

Breaking down dichotomies in the narratives of women's activism in Morocco

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Introduction

The situation of Moroccan women has gone through rapid changes in the last twenty years. Although the women of Mernissi's (1988) biographies from the 1980s still live and work in the cities of Morocco, the political changes, most notably the change of the king in 2000 and the reform of the family law in 2003 have given Moroccan women an unprecedented access to public life. The new family law – or *moudawana*, as it is commonly known – gives women the right to marry without a male guardian and ask for a divorce in the court, abolishes repudiation, puts limits to polygamy and child marriage and extends women's right to custody of their children. The new constitution, which came to force in 2011 after the so-called Arab Spring, gives full equality between men and women as is stipulated in the human rights treaties to which Morocco is a signatory. However, in practice equality is still an aspiration in many areas of life. When it comes to family law, judges have full discretion regarding marriage of minors, divorce, polygamy and alimonies. Sexual harassment is rife and domestic violence and rape remain difficult to prosecute due to an out dated penal code. As Mernissi (1991) has noted, Moroccan women have always worked and contributed to the family income, yet levels of illiteracy among rural women remain at 60% and knowledge of the newly gained rights is taking a long time to reach the majority of Moroccan women.

This chapter discusses the development of women's civil society in Morocco. Of particular interest is the deep division that exists between women's groups with different political and ideological affiliations. I use the terms 'rights-based' and 'faith-based' organisations to refer to the ways in which different women's organisations prioritise available discourses in defining their goals. The terms do not define the organisations but are used descriptively in

order to recognise and discuss differences between actors. As is further explored in this chapter, the ways in which available discourses are used by different organisations are complex and often issue-driven rather than for the formation and maintenance of fixed identities. I have opted to use the word ‘referential’, a word borrowed from activists’ own vocabulary, to describe the way in which multiple discourses are evoked in activism in Morocco.

History of women’s activism

When King Mohammed VI announced the reform of the constitution in March 2011 Morocco’s major civil society groups were to be consulted. Perhaps the most powerful among these were women’s groups, including both faith-based and rights-based organisations. Women’s organisations were first founded in the 1980s, and since the success of the advocacy campaign of the rights-based groups to reform the family law in 2003 women’s movements have been among the most important political lobby groups in Morocco.

As in many other postcolonial Muslim countries, women were first engaged in political activism in the nation’s struggle for independence. Due to the high levels of education given to elite families’ daughters, middle class women were an important asset to the independence movement. Some women’s organisations, linked to political parties, were born in this period concentrating on independence struggles and social work (Lopez Plaza, 1999). After independence, King Mohammed V initiated a women’s group, the *Union Nationale des Femmes Marocaines* (UNFM), which was presided over by women of the royal family. This group organised meetings and gave statements about women’s role in Islam and in the family and ran educational programmes to educate women in household management and some traditional forms of income generation (Brand, 1998; Lopez Plaza, 1999). The 1960s and

1970s saw the rise of human rights groups, who were protesting over the treatment of political prisoners, and leftist and Islamist political opposition who were both calling for major economic and political reforms. Registration of civil society and political organisations was strictly limited to those approved by the king, and thus, most of these groups were at the time considered illegal. Indeed, it has been noted, that the history of Morocco's civil society was written from prisons (Slyomovics, 2005). By the late 1980s the king, Hassan II, began legalising civil society groups and planning moderate political reforms. Political plurality and freedom of association are still contested, even after the extensive political reforms of Mohammed VI since 2000 (Cavatorta and Dalmasso, 2009; Pruzan-Jorgensen, 2010).

The first women's political organisations were non-structured protest movements by the mothers, sisters and wives of political prisoners who met at the prison gates and started protesting over the disappearance and maltreatment of their loved ones. Although the protest of mothers was tolerated more than the political action of young women, the authorities doubted the authenticity of the movement, suspecting the mothers would have been unable to get organised without help from the political activists (men) (Slyomovic, 2005:162).

Women's organisations also emerged from the women's sections of the political parties, Islamist organisations and human rights organisations, where largely middle class women from political families were invited to take part in politics, but were unable to voice any of the woman specific concerns they felt needed to be raised. While many of the organisations have now officially severed links to political parties and are claiming total autonomy in their work, outsiders often consider them to be leftist sympathisers and are frequently looking to expose the compromising political liaisons of the organisations or their individual members.

The first issue over which rights-based women's NGOs were united was the reform of the family law. The Moroccan constitution of 1956 granted equal political rights to men and women. In reality however, women's ability to enjoy their political rights was severely

limited by the family law, in which women were defined as minors. In practice, this meant that the consent of a husband, father or another male relative was required for most activities or bureaucratic transactions taking place outside the house. The family law reform concerned all women's NGOs in Morocco; most rights-based organisations were campaigning for reform and most faith-based organisations protesting against it. These often aggressive campaigns widened the gap between faith-based and rights-based women's civil society. Women's organisations that have been founded after the *moudawana* reform are often less implicated in the division between rights-based and faith-based women's movements.

Methodology

This study is based on a social constructionist epistemology. People construct themselves and their surroundings through interaction with others and through narrativising their experiences and understandings of these interactions. This narratability cannot be reduced to the content of the story told (Cavarero, 2000), but reflects the structure and process of the narration (Tamboukou, 2008) and the internal consistency of the story (Tullis Owen et al, 2009). Therefore, the social constructionist theory of narrative concerns the actual creating of the story as well as analysis of its content.

Although none of us understand the world in exactly the same way as others, and none of us share the same ideas about how the world should be, shared goals become possible through acting on what Spivak (1987) terms 'strategic essentialism'. As Spivak explains, alliances can be built with others on certain subjects in order to achieve a common goal, although other goals may not be shared. Important to Spivak's strategic essentialism is the need for critical engagement with the differences and similarities in our positions (Danis et al, 1993). It is not enough to put those differences aside for the sake of one shared goal; actors must reflect on how these differences are present in the shared activities.

Furthermore, applying an intersectional lens to the study allows us to understand the participants as inhabiting several identities simultaneously, rather than applying the additive view on the different categories of oppression they meet (Nash, 2008). Thus, civil society organisations are not merely defined as faith-based or rights-based, rural or urban, small or large, but all of these categories are seen as fluid, constructed in relation to other actors and each other. An intersectional approach to applying strategic essentialism may be able to suggest possible links across divisions in women's activism. The term 'referential', adopted in this chapter to describe the political and ideological affiliations of participating organisations, also highlights this dynamic relationship between organisational structures, discourses and issues campaigned for.

This study takes the form of a qualitative case study of politically active women's CSOs in Morocco. Data for the study consists of twenty-four in-depth interviews conducted over one month in January 2011, and again from September until December 2011, with women's CSO leaders or advocacy campaign managers and a qualitative content analysis of documents produced by women's organisations. Hitchings (2012) has found that asking participants to question their taken-for granted practices has the potential to provide critical insights to both the researcher and the participants into how practices are performed and how they come about.

Rights-based women's activism

Many of the rights-based organisations were either founded from within leftist political parties and human rights organisations or at least by women activists whose history of activism began in those groups. Therefore, when first defining their referential as women's groups, they were already politically affiliated to certain ideologies. The question of which discourses they could draw from for inspiration, still needed to be debated. Some rights-based

organisations opted for the exclusive use of international human rights discourses, some for a mixed referential using human rights and religion, and others for a referential based on cultural references emphasising the values of equality and dignity that can be found in cultural traditions. Although the referential used in each campaign varied greatly between organisations, the organisations defined here as rights-based highlight the primacy of human rights as the inspiration for their work.

We organised seminars on women's personal status, I mean we had a reading of even the Koran and there was the problem of referential: as in what do we base ourselves on? So we based ourselves on the referential of human rights, as in the conventions of CEDAW and human rights in general and on the spirit of Islam. We concluded that the spirit of Islam is egalitarian; egalitarian; and the personal status of women was only one interpretation among others of Islam: and a patriarchal interpretation of Islam. And so with this referential we were able to assemble the committee and do a lobbying, a lobbying, and do an advocacy towards the political decision makers. (interview with FM, rights-based activist)

This organisation has adopted a 'double stance' on Islam and human rights which means that FM believes that human rights and women's rights can be compatible with Islam, if the Koran is approached hermeneutically. FM's view resonates with Othman (1999) who asserts that Muslims can respect the universal notion of human rights as they search for the equivalent values within their own traditions, and to refuse to engage with Islam and its potential for women's emancipation would allow the Islamists to monopolise the religion and to impose their own view of it.

However, in contrast to Othman's (1999) theory and the approach of FM, many of the rights-based organisations adopted human rights as their sole source of referential, refusing to engage with religious ideology within their activism. This approach is consistent with an interpretation which suggests that the Koran can only ever be an interim solution to the inequalities created by the Islamic patriarchy; equality can only be created on the basis of internationally recognised women's rights (Einhorn and Server, 2003; Barlas, 2005). Rejection of Islam can partly be understood to result from the marginalisation women activists faced after Moroccan independence, where Moroccan traditions, religion and nationhood became conflated and overshadowed all women specific concerns (Hélie-Lucas, 1987; Mernissi, 1988). Partly it reflects the battles women activists faced in the 1990s, when their most ardent opposition came from the Islamist movements. Sadiqi (2003) traces the roots of this rejection to the encounter of the Moroccan civilisation with the West under French colonisation. The first developments of feminism in Morocco from the 1960s onwards Sadiqi defines as liberal, or secular feminism, but from the 1980s onwards she identifies a more religious, or conservative feminism co-existing alongside (Sadiqi, 2003:21). Both have their roots in the wider political organisations of the country, the liberal feminism stemming from the leftist political rights movement and the religious feminism from conservative political parties and associations.

Moghadam considers the social and historical location of feminist praxis to be part of a wider, ever evolving feminist philosophy that should not be divided into oppositional binaries, but rather seen as a fragmented movement that reflects social realities in different regions in diverse ways. Thus, there cannot be one good or correct way to do feminism: 'women, and not religion, should be at the centre of that theory and practice' (Moghadam, 2002:45). The main criticism Moghadam has for the Islamic referential in feminist activism is the possibility of it reinforcing the legitimacy of a patriarchal system supported by religious

arguments and reproducing it. This fear is reflected in many of the rights-based activists' comments, such as that of AM;

But it's very risky to search, as feminists, our arguments inside a religious system, because at that moment it's [...] even if we could find the elements of response, but that would mean at that moment that if Islam was in our favour, it's fine, if it isn't in our favour we should be quiet. We cannot adopt that approach. (interview with AM, rights-based activist)

Mixing the referential with narratives of human rights may reduce this risk, but according to the view expressed above, Islamic feminists are nevertheless limited in their discourse by the confines of the religious laws.

Rights-based women's groups first organised themselves around the issue of the family law. For more than ten years, until its reform, the *moudawana* defined the organisations and their activities. Proximity work with women victims of violence was closely linked to this advocacy, and case studies and statistics of service users were used as evidence to support the law reform. Faith-based women's organisations followed the lead of the Islamist movements they came from and advocated against any reform of the law. Reform of a law based on Islam through state mechanisms was feared to result in the de-sacralisation of religious texts in general (Sadiqi, 2008).

In the mid-2000s after the family law was reformed, rights-based organisations had to redefine their goals. Many concentrated on teaching the new law to practitioners and citizens as well as on reporting on the implementation of the new *moudawana* and the problems many women were encountering in the courts (Sadiqi, 2008). Support for victims of violence and

literacy and professional training, which were always an important part of the women's organisations work, continued throughout. Campaigns are on going to introduce a law regarding sexual harassment, increase women's political participation, stop child marriages and labour and to reform the penal code concerning rape, sexual violence, abortion and domestic violence.

Political parity and democracy were important themes to rights-based organisations all through the last decade (Sadiqi, 2008; Salime, 2014). A voluntary quota system in national legislations was introduced in 2007, whereby a separate national list is constituted, consisting of women candidates (Darhour and Dahlerup, 2013). Candidates from this list are not elected, but will be assigned a seat if their party receives enough votes. Few women are placed on the local lists, from which voters choose whom to vote for, and NGOs keep campaigning for better representation of women (Liddell, 2009). Parties are accused of putting forward women without the necessary capacity to take on active political roles as well as marginalising women as soon as they have been elected, as observed by MZ;

Also there is an obligatory quota that women participate in the political life. The political parties in all of Morocco have taken women [...] but who are not well trained whether it be on the level of human rights also, and they took women it's just to add to the number of representatives of each party. But these women, they have exposed these women on the list so that people could give their voice, but after they always have the very marginalised role because they are not trained, most of all. (interview with MZ, rights-based activist)

One of the interviewees had been nominated for the elections. Because of her activist experience she may have been regarded as having a better capacity to act if elected than many other candidates, as described in the quotation above, however the way in which her nomination took place is an illuminating example of how the quota is applied, as she described;

I even stood in elections. Or in fact it was the [president of the community], who put me on the list without asking me first because he needed two women in order to fill his quotas. In the beginning I was against it, but people told me it could be useful for me.
(interview with KT, village association activist)

Some rights-based organisations offer training to women standing in elections and to those already elected to make up for their lack of experience. Furthermore, some political parties also nominate women from CSOs, as they are often well informed in political decision making practices (Sadiqi, 2008).

Despite issues of implementation and slowly changing attitudes, work done by women's organisations is paying dividends.

But we can say anyway that in our society there has been change. In our society there has been an opening. The women [...] it's not like before: they don't dare to speak; they don't dare to criticise; they don't dare to tell their suffering. Now they come to the support centres; they say I have this, I have this, I have this, that's very important.
(interview with BA, rights-based activist)

By knowing their rights and having the confidence to demand them, each woman can contribute to their own emancipation.

Faith-based women's activism

Two main Islamist movements operate in Morocco. The first one is linked to the country's officially recognised political party, Justice and Development (PJD). The second movement, Justice and Spirituality is still officially banned in Morocco, as it refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of the king. Both movements have their women's organisations, but due to the difference in the movements' political viewpoints the groups do not normally cooperate with each other. The campaigns opposing the *moudawana* reform were exceptions as the movements marched together against the proposed changes and attracted an estimated 200,000 followers to the streets of Casablanca in 2000 (Mir-Hosseini, 2007).

Although all of the faith-based organisations prioritise Islam as the first point of reference in all their activities, most also incorporate human rights on some level. They may say they are incorporating the 'spirit of human rights' into their framework of Islam. This is often coupled with the defence of human rights as universal, belonging to all and incorporating human values that can also be located within Islam, as LX explained;

Because there are things we share together: there is citizenship; there is living in peace; there is having the minimum of dignity and rights and feeling like a respected human being. If there is no dignity it is bad. (interview with LX, faith-based activist)

The very same arguments are also put forward by those rights-based organisations that have opted for a mixed referential incorporating human rights and Islam. Where the two differ, are

in cases where human rights, as they are universally recognised, clash with religious texts. In these cases rights-based groups give primacy to human rights, whereas faith-based groups refer to Islam.

Because the notion of equality in Islam, it is an equality of women and men; a complementary equality: one complements the other. We cannot talk about mechanical equality: woman does the same work as men and men do the same work as women. Anyway the international conventions speak of prohibition of women working at nights; prohibition of women working in mines, so we cannot talk about mechanical equality. There is equality, but a complimentary equality. We are for equality but we are for a certain, as we say, a certain positive privilege for women, because women aren't obliged to buy whatever, women are the pets of the family because it is men who must bring the necessary to the home. (interview with BK, faith-based activist)

Seeing the supremacy of Islam as a positive in terms of the meaning it gives to equality allows the activist to dispute that human rights are the only route to women's emancipation. Knowledge of different statues of human rights also allows activists to point out some of the contradictions in human rights, thus defending their positions when tensions between Islam and human rights are presented to them. BK and other faith-based activists' view on equality as complementary is strongly rejected by rights-based activists (Guessous, 2011). It is evident that rights-based activists share what Mahmood (2005b:5) calls a 'dilemma for feminist analysis': why would any woman want to support an organisation whose ultimate goal is women's subordination to men and a society divided along gendered lines?

Mahmood's (2005b:14) discussion of Islamic feminism severs the assumed links between agency and subversion; challenging the assumption that anyone with agency will wish to struggle for liberal progressive politics. According to Mahmood (*ibid.*), agency can only be understood and defined within the social context where it operates, and a concept of agency cannot be directly imposed from post-enlightenment Europe to post-colonial Arab Middle East. The ease with which the faith-based activists in Morocco explain their positioning between Islam and human rights points towards a complex and well thought out definition of agency, which recognises emancipation as important but not reducible to Western discourses.

An important part of faith-based women's activism is also challenging the patriarchal reading of religious texts. Islamic, or Islamist feminism is connected to the quest by women to reinterpret religious texts and move away from the male interpretation which constitutes the patriarchal rule in society independent of Islam itself (Badran, 2005; Latte Abdallah, 2010). They do not argue that this equals a return to a golden era, where Islam was authentically interpreted. Instead, faith-based activists recognise that patriarchal cultural norms have distorted the view of gender in Islam, and the job of Islamic feminism is to discover the meanings and values that lie behind the male interpretation of the texts (Rhouni, 2011:77). As LX explains, "Our jurisprudence is based for however long on a jurisprudence created by, I mean interpreted; the texts – our texts – were interpreted by men. [...] They were read with a masculine eye, so certainly women were absent" (interview with LX, faith-based activist).

Rhouni (2011) describes this hermeneutic activity of redefining the gender roles in relation to Islam through *ijtihad* – the act of reading and interpreting religious texts - as 'Islamic gender critique' (p.77). Thus, *ijtihad* becomes understood as a contextual and deconstructing analysis and a critique of the religious texts rather than as a search for an existing truth that risks being patriarchal in its essence.

Apart from encouraging *ijtihad* from the women's point of view and educating women about their rights within Islam, the activities of faith-based groups do not differ much from rights-based groups. Many place literacy and professional training at the centre of activities and encourage women's economic independence (Salime, 2014). There are also services for women living in difficult situations, but instead of helping women get through divorce proceedings, as many rights-based organisations do, the onus is on family unity. The organisations associated with the official Islamist party PJD are working to improve political parity, whereas those linked to Justice and Spirituality speak of democracy as part of a wider, societal process in which women have an important role to play. Some faith-based organisations are also concerned about sexual harassment.

Narratives of dichotomy

There are people who are against everything that is Islamist; everything that is PJD, Islamist. Even if you are open, I am moderate, I am; not everyone, but certain people. Certain people. (interview with BK, faith-based activist)

An important finding from the empirical evidence is the wide gap that exists between rights-based and faith-based groups. Guessous (2011:174) suggests that the aversion of leftist feminists to faith-based women's groups is a historically specific reaction dependent on the view these activists hold of modernity, progress, religion and secularism. In a study that follows a similar trajectory to this chapter, she traces this antagonism through a genealogy of events and developments in Morocco over the past 20 years, such as the *moudawana* reform. During my research I noticed that this dichotomy is also reproduced in everyday conversations amongst activists themselves, and thus reinforced through their discourse. This is especially true with rights-based activists, whose criticism of women within the Islamist

movements is directed at the patriarchal structures of these movements: any woman agreeing to work from within such a structure is seen as a hypocrite. This view is defended by their own apparent independence from the political parties they originated from. Here is one such example;

And there are, for example, the associations who work, as you said, with referential that is traditional. [...] it is a contradiction with my work because they say to women that they must accept the submission and remain with their husband and after the husband it's the father. (interview with AE, rights-based activist)

Even when rights-based groups are faced with the actual, and often more nuanced discourses of faith-based organisations, they often refuse to accept these discourses at face value. While rights-based groups wish to present diversity between their positions, similar diversity is not observed when speaking of faith-based groups; rather they are all represented as ‘the same’, standing for the same political issues.

Faith-based organisations are keener to show their openness, and whereas rights-based organisations may remark on the hypocrisy of a veiled women as an activist after the recorder has been turned off, faith-based groups maintain that veiling and other religious customs are each woman’s personal choice and has no effect on the way they will be treated. As LX recounted; “[We work] with women who are members of the movement, with women from outside of the movement, veiled women, unveiled women” (interview with LX, faith-based activist)

Despite this apparent openness towards expressions of personal preferences regarding dress and adherence to other Islamist principles, faith-based activists also differentiate between

rights-based and faith-based groups. Although faith-based groups may wish to establish cooperation with rights-based women's NGOs on single issues, they maintain the discursive dichotomy between the values of the different groups.

The majority of the values, there isn't a problem but sometimes our comprehension, for example, I'll give you an example: equality. [...] certain people said Islam, or your idea of equality; women cannot defend equality because Islam in the inheritance women take less than men. So Islam is for our values on equality between men and women.
(interview with BK, faith-based activist)

BK refers to the fact that according to Sharia-law men are entitled to a larger share of inheritance than women. As an Islamist she will not dispute this interpretation, but recognises that rights-based activists see this as an unequal practice and use it as an argument to dispute any claim made from within Islamist discourses on gender equality. To BK the law of inheritance is part of a larger Islamist discourse on equality, whereby men's greater economic responsibility warrants a larger share of inheritance, but this does not diminish the complimentary equality Islam promotes.

At times the rights-based activists' discursive construction of Islamist women activists as 'other' is directed at the politics of Islamist movements and what they see as these movements' deliberate exploitation of religion and traditions to oppress women.

Moroccan traditions are exploited by the Islamists to keep women in the house and in subordination. This is possible because of illiteracy. [...] But exploitation of traditions and the language of religion is hypocrisy from their part because while they speak

against feminism and Western values they are happy to use a computer and other technologies that come from the West. (interview with FA, rights-based activist)

This approach sees Islamist movements as uniform and universally patriarchal, and the women who participate in them as submissive. Mahmood's (2005a) vision of Muslim women's agency as being enacted through something other than the Eurocentric emancipatory project is not acknowledged in this critique. Neither is the diversity of the faith-based women's civil society in Morocco, where economic and political emancipation and education are among the main goals of many faith-based women's groups (Salime, 2014). Faith-based women activists, who wish to challenge the patriarchal Islamist movements from the inside with the help of *ijtihad* are dismissed by rights-based activists as hypocrites. Yet the same rights-based activists are using *ijtihad* and religious referential in their own work. While the dichotomy between rights-based and faith-based women's activism is upheld and reconstructed discursively, the campaigns and narratives produced by the actors often seem more similar than divided.

Similarities across divisions

Although the campaigns focusing on the family law reform positioned rights-based and faith-based women activists at opposing positions politically and socially, since the reform both groups have moved on to campaigns and social projects that have much in common with each other. One such project, that women's NGOs all over Morocco have taken on, is the education of women (Salime, 2014). NGOs provide literacy, language and professional training, such as sewing, cooking and computer literacy. The motivation for such training is

also strikingly similar between rights-based and faith-based groups, as evidenced in the two extracts below:

All development should pass through the education of women, because when we educate a woman we educate the entire family and the children profit from it too.
(interview with LK, faith-based activist)

The motivation of the association is to give women the opportunity to become economic and social actors. When women have access to money the entire family profits from it. (interview with AL, rights-based activist)

Both rights-based and faith-based women's NGOs wish to make women independent economic actors. Both also emphasise the importance women's education has for the well-being of children and families. Other issues that many faith-based and rights-based groups agree on are political parity and legislation for sexual harassment. There are also important discursive strategies shared by the different *organisations*.

So that all those women at one point of their lives have been victims of this kind of behaviour that is immoral, completely immoral and completely humiliating because it touches on the dignity of a woman. (interview with LM, rights-based activist)

Because there are things we share together: there is citizenship; there is living in peace; there is having the minimum of dignity and rights and feeling like a respected human being. (interview with LX, faith-based activist)

For example in the Koran there are a lot of texts that speak of the dignity of men in general, men and women, and at times there are texts that speak even in terms of gender, they address men and they address women. And dignity is an essential principle in the declaration of human rights. (interview with FM, rights-based activist)

Dignity, as a concept, can bridge the gap between international human rights and local interpretations of equality based on Islam and Moroccan traditions. The word is used strategically by both faith-based and rights-based activists to refer to human rights, Islam and Moroccan culture simultaneously, as it resonates with all three, and establishes a link between the three.

As discussed previously, rights-based and faith-based organisations can be divided by which discourses they prioritise in case the two are found contradictory. When describing their referential, however, it can be difficult to distinguish them.

The referential we have; we work on the rights of women; we are inspired by the values of women's rights on an international level; we are for the improvement of the situation of women and on the other side hoping besides; our Islamic religion and our authentic values of our country Morocco. So we make an equation between the two values: the international values of women's rights and the national authentic values of our society. (interview with BK, faith-based activist)

I mean we did a re-reading of Islam and the Koran and we concluded that there are texts that are equalitarian with women and there isn't a contradiction; and we thought that even the conventions and international treaties of human rights are a fruit of all civilisation; and including the Muslim civilisations that contributed to [...] I mean there isn't a contradiction. (interview with FM, rights-based activist)

There is a long history of positioning rights-based and faith-based women's NGOs in Morocco against each other. This is done by the media, but very importantly also by the women's CSOs themselves. If we put aside the discursively constructed dichotomy between rights-based and faith-based activists and look instead at the issues the organisations campaign for, as well as the motivations, the discourses used to support the campaigns and, in the case of some of the rights-based organisations, even the referential, we can see that in many levels the women's CSOs have more in common with each other than the dichotomised discourses let us believe. The antagonism between the groups, which is not shared to a similar level by political parties from different ideologies, serves to divide the women's movement in Morocco and weaken their important legislative and political campaigns, such as the one to ensure political parity in all decision-making instances. Finding these similarities does not however mean that all the NGOs share priorities and discourses in all instances. Indeed, this would not even be desirable, as too strong a voice leading such activities can mask the needs of those who are outside of the margins. Recognising difference within the women's movement is important, but as the above examples show, it can be done without dichotomising and antagonising discourses.

Why the divided women's civil society is hurting emancipation?

Both faith-based and rights-based women's NGOs in Morocco work towards women's political and economic emancipation, but the deep political and ideological divide that exists between them works to marginalise their efforts from national political agendas. While faith-based and rights-based women's groups remain divided, political parties on both sides keep reducing women's political participation to tokenism (Liddell, 2009). Women activists confirm this marginalisation they experience in both political movement and in civil society organisations in Morocco.

So it's a group of women who found themselves in the structures of the two structures especially the UNEM, National Union of Moroccan Students and the Moroccan Association of Human Rights at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, they realised that the question of women was marginalised in these structures; that in addition to the object of battle that united them with the other activists there was a specificity that concerned their demands as women and there were behaviours, attitudes and ideas that were circulating and that attacked the respect and integrity of women and towards which these structures remained indifferent. (interview with NR, rights-based activist)

This quote demonstrates that women's civil society was born out of the marginalisation of women's issues and experiences within the structures of the student and human rights movements they emerged from. The below quote is from a faith-based activist whose organisation is linked to the Islamist party PJD and the interview took place just before the 2011 elections.

It isn't good enough to have a really democratic parliament. So I am not too optimistic for the elections; but I don't think these elections will have an impact on our activities, I don't think so. Even if we have a parliament that is open; even if we have an Islamist government I am not; I don't think they have an impact on our association because the signs that have been given so far tell me that nothing will change. Nothing will change, or there will be a change of face but no change of heart. (interview with BK, faith-based activist)

The participant's prediction came true as the party nominated only one woman to the government after their election victory, despite consistently nominating more women in their candidate lists than other parties. Faith-based activists experience the same marginalisation and feel the same urgent need to organise as women in rights-based organisations, however, the effects of the division between the two is having on their possibilities for emancipatory action remains under-analysed. Although the same organisations have worked towards political parity and reinforcing the quota system, the political and ideological affiliations of Islamist women becomes a more important consideration than their sex.

Yes, but for example, because it's true that [the members of PJD] call themselves democrats, they want parity, but for me parity; when they say they want parity is it going to be the women of PJD who go to the parliament? [...] it is true that it is democracy but at times we don't know what to do. We have never worked with the Islamist associations nor the other parties, PJD, never. (interview with AD, rights-based activist)

These reservations do not seem to be experienced by men in the same way. Parti Progress et Socialisme (PPS), an ex-communist party from which ADFM, the most vehement critics of the faith-based women's groups emerged as a separate women's organisation in the 1990s (Sadiqi, 2008), joined the government run by PJD in 2011. Islamist and secular men are thus benefitting from this division within women's civil society, as the voices of the divided interest groups are easier to ignore than would be a more united women's movement.

Conclusion: the need for separate voices

Although the above speaker made it clear during the interview that she is only considering rights-based women's organisations as part of the diverse women's movement she refers to, her words can be expanded to include the faith-based organisations that share the goals of eradicating violence against women and “change[ing] things in favour of women's rights” (NR). Indeed, having the voices of faith-based women's organisations in battles such as the one for legislation against sexual harassment and violence against women could help address the conservative opposition to such laws, whereas the rights-based approach considered alongside the religious referential could speak to the modernist fractions of the political elites. Speaking together would allow both approaches to be used simultaneously, while also maintaining the separation between rights-based and faith-based organisations,

The antagonism between rights-based and faith-based women's organisations in Morocco is historically situated in the family law campaign and the state policies of the time in which the Islamist movement was established in order to divide the political opposition to the king, Hassan II (Beau and Graciet, 2006). Such influences are present in many post-colonial feminist struggles, and as noted by Heng (1997), are haunted by the history of nationalist

struggles and the ambivalence of nationalism to modernity. Women's NGOs are left to define the modernities they inhabit in the confines of the political divisions originating from nationalist struggles. Jamal (2005), writing about Pakistan, suggests that Islamic movements present an alternative to the anti-Islam discourse on war on terror and the universalising discourses that equate modernity with secularism. She recommends a conversation between the feminists and the Islamists in Pakistan through exploring 'these contradictory spaces for opportunities, if there be any, for mutual recognition (Jamal, 2005:71). Kirmani (2011) notes that in India, Muslim women are often forced to choose between international secular discourses on women and discourses locked in cultural and religious values, without recourse to a hybrid understanding of their identities. In Morocco both rights-based and faith-based groups seem to be promoting a hybrid understanding of women's rights and equality based on human rights as well as Islam and Moroccan culture. Yet despite the similarity of these discourses and the topics campaigned for, faith-based and rights-based groups are unwilling to enter into a conversation with each other.

As the binaries constructed through the identity politics of the different groups are preventing co-operation, we might ask whether co-operation would be made more possible if activists were to adopt a more intersectional lens. Matsuda (1991:1185) suggests that acknowledging the extent to which our different identities are intertwined might give us a knowledge of self that could allow to work together, while simultaneously recognising that there may be a time when we must end our coalition in order to preserve our integrity. By avoiding difficult conversations we are ignoring the realities and constraints in the lives of the others, but we lose sight of the ways in which we create our own identities in relations to such perceived otherness. Rhouni (2011) notes that Moroccan women's CSOs have used the *moudawana* as a leverage to define themselves in relation to each other. Now that the CSOs have moved on to more complex issues, where simple identity politics in and religiosity can no longer

provide the *raison d'être* of the CSOs, the antagonism between rights-based and faith-based groups is no longer a useful discursive tool. Intersectional thinking, alongside the recognition of the hierarchies that operate in the creation of otherness could make the adoption of strategic essentialism possible. As we compare the language and referential of faith-based and rights-based groups and find several points of convergence, we can conclude that organisations to have multiple identities just as individuals. CSOs' political identity may rest closely within the confines of its originating the political party, but this need not pre-determine the organisation's view-point vis-à-vis religion, use of technology or international human rights conventions.

This chapter has discussed the dichotomies between faith-based and rights-based women's groups in Morocco. The divisions are located within the political context and nationalist struggles, and are thus difficult to overcome, even when NGOs may have the same aims. Concentrating on single issues, recognising the multiple identities of the NGOs and embracing strategic essentialism can allow joint action in the future. While co-operation may be difficult due to the politico-historical origins of the antagonism, women's groups will do well to recognise that the current dichotomy is only serving the male political elites, who are not observing the divisions between socialist and Islamist groups in their exclusion of women from political decision-making.

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