtihad* means in practice and how it is applied to some verses of the Quran, according to the theologians of the CSRWI and other scholarly work.

Chapter 5: Islam's Holy Texts and Interpretations of the Quran

Islam, as a religion and laws derived from the holy Quranic texts, is based on interpretation. Such interpretations of the religion are what provide the framework of Islamic feminism. *Ijtihad* is defined as the process of making decisions about Islamic Law based on independent interpretations of the Islamic texts (the Quran and hadith) and should be used to reanalyze the Quran from individual perspectives, according to many Islamic feminists (Codd, 2015). Ziba Mir-Hosseini also contends that there is a stark difference between religious faith and the institutions and laws that make up organized religion. Mir-Hosseini writes that:

> …the result is the pervasive polemical and rhetorical trick of either glorifying a faith without acknowledging the horrors and abuses that are committed in its name or condemning it by equating it with those abuses. Of course, religious faith and organized religion are linked, but they are not the same thing, as is implied by conflating them in the label 'Islamic' or 'religious' (Mir-Hosseini, 2006, p. 632).

This conflation of ideas, without consideration of religion's personal significance, is why the idea of implementing *ijtihad* into religious practice is vital to a reformist approach to religion, such as Islamic feminism.

In addition to understanding *ijtihad* when discussing interpretations of Islam, it is also necessary to understand the distinction between *sharia* and *fiqh*. Mir-Hosseini (2006) differentiates between the two in the following explanation:

> In Muslim belief, sharia—revealed law, literally "the way"—is the totality of God's will as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. *Fiqh*—the science of jurisprudence, literally "understanding"—is the process of human endeavor to discern and extract legal rules from the sacred sources of Islam— that is, the Koran and the Sunna (the practice of the Prophet, as contained in *hadith*, Traditions). In other words, while the sharia is sacred, universal, and eternal, *fiqh* is human and—like any other system of jurisprudence— subject to change. *Fiqh* is often mistakenly

> equated with sharia, both in popular Muslim discourses and by
> politicians and academic and legal specialists, and often with ideological
> intent… (Mir-Hosseini, 2006, p. 632)

Most importantly, in her description of the two, she argues the following:

> I contend that patriarchal interpretations of the sharia can and must be
> challenged at the level of *fiqh*, which is nothing more than the human
> understanding of the divine will, that is, what we are able to understand
> of the sharia in this world at the legal level. (Mir-Hosseini, 2006, p. 633)

This means that, with this understood ability to interpret the Quran, Islamic feminists can use (re)interpretations of the text to prove that gender justice exists within the verses. This is why *ijtihad* is consistently referenced by Islamic feminists. Using *ijtihad*, religious scholars, such as those working in the Mohammedian Association of Scholars, and the CSRWI, analyze and occasionally reinterpret verses of the Quran to better fit the modern context. This will be further discussed in the following section.

Reanalyzing Contentious Verses

Using the tools of interpretation, scholars and theologians such as those at the CSRWI address the contentious verses of the Quran. That is to say, these scholars highlight verses of the Quran that receive attention from secularists for being particularly patriarchal and discuss the ways in which these verses can be read through a feminist lens. Some of the most contentious verses are about inheritance, guardianship (or *qiwama*, which denote the man as the guardian of the woman), polygamy (in which a man is able to take up to four wives), and divorce. While these can be reinterpreted through reformist readings, women's rights in regard to marriage, divorce, and polygamy are protected under the Moroccan Family Code, the Moudawana.

Specifically, the reform of the Family Code raised the age of marriage to 18, gave women rights by law in polygynous marriages, and gave women the right to divorce her husband, among other things (I. Bouzghaia, personal communication, April 20, 2016). While the interpretations of these verses vary from individual to individual, this section discusses some of the responses to these predicaments that lay within the words of the Quran, based on the interpretations of Islamic feminist scholars.

In my own interview with Asma Lamrabet, she emphasized the fact that 98 percent of the Quran is about equality and justice between men and women, which is central to the universal values in the text. Both the Quran and the hadith make clear reference to the equality of men and women, such as the line from verse 1 of the Sura Al Nisa (The Women) of the Quran: "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women" (CSRWI, 2015a). Similarly, the Prophet Mohammed is cited in the hadith as saying "Women are the twin halves of men" (CSRWI, 2015a). Nevertheless, critics of Islam focus on the 5-6 verses that, when read literally, can be perceived as preaching inequality of the sexes. These verses answer to the contexts of the seventh century, historical Quranic times, when women were seen as inferior in many civilizations, according to literature from that period (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016). The idea of Asma Lamrabet's work in Islamic feminism is to put these notions from the Quran into present day civilization and context.

For example, the ideas of inheritance and guardianship are some of the many concepts of the Quran that Lamrabet reanalyzes based on today's context. This is relevant to Verse 35 of Chapter 4 of the Quran titled Al-Nisa (The Women), which

states "men shall take full care of women with the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 65). This explains the notion of *qiwama*, which is the concept of guardianship or protection, and is also the reason that men get twice the share of the inheritance as the woman based on the teachings of the Quran (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016).

In an analysis of the verse from the Quran, Al-Nisa (The Women) (Al-Quran, Sura 4, Verse 34), regarding inheritance in which men are given two shares compared to one for women, it is clear that the man is entitled this amount because of his obligation to then provide for the family financially (Pruzan-Jorgensen, 2013). In this notion of men providing for the family, there is a distinction between "taking care," (*ri'aya*), which has superior connotations, and "maintenance," (*i'ala*), which denotes a more mutual effort within the home (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 6). The Renewal of Woman's Awareness, a women's association founded by Morocco's parliamentary group the PJD (Justice and Development Party) states that "if a man is able to support his family, a woman should not work outside of the home. Housework should be formally recognized as an economic activity related to development and should therefore fall under the rubric of "profession" on identity cards" (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 6), henceforth legitimizing women's role in the home.

Lamrabet says that there are two main points to keep in mind about this concept. The first is that it is actually something that was revolutionary at the time, because no text prior to the Quran gave women any right to inheritance. The second point is to consider that the Quran gives women only half of what men get because, at the time, men had all economic responsibility and were expected to provide for the family with

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the money he received. When the Quran was written, this stipulation was fair and just, because the inheritances given to men were intended to be used for maintaining the entire family, including the sister who received a small share. This smaller share given to the sister was meant to be her own money that she was free to use, since women in this time had limited responsibilities (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016). Because of these factors, the verses of Sura 4 that stipulate men's double inheritance and guardianship over women are unequal, but they are just in the historical context (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016). In the context of Quranic times and the social dynamics of that period in history, according to Lamrabet, this solution is fitting.

However, Lamrabet argues that within the context of the 21st century, this direct interpretation of the Quran is no longer just or equal. It can't be considered just or equal because "man is not the head of the family, he can't be. And women are working; women are the head of families, so now the verse is unequal and unjust in our context. So now we have to go and to be just, and to be just is to give the same part" (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016). With a critical eye, and unafraid to point out the flaws that exist in literal readings of the sacred texts, Lamrabet also urges people to remember that "these verses are not trying to say that the women are inferior, they're just trying to answer to the contexts" (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016).

In my interview with Manal Dao-Sabah, a Ph.D. candidate working on a dissertation on Islamism in Morocco, she points out that one of the biggest limitations to the success of Islamic feminism as a movement is the "weak hadith," which many

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Muslims use as a source of guidance in addition to the Quran (M. Dao-Sabah, personal communication, April 28, 2016). The hadith is a collection of traditions based on sayings, actions, or behavior of Mohammed, collected by various narrators. A hadith can be classified as "weak" if it is not confirmed to be from the Prophet himself, and occasionally weak hadith suggest that women lack in areas of religious knowledge and mental capacities, implying disrespect towards women in the modern context (M. Dao-Sabah, personal communication, April 28, 2016). People often get stuck on the subject matter of these hadith, which Dao-Sabah argues should be overcome through the vital practice of *ijtihad*; theologians should be taking responsibility to interpret these hadith in a way that takes into account contexts of the 21st century and "carries out the messages of equality and justice in the Quran" (M. Dao-Sabah, personal communication, April 28, 2016).

Lamrabet elaborates on the limiting factors of weak hadith by pointing out that when reading the hadith, it is important to remember that these accounts of Mohammed's life and teachings might be false. Weak hadith are not considered "authentic," since they are written by various observers of the Prophet's life and are based on words that the prophet said centuries ago, that do not apply to our world today. Unlike the Quran, which is considered holy and therefore untouchable, hadith can be altered and reformed (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016). Lamrabet says that the Quranic texts should be interpreted according to the understanding that Mohammed was always respectful towards women, defended women's rights, and worked to change the patriarchal society of his period (A. Lamrabet, personal communication, April 29, 2016).

These understandings of the Quran and hadith are the basis for how reinterpretations shape the goals of Islamic feminism from a theological perspective. While the CRSWI is able to disseminate its findings to the scholarly community, other organizations like Musawah find ways to take action towards gender justice within the Moroccan home. Combined, such initiatives are paving the way towards feminist understandings of Islam throughout Morocco.

Conclusion

Local feminisms give women more freedom to define their values on their own terms. In the case of Islamic feminism in Morocco, this means that Muslim women do not have to choose between religion and gender equality. By decentering the dominant discourse of western feminisms, and looking at the discussion of transnational feminisms from a pluralist perspective rather than a universalist one, we can see the vibrant and diverse offerings of local feminisms. Islamic feminism in Morocco is one example of such localized feminisms.

Throughout this examination of Islamic feminism in Morocco, I have identified overarching themes that have presented themselves as principal to the success of the movement. First is the importance of independent interpretations of the Quran through *ijtihad* that allow for feminist readings of Islam's sacred texts. Since Quranic interpretation affects how laws are written and implemented in many Muslim countries, including Morocco, these progressive readings have helped promote policy reform in legislation that has historically marginalized women. Second is the importance of understanding the value placed on the family unit and roles within the family as an integral part of Moroccan culture, and approaching gender justice through such framework.

Locating this discussion on Islamic feminism in the specific context of Morocco draws attention to the importance of the women's movement in expanding gender justice in the country. However, my research for this thesis also highlighted the limitations that the movement faces. Some researchers of Islamic feminism, such as Manal Dao-Sabah, argue that the Moroccan state could be doing more to affect change

and progressive reform based on women's re-readings of the Quran (Manal Dao-Sabah, personal communication, April 28, 2016). Asma Lamrabet touched on another weakness during my interview with her, when she noted that female religious guides are most impactful in rural areas where women are illiterate and therefore unable to practice Islam through their own readings and interpretations. Instead, these women in rural areas rely on the Mourchidats (female religious guides) who often disseminate more conservative and traditionalist interpretations of the Quran. Dao-Sabah contends that educational programs and more progressive media are important steps in counteracting the conservative, patriarchal interpretations that are disseminated in rural parts of the country. Programs educating women would not only allow them to read and interpret the Quran, but it would also help women understand their rights under the reforms of the Moudawana and the reformed constitution.

Education and capacity building are valuable solutions to overcoming these limitations within Islamic feminism. While literacy is one important factor in this, spreading awareness and understanding of the inherent gender equality in Islam at the grassroots level is also important. One example of this is Musawah's work in strengthening the family unit through their capacity building "I-nGEJ" sessions and involvement of both men and women in discussions about equality also helps to encourage traditionalists to practice *ijtihad* rather than relying on outdated Quranic interpretations.

Localized feminisms such as Islamic feminism in Morocco should be celebrated for the ways they empower communities. However, as with any subject of analysis,

there are also areas that are lacking recognition or acknowledgement within the narrative. I have identified some of these areas to address more critically.

One area of critical analysis relates to the limitations of describing progressive readings of the Quran as strictly "feminist." At the beginning of this thesis, I proposed a working definition of the term "feminism," which uses Ferree and Tripp's notion that feminism is "a broad goal of challenging and changing gender relations that subordinate women to men and that thereby also differentially advantage some women and men relative to others" (Ferree & Tripp, 2006, p. vii). In noting that anyone "struggling to change women's subordination…and [working towards the] goal of empowering women" is a feminist, this definition broadly includes people of diverse value systems and identities (Ferree & Tripp, 2006, p. vii). Thus, using this working definition, the interpretation of Islam's sacred texts through a "feminist" lens is not exclusive or limiting when applied correctly (i.e. justly, equally, and equitably).

However, it cannot be ignored that there are people who reject the term "feminism" because of the implication that it inherently signifies western feminism and the hegemonic stances expected thereof. Similarly, feminism also has the connotation of assuming men as exploiters and women as exploited, without taking into account the patriarchal institutions and systems that actually serve as the oppressor. This simplistic view of feminism deters many people from using the term. Thus, not all those who possess feminist core values identify as feminists for fear of aligning with this context of exclusion and prejudice. This is true for scholars such as Asma Barlas, who – considering the diverse definitions of agency, freedom, and empowerment within the framework of transnational feminism that I proposed in Chapter 1 – aligns with the

definition of feminism, yet rejects the term. Because of this, I speculate that deeming these progressive readings of the Quran as "feminist" could unintentionally deter Moroccan Muslims from considering and accepting such interpretations. Through my research, I observe that this is something that the discourse on Islamic feminism does not fully recognize.

I suggest that it could be beneficial to reframe the discourse about reinterpretations of the Quran from a strictly feminist discourse to one about equity, equality, and justice in society as a whole. This discussion would still include equity, equality, and justice in terms of women's role in the family unit and public sphere, but would expand its focus to highlight the positive impact of *ijtihad* in terms of general human rights dilemmas, democracy, economic development, and other concerns of peace in Morocco.

Moreover, the Islamic feminist discourse is very much rooted in the theological sciences and focuses somewhat narrowly on scholarly interpretations. From my own analysis, this can lead to a disconnect between the research centers that produce such work, and the citizens who could benefit from receiving the findings of these progressive theologians. While there are organizations that strive to bridge this gap, such as Musawah and its local partnering NGOs, I identify this as another aspect of Islamic feminism that makes it inaccessible and exclusive.

As I have emphasized previously in this thesis, Islamic feminism is not the only branch of feminism that exists in Morocco. This thesis only covers what scholars in Islamic feminism identify as central to their work. It is important to note that the dialogue about Islamic feminism is currently very much rooted in women's role in

society and in the home, often in the context of motherhood and wifehood. This means that the discussion does not venture outside of the realm of heteronormative discourse. This is the case, in part, because the theological research of Islamic feminism focuses on the binary of men and women in heteronormative family structures, and how the Quran can encourage equality and justice within those dynamics. That is not to say that there is not a movement in Morocco that centers the LGBTQ community. Future areas of feminist activism and scholarship require growth, including the potential interpretations of Islamic feminist movement on LGBTQ rights. The relationship between Islamic feminism and LGBTQ rights is something that I am interested in exploring in further research.

Nonetheless, future and present movements within Islamic feminism in Morocco prove valuable to empowering women's senses of agency and freedom in their own localized meanings. Through social movements and legislative reform, Morocco's Islamic feminism has helped to shape gender justice for Muslim women. Moreover, this social change and subsequent empowerment of women makes for a more equal society for all genders.

Glossary

Burqa: also written "burka"; long, loose fitting garment that covers the whole body from head to feet, worn by some Muslim women in public

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (UN treaty first signed in 1979 by 187 countries, now including Morocco but excluding the United States)

CSRWI: Center for Study and Research on Women in Islam

Djellaba: Loose fitting hooded cloak worn by both men and women in Morocco and other Arab countries

IRB: Institutional Review Board (formal committees designated to review and monitor biomedical and behavioral research involving human subjects)

Feminism: "Advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of the female sex; the movement associated with this" (OED)

Fiqh: Islamic Jurisprudence, or "human (scholarly) understanding of divine law" (Altiok, 2015, p 1).

Hadith: "the authoritative record of the Prophet's exemplary speech and actions" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 201)

Hijab: veil or headscarf worn by some Muslim women in public

Ijtihad: Jurisprudential reasoning, or independent analysis of Islam's holy texts (the Quran and the hadith) (Badran, 2009)

Imam: Male religious guide

Islam: "The religious system established through the prophet Muhammad; the Muslim religion; the body of Muslims, the Muslim world" (OED)

Islamic Feminism: A cross-section of Islam and feminism meant to bring together the common points of Islamists and feminists in the form of a movement or ideology, using historical contexts and interpretation of the Quran.

Jurisprudence: "the theory or philosophy of law" (OED)

Moudawana: Moroccan Family Code

Mourchidat: Female religious guide

Muslim: "n. A follower of the religion of Islam; adj. Of or relating to Islam, its followers, or their culture" (OED)

Muslim Feminist: The distinction here between Islamic feminists and Muslim feminists is that Muslim feminists can be secular feminists; due to Morocco being a 98% Muslim country, many Moroccan secular feminists are Muslim but do not align themselves with Islamic feminism.

NGO: Non-governmental Organization; nonprofit organization

Niqab: "A form of the veil that covers the head, face, and torso" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 202)

Oulema: also written "Ulema"; "Islamic religious scholars" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 203)

Patriarchy: n. The predominance of men in positions of power and influence in society, with cultural values and norms favoring men. (OED)

Secularism: "separation of religion from issues of the state, and as the increasing differentiation of society into discrete spheres (economic, legal, educational, familial, and so on) of which religion is one part" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 47)

Secular Feminism: Feminism that does not take religion into account

Sharia: "moral discourses and legal procedures that are often glossed as 'Islamic Law'" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 203)

Sunna: "describes the practices of the Prophet and his Companions, and is considered the second most important source for the derivation of Islamic law and de-emphasis on fidelity to any one school" (Mahmood, 2012, p. 203)

Sura: also written "surah" or "surat"; meaning chapter of the Quran

Quran: also written "Koran"; the sacred book of Islam believed to be dictated by God (Allah) to the Prophet Mohammed and written in Arabic, consisting of 114 suras (chapters)

Wahhabism: ultraconservatism within Sunni Islam

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