
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Secular to Islamic Feminism(s): The Development of Moroccan Feminist Ideologies

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| ABSTRACT

The present paper explores the ways in which secular and Islamic ideologies have emerged and developed as distinct frames of reference for the Moroccan feminist movement. It examines critically the changing meanings of 'the secular' and 'the religious' and the ways they communicate and manifest in the Moroccan feminist narrative. The aim is to track the development of the two sub-movements referred to as secular feminism and Islamic feminism and analyze their dynamics and ability to adapt to a complex socio-political reality by adopting different ideological approaches to the issue of women's rights reform. The study of the course of the Moroccan feminist movement and its shift between secular and Islamic feminist discourses helps improve our understanding of feminist theory by observing various feminist expressions in different cultural environments from the ones which are perceived as the native home of feminism. It also helps us examine the influence of local ideological conflicts on feminism and deconstruct these ideologies by detecting their limitations, enabling us to have a clear perception of the nature of the feminist movement today and foresee the prospects of women's rights reform in Morocco and other Muslim-majority societies in the future.

| KEYWORDS

Secular feminism, Islamic feminism, Moroccan feminism, feminist ideologies.

| ARTICLE DOI: [10.32996/ijcrs.2022.2.1.2](https://doi.org/10.32996/ijcrs.2022.2.1.2)

1. Introduction

The feminist movement in Morocco is roughly a century old. It has developed through a long process of accommodations with a rapidly changing socio-cultural and political environment which has shaped its ideological identity and influenced its approaches toward women's rights reform. The complex post-colonial reality in which Moroccan feminism has formed led to the creation of two major feminist movements representing different frames of reference, which use different discourses and strategies reflecting the socio-political diversity of the Moroccan context. However, the shift towards Islamic feminism, and the nature of the latter's relationship with secular feminism, is still understood as a conflict between two ideological systems claiming legitimate grounds at the expense of the other. Secular and Islamic feminism(s) are considered to be essentially divergent movements that are constantly in conflict, not two different approaches to feminism that can have common grounds as well as differences. The issue is that both movements are part of the general Moroccan feminist movement, and their different frames of reference are only ideological adaptations to an increasingly diverse socio-cultural and political reality.

This paper begins with a historical analysis of the roots of the differentiation between secular and Islamic ideologies in Morocco in order to have a clear idea about the environment in which Moroccan feminism emerged and developed. It explains the change in Moroccan culture that modernity has caused, creating an alternative paradigm to tradition in the Moroccan consciousness. It shows how these phenomena have developed into social and political movements, which eventually settled on two main ideological movements, secular and religious ones. The paper aims at explaining the circumstances in which the concepts of modernity and tradition emerged, crystallized, and evolved to create secular and religious polarized ideologies. Understanding those concepts paves the way for explaining the role they played in the evolution of the Moroccan feminist movement and the role they played in the division of the latter. The paper also offers an analysis of the emergence and development of the Moroccan feminist movement since the colonial era and the way it shifted to secular and Islamic phases. It begins with the emergence of

feminist consciousness in Morocco amongst nationalist leaders before the rise of secular and Islamic ideologies. It also examines the evolution of the feminist movement as it gained momentum in the Moroccan social and political scenes and how feminism began to assert a secular human rights frame of reference, which was a necessity in that period in which Political Islam was on the rise and religion was used to demonize feminism and reinforce patriarchal practices. Afterwards, it elaborates on the concept of secular feminism and the components of its discourse, as well as its position towards religion as a cultural and political frame of reference. Finally, it examines the phenomenon of Islamic feminism, which emerged as a new feminist expression, and discusses the circumstances which contributed to its development, as well as its perception of religion and its relationship with secular feminism.

The significance of this research lies in its ability to provide a better reading of the development of Feminism and the prospects of women's rights movements' reform in Morocco as one of the leading examples of women's rights reform in the Islamic world. There are, of course, other leading countries in women's rights reforms, such as Tunisia and Turkey, but the specificity of the Moroccan experience lies in the fact that its achievements are the result of a democratic public mobilization that forced the regime to adopt its demands, not an imposed reform from above as it is the case of Turkey and Tunisia. Another aim of this research is to deconstruct old binaries such as religious/secular, Tradition/Modernity, and East/West and show that the polarization between them is ideological more than cultural. The research also contributes to decentralizing the theory of feminism as a western master narrative by observing its dynamics outside the original environment where it emerged and crystallized.

2. Feminism before Ideologies

The roots of feminist consciousness in Morocco go back to the early 1930s when young men of the nationalist movement, who were educated in France, started raising the issue of women's emancipation as part of the necessary reforms to modernize the country and pave the way for independence. Those men started writing in the francophone Moroccan press, drawing attention to the injustices that Moroccan women endured and comparing their status with the status of women in France. They were also inspired by other feminist experiences, such as that of the feminist movement in Egypt and Turkey. Their main focus at that time was on education as part of a gradual reform strategy that aimed at elevating the status of women to allow them to contribute to the social and political life, thus putting Morocco on the track of progress (Baker, 1998, p. 20-21).

At that time, women's rights consciousness was part of the project of modernizing the country and was not associated with any secular or religious ideology. Within the nationalist movement, both modernist and traditionalist leaders became aware of the need to educate women and not exclude them from society and recognized the role they could play in resisting colonial rule. These nationalists sought to bring more women to the movement, encouraged their involvement in the resistance, and supported their political participation, all of which helped the nationalists show 'the French' that they were capable of being civilized and modern. However, despite the fact that most women were still subject to exclusion and illiteracy, the experience of the few women who participated in this era sparked the flame for organized women's rights movements that would appear in the near future and which aspired for more social and political rights for Moroccan women.

In that period, the first female voice to appear and engage in feminist activism was the prominent nationalist figure Malika El-Fassi. She published her first article titled "On Young Women's Education" in 1935 in an Arabic-language Moroccan magazine called "Majallat Al-Maghrib", calling for girls' education, speaking against women's illiteracy, and encouraging the establishment of girls' orphanages. She was the only woman amongst the nationalist leaders to sign the independence treaty in 1944. Later in 1946, she became the president of the women's association of the Istiqlal Party, and she used her position and reputation to fight for women's emancipation, setting an example that would inspire other women to follow. However, despite her political status, her feminist activism focused on the social situation of women mostly rather than the political one (El-Kadiri, 1997, p. 492-494).

3. The Way to Secular Feminism

As a movement, it was "Akhawat Al-Safa" (Sisters of Purity) that stood out as the most influential feminist organization of that time. It was founded by the Democratic Independence Party in 1946. Like Malika El-Fasi, the women who founded the Sisters of Purity were the nationalists of the upper-middle class, who were amongst the few Moroccan women who had an education. This fact made them realize that despite their social status, they did not enjoy the same privileges as the men of their social class. In 1947, during its first national congress held in Fez, the association issued a document setting out a number of demands which defined the vision of the movement. These demands focused on the need to provide education and independent income for women and called for the revision of some of the Islamic personal status laws, such as customary divorce and polygamy, which launched one of the beginnings of the secular orientation of the Moroccan feminist movement (Baker, 1998, p. 54-55).

With the passage of time, these feminist voices were joined by other voices, including journalists, politicians, activists, etc., the range of their voices started spreading far amongst the educated population, and political parties started to include feminist ideas in their campaigns. At the social level, after King Mohamed V's daughter gave a speech in public without wearing the veil, in 1957, as a symbol of women's emancipation, women started changing the way they dressed and became more open towards French lifestyles alongside men (Sadiqi, 2008, p. 326-327). However, feminists were disappointed because although they participated in

the struggle for independence, their political and legal representation was weak. Besides, the first post-independence family code, drafted in 1957, was patriarchal, in their view, as it asserted the same old practices of male guardianship, polygamy, and customary divorce. This reality made the feminist movement lose faith in the ruling male elite which adopted a conservative position; thus, they started joining the leftist political parties of the opposition, which adopted a more progressive approach to reform (Sadiqi, 2014, p. 133).

The leftist political movement became more popular as it attracted huge numbers of youth from the lower classes, amongst which were feminists who also grew in number with the increasing rate of education among young women. These young men and women saw in the left a strong movement of opposition that could bring about political change. However, feminists sensed that despite the progressive position of leftist parties, they did not prioritize women's rights issues over other broad political matters. Therefore, they started organizing their own feminist NGOs, which emerged from the same leftist political parties, in order to focus on women's rights and not to let male-dominated parties alter their priorities. These associations were "L'Association Démocratique des Femmes Marocaines" (Democratic Association of Moroccan Women) which emerged from the communist party "Parti du Progrès et du Socialisme", in 1985, and "L'Union de L'Action Feminine" (Union of Feminine Action) which emerged from the socialist Party "L'Organisation de L'Action Démocratique et Populaire", in 1987 (Ennaji, Sadiqi, & Vintges, 2016, p. 55-56).

The two associations were part of the democratization movement in Morocco, and they constituted a great mobilizing force that was involved in different campaigns, such as providing social services, raising consciousness about women's rights, and supporting their own political parties. In 1992, the Union of Feminine Action launched a campaign collecting one million signatures in support of a reform proposal which was submitted to parliament demanding the revision of the personal status code (Mudawana) and the ratification of CEDAW. This event uncovered the weight of the feminist movement and the credibility it had in society. Besides, although the amendments that followed the campaign were not sufficient as they merely put light restrictions on the practices of guardianship and polygamy, the feminist movements read them as a sign that the 35-year-old Mudawana was no longer treated as a sacred patriarchal text. Moreover, despite the aggressive and demonizing reactions their demands were met with by Islamists, feminists insisted on the secularization of the family law because the conception of women's rights in the Islamic jurisprudence was not progressive, and in many cases, it was discriminatory and patriarchal in its readings.

A few years later, when the socialist government, which was formed by a coalition of leftist political parties, came to power in 1998, the feminist movement regarded the event as the opportunity to push further their demands since the political backup was guaranteed. The government supported by these feminist movements announced the "National Plan of Action for Integrating Women into Development" (NPA), suggesting a number of laws, such as raising the age of marriage of girls to 18, the elimination of male guardianship, making divorce judicial, etc. the reaction of Islamists to this plan intensified the ideological controversy over the issue, claiming that the suggested reforms were an attack on the frame of reference of the family law, which if secularized would mean that the only legal document that claims adherence to the Islamic jurisprudence will disappear. Consequently, the failure to find a middle ground between these movements led to massive demonstrations in the two biggest cities in Morocco, Rabat and Casablanca, where millions of followers of both political movements marched against each other in one of the most polarizing political events in the history of the country.

Nevertheless, putting the plan on hold was not a setback for secular feminists in their quest for reforming the law and fighting patriarchy and fundamentalism. As a matter of fact, the 2000 crisis made all parties realize the extent to which women's rights issues are polarizing society, hence the need for compromise towards reform. In 2002, political parties adopted a new quota that allowed 35 women to enter the Moroccan parliament. Following that year, the king announced a new Mudawana which responded to a lot of feminists' demands, such as raising the age of marriage, restricting the practice of guardianship, etc. (Moghadam, 2009, p. 13). This reform was welcomed by feminist movements, which did not see a problem in making it an initiative by the king on the basis of his religious authority because they saw it as a strategic move that did not threaten their frame of reference as long as the laws presented are compatible with the principle of gender equality as defined by CEDAW and other Human Rights conventions.

In the following years, women's rights movements continued their activism in political and social movements, journalism, scholarship, and so on, making the movement part of society and an integral part of the democratization process. Consequently, when the wave of the "Arab Spring" reached Morocco, women were part of the youth movement, which protested for radical political reforms in the country. Therefore, the monarchy responded by promising to make a new constitution that would present major reforms regarding various political and social issues, including women's rights. In clear recognition of gender equality, the 19th article of the new constitution stated the following:

The man and the woman enjoy, in equality, the rights and freedoms of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental character, announced in this Title and in other provisions of the constitution, as well as in the international conventions and pacts duly ratified by Morocco and in respect of the provisions of the constitution of the constants and of the laws of the Kingdom. The state

works for the realization of parity between men and women. An authority for parity and the struggle against all forms of discrimination is created to this effect.

This article, alongside other articles, indicated the total recognition of decades of feminist activism by giving institutional legitimacy to their core principles of gender equality and freedom and their frame of reference embodied in international conventions, thus settling the debate about the legitimacy of feminism and its authentic Moroccaness.

In sum, the so-called secular feminism in Morocco started as a movement that did not need to assert its secular identity. It was not strongly involved in institutional politics as it was merely about education and giving women the needed social and political space to contribute to the progress of the country. As the movement got more followers and enlarged its grassroots, feminists started realizing that the patriarchal political elite was not serious about the women's rights struggle and that they had to take the matter into their own hands. In the way, the circumstances surrounding the development of the movement, such as globalization, Political Islam, the monarchy, the predominantly Muslim culture, and the centrality of family law in its struggle, have all shaped and developed its ideological tendencies and the strategies it sought to achieve its goals. Nevertheless, although their struggle was crystallized by constitutionalizing gender equality, the movement still has to work on the realization of this principle thus still has to face a lot of issues about religion, political ideologies, identity, and so on, which will keep shaping the nature of the movement and the course of its development.

4. Secular Feminism: What's in a name?

The frame of reference of the so-called secular feminism evolved during a long period of activism and interaction with the Moroccan social and political spheres. In the beginning, secular feminism was part of the general Moroccan feminist movement, and it did not need to assert its frame of reference, as the focus at that time was on enabling women to have access to education, work, and political participation as part of the modernizing and decolonizing processes. However, with the waves of politicized religion, feminism was forced to emphasize and adjust its frame of reference in order to protect its principles and to find a stable position that would allow it to adopt international human rights principles without associating itself with westernization and to be in harmony with the Moroccan culture and identity without making compromises with tradition-based patriarchy. This reality made secular feminism so flexible and diverse in its discourse which included nationalist, Islamic reformist, human rights, and democratic language, to ensure that it spoke to society within the widest range of its diversity and complexity.

It is important to state that the so-called secular feminism emerged during an era when modernity was new to Moroccan society, and the latter was still traditional and depended on religion and traditions as the only frame of reference for culture, society, and politics. Social and political institutions, at that time, were in need of a profound level of modernization, and since religion was predominant, secularizing these social and political institutions was a natural and necessary procedure. The process of modernization in Morocco was gradual and extended to all aspects of the public sphere, including education, political institutions, economy, etc. However, the private sphere, particularly family life and family laws, remained governed by tradition and traditional laws. Consequently, being the remaining space for tradition, the private sphere was immune to secularization, making the reform of family laws the most challenging task for feminist movements. As a result, the Moroccan family law, known as the Mudawwana, became central in the struggle of the Moroccan feminist movement to achieve full legal equality for women.

The term secular is one of the most controversial words used in Moroccan culture and politics. It brings a lot of meanings to mind and triggers a lot of controversies. The adjective "secular" was rarely used before the emergence of Islamic feminism. It began to be used afterwards to differentiate between the two paradigms; thus, it was used for practical purposes and to assert the non-religious identity of the movement. It was not meant to detach feminism from Moroccan culture and religion but to show that this type of feminism is neither driven by religious motives nor limited to the boundaries of religion. Secular feminism describes a position that does not engage in reforming or renewing religion-based culture but rather seeks to secularize it. In other words, it seeks to confine religion to the private sphere and not let it play any role in legislation and public life. Most Moroccan secular feminists, however, are neutral toward religion and do not mind any possible role of it as long as it is compatible with feminist values. At the same time, they personally believe that religion should not be a source of legislation, social values, and culture in general.

Political Islam, however, had a great impact on the ideological orientations of the secular feminist movement. It brought religion, as an identity politics, to the forefront of the debate about many issues ranging from identity to women's rights, pushing feminist movements to take a defensive ideological stand. Before Islamism, secularism was not a political identity for feminism as the discourse of the latter included Islamic modernist arguments in its paradigm to show that they are not in conflict with religion. However, Political Islam has re-appropriated religion and turned it into a political identity that resisted, on religious grounds, the reformation of the family law. It also redefined and narrowed the definition of secularism to signify anti-Islamic connotation, constructing a firm binary relation between religious and secular paradigms (Badran, 2013, p. 113). This ideological dichotomy has put feminists in a situation where they had to choose either the Islamic patriarchal status quo or the secular women's rights frame of reference.

Meanwhile, the word secular was often avoided in the discourse of secular feminism because it was often misinterpreted. This helped the movement keep a low profile to avoid being demonized by Political Islam and portrayed as anti-Islamic. This choice was a very pragmatic and strategic decision because it spared the movement a lot of unnecessary tension and made its struggle more practical than ideological. That is to say that instead of wasting their energy on debating the ideological meaning of words, thus giving the Islamist groups an opportunity to diminish their demands, they focused on criticizing the patriarchal discriminatory aspects of the Mudawwana and pressing for reform. This way, secular feminism was able to remain constantly in progress, raising consciousness about women's rights in society and forestalling Islamist groups from objecting to their proposals for the new Mudawwana of 2004 on religious grounds. This vision demonstrated that the frame of reference of secular feminism was not anti-religious but wider than any religious frame and inclusive of all women regardless of their religious orientations.

The experience of the so-called secular feminism in Morocco grew out of the general feminist movement, and its frame of reference was shaped and evolved in interaction with the country's changing socio-cultural and political environment. It started as a social trend that aimed at improving the social situation of women and granting them fair political representation. As it grew larger and stronger, gaining more social ground and more political support, the movement began to develop in terms of discourse, ideology and strategy. It became poly-vocal and diverse, reflecting the diversity and complexity of Moroccan society and culture. In the course of its evolution, the country was going through an extensive modernization process, and feminism was part of it. This period required adopting a secular position that allowed the reform to stand on rational, pragmatic grounds. However, trying to live in reconciliation with a traditional culture that constantly hindered women's rights reform on religious grounds was exhausting. For this reason, a number of feminists started widening the scope of reform and decided to engage in it from within religion, too, by re-reading religious history, culture, and the fundamental texts from an egalitarian perspective, thus re-appropriating religion from fundamentalist monopolization and turning it from an obstacle in the way of feminist reform to a contributing force in it. This shift led to the emergence of a new movement that its theorists and critics began to call Islamic feminism.

5. Islamic Feminism: Background, Discourse, and Ideology

Islamic feminism refers to an intellectual movement that emerged in the late 80s, led by feminist intellectuals, scholars, and journalists, who began to take an interest in studying the Islamic tradition from a critical, revisionist position in order to provide a new reading that explores the embedded principles of gender equality and social justice in Islam. Islamic feminism is part of the general movement called feminism and shares its common principles of women's rights and gender equality. However, the concerns and approaches of Islamic feminism are different as it focuses on Islam as a cultural and historical tradition in order to re-read it from a feminist perspective. The epistemological and ideological objectives of Islamic feminism aim at paving the way for gender equality reform in Muslim-majority societies by focusing on an essential component of culture which is religion. Moreover, although Islamic feminism is a global movement, it is also marked by the specificities of each national context in which it operates. It develops its ideology and discourse in relation to the ideologies that are active in its cultural and political environment.

Possible roots of Islamic feminism in Morocco can be traced back to the individual attempts of nationalist figures who questioned the gender inequalities and injustices which Moroccan women endured, and still endure even today, and argued that those practices, although justified in the name of Islam, can be contested from within the Islamic frame of references if reinterpreted with a pro-women spirit. Allal Al-Fassi, who was one of the leaders of the Moroccan nationalist movement, was also one of those who spoke against the inferior status of women in society and the discriminatory practices, which he argued to be traditional pre-Islamic practices that survived through patriarchal interpretations of Islam. He also called for the revision of the Maliki school-based personal status code, which promotes degrading practices such as male guardianship, polygamy, etc. (Gray, 2013, p. 28-30). However, this call for the revision of what Al-Fassi considered to be un-Islamic practices did not find an echo in the Moroccan intelligentsia of that time, nor was it supported by any movement that could adopt and promote this line of "Islamic reform".

The movement of Islamic feminism emerged in the late 80s in a number of Muslim-majority countries that went through decades of modernization and had strong Political Islam currents, such as Egypt, Iran, and Morocco (Badran, 2009, p. 302). The Islamist discourse in those countries was propagating traditional values about women and their domestic role while at the same time demonizing the feminist discourse that encourages women to be more visible and active in public life. Feminists began to be concerned about the spread of those traditionalist interpretations of Islam with the growing influence of Political Islam, which they feared might jeopardize decades of feminist struggle. They also began to notice the polarization between feminists and Islamists over family code reform, reinforced by the deliberate discrediting of secularism by Islamists who reappropriated religion to obstruct reform. In this context, feminists needed a different strategy that encounters the Islamist discourse by developing a counter-discourse that raises feminist demands but speaks from within religion. Islamic feminism, in this sense, was a reaction to Islamism as an attempt to re-appropriate religion from fundamentalist monopolization and to disempower the latter's discourse that uses Islam to encounter feminism, thus making religion an empowering factor and a source of cultural legitimacy for feminism.

The emergence of Islamic feminism cannot be reduced to a strategic response to Political Islam but can be read as a postcolonial reaction to western representation of Muslim women by asserting the authenticity of their feminist aspirations. Those women, living in a postcolonial era, were still reshaping their national and cultural identities and were looking to make their feminist voice more autonomous and adaptable to their religious identities. Their authenticity was the way to counter the orientalist discourse, which propagates Muslim women as submissive by nature and that feminism and Islam are not compatible (Rhouni, 2010, p. 26). The new voice they created was the fruit of decades of feminist adaptation in their societies which resulted in developing a new voice that adds to the plurality of feminism, using a more traditional and religious language this time, and adding to the efforts of the secular movement of feminism but from a different perspective. Nevertheless, countering western orientalist discourses doesn't mean that those feminists did not realize that a great deal of the images in Islamic jurisprudence was negative and reinforced a submissive culture of women, but they were against the essentialization of those images which were used to diminish Muslim women and their culture. They were, as a result, determined to challenge those discourses and images by initiating an extensive revision of Islamic jurisprudence and its references, which they believed, were never seriously challenged from within their framework.

Amongst the main figures of Islamic feminism not only in Morocco but also internationally was Fatima Mersinssi, a Moroccan sociologist and a feminist whose ideological affiliation is still a source of controversy due to the complexity and diversity of her work. Secular feminists regard her to be a secular feminist, whilst Islamic feminists also refer to her as a pioneer of Islamic feminism. Her work "Le Harem Politique" (Women and Islam), published in 1987, was one of the founding texts in the study of Islam and gender, in which she tried to deconstruct the sayings attributed to the prophet questioning their alleged fixed interpretations, in favor of a more progressive feminist reading (Yafout, 2016, p.98-99). Another known Moroccan figure who engaged in this scholarship is Asmaa Lamrabet. She began her contribution more than a decade after Mernissi. She believes that women's rights are universal but should be normalized in every culture using its dominant lexicon. Her works focus on the Quran and the life of the Prophet in order to interpret them in a way that constitutes an understanding of Islam that addresses women as independent humans and social entities, rather than being relational to family or men (Yafout, 2016, p.105-106). A third known critical Islamic feminist figure is Nadia Yassine, who is the daughter of the founder of the Islamist movement "Justice and Charity" and the head of its women's Branch. She also adopts the historical approach in rereading the Islamic texts in order to question the patriarchal interpretations associated with Islam, alongside her political activism within her movement to grant the female members more visibility in leadership positions (Yafout, 2016, p.100-101).

Islamic feminist theory argues that the Quran affirms the principle of equality between human beings and promotes social justice. Based on this understanding, Islamic feminists seek to reinterpret the texts that deal with the issue of women and historicize them in light of more pro-women vision. The basic idea is that although the Quran is sacred, jurisprudence is not. It is a human understanding of the intentions of the text, which is very much affected by the social and cultural atmosphere of the era in which those interpretations emerged. The same concept applies to the interpretations of prophetic sayings and the legal opinions of referential scholars of jurisprudence which are very much a product of male-centred mindsets. This historicizing and reinterpreting project seeks to elevate the status of women and the way the Islamic culture perceives gender relations and to improve their image in the most conservative circles in Muslim societies. Moreover, it enables women to have a larger space to contribute with their own interpretations and to bring their own experiences and perceptions to the field.

Islamic feminist theory also introduces gender as an analytical frame to the study of Islamic history. It brings modern methodologies and approaches to revise and reread this history from a gender perspective. One of the goals is to understand the way patriarchal practices are produced and re-produced throughout history and the way women as a social category have adapted to those societies that constantly minimized their gender roles. It also seeks inspiration from prominent female figures who were believed to have played significant roles in their social and political environments, including women of the Harem institutions, who were always portrayed as objects rather than influential in their political and social environments. Rereading the history of Muslim and Arab societies aims at challenging the patriarchal images of this history by revisiting it and focusing on the lives of prominent women to provide more enlightened readings to encourage people to be more open towards gender equality and accept it as part of their religion and history instead of making them choose between their culture and gender equality.

Islamic feminism, in a broad definition, refers to different categorizations. It is a field of study and an intellectual and social project that includes a range of women with different backgrounds. Islamic feminism does not refer to Islam as a faith but as a field of study which includes religious Muslim women and men, secular Muslims, and even non-Muslims. It involves everyone who contributes to the study of Islam from a gender equality perspective and who believes in its compatibility with women's rights regardless of their religious orientations (Rhouni, 2010, p. 33). Islamic feminism is also a movement in feminism that refers to Islam as a cultural affiliation and geography rather than just faith. It is like saying Egyptian feminism or Arab feminism, which does not imply that everyone contributing to it is speaking from a faith standpoint or carrying a religious project but rather a cultural one that tries to speak to Muslim societies from within their culture in an attempt to normalize feminism and make people of those societies more open to it.

In the same way, secular feminism is inclusive of multiple discourses, including Islamic modernist one; Islamic feminism is also inclusive of the secular feminist approach and discourse of human rights, which were brought by secular feminists who began to embark on this type of intellectual endeavor. Islamic feminism re-appropriated the Islamic modernist discourse from secular feminism and centered all its thought and activism around it. This tendency was triggered by a growing consciousness amongst a number of feminists that patriarchy is deeply rooted in culture and religion and that the Islamic modernist dependence on a selective reading approach is not sufficient to deconstruct the relationship between religion and patriarchy. In other words, it is no longer sufficient just to look for readings that are friendly towards women in religious references and jurisprudence. Therefore, a feminist radical reform of religion is required to regenerate new readings of the texts and make new interpretations in light of the historical relativity of the texts and the humanistic spirit of Sharia.

Islamic feminism as a movement and a field of study is the outcome of decades of evolvement in the feminist movement in Morocco and other countries. It represents a new consciousness amongst feminists in Muslim majority societies that patriarchy is deeply embedded in culture and that political struggle must be supported with cultural reform focusing more on religion as a fundamental source of cultural legitimacy. It was an attempt to normalize feminism in a cultural and political context in which religion still influences people's lives and is used to fuel ideological tension between secular and religious movements. Islamic feminism is meant to reduce the tension between Islamic movements and secular feminists, which has been hindering women's rights reform for decades by providing a middle ground to which both parties can relate. In other words, it played the role of a lifeline that enabled substantial reforms in the personal status code to take place without invoking any disputes about the compatibility of those reforms with the religious identity, thus foiling any attempt to abort those reforms. However, working on common goals does not mean that the ideological contrast between Islamic and secular feminism(s) disappears, but it shows that the two movements can work together, communicate, and work on converging in terms of their frames of reference in order to reduce the ideological gap between them.

6. Conclusion

Moroccan feminism has gone through many phases during its course. It has accumulated decades of experience and crystalized unique approaches, perspectives and expertise in dealing with the women's rights struggle. Moroccan feminism began as an "Ideology-free" movement that prioritized pragmatic reforms over ideological conflicts. However, the predominantly religious culture has pushed it to develop an embedded secular orientation which helped it encounter religiously justified patriarchy without directly confronting religious circles. The secular frame of reference of Moroccan feminism surfaced during the 80s as a reaction to the rise of the strong Political Islam wave. Subsequently, the rise of Islamic feminism came to offer a different approach that tried to justify feminism from within the Islamic tradition in order to provide an equilibrium with secular feminism, which derives its legitimacy from human rights international conventions. This shift allowed the general Moroccan feminist movement to widen its scope and reach the religious audience and expose it to feminist ideas. Nevertheless, the common grounds between the two feminist movements did not reduce the ideological tension triggered by their contrastive frames of reference, which obliged the feminist movement to adopt a broader paradigm.

Today, there is growing consciousness within Moroccan feminism that the ideological dichotomy comes at the detriment of the movement. This contention has encouraged feminists to adopt a more pragmatic approach that transcends ideological dichotomies. It aims at providing a broader paradigm that assimilates feminist ideologies into a multi-dimensional paradigm that takes the complexity of culture into consideration and assimilates religion as an important component of this culture but does not confine the latter to it. This "third-way" approach is a return to the feminist discourse of the early Moroccan nationalist leaders and activists before the rise of secular and religious ideologies, which polarized the cultural and political spheres. It questions the foundational ideologies of secular and Islamic feminism, arguing that secularism and religion must try to live together in a way that makes secularism compatible with the specificities of its social and political contexts and not turn its back on it and that Islamic feminism should be open to secularism and not reduce culture to the religious component. The "third way" also promotes that feminism should be pragmatic and focus on problems that both movements agree upon, such as political representation, education or employment, leaving the ideological disputes aside.

Although this article provides important insights into the development of the feminist movement and the relationship between secular and Islamic feminist ideologies, the focus on the Moroccan context limits the study as the Moroccan feminist experience does not necessarily speak for the broader Arabo-Islamic context. There are many other feminist experiences in other Muslim majority countries such as Tunisia, Turkey, and even Iran, where feminist experiences evolved in reaction to different socio-political circumstances and developed different discourses accordingly. Those experiences are worth studying as they broaden our understanding of feminist theory and the variety of feminist reform approaches. The Turkish and Iranian feminist experiences, for instance, represent opposing examples where feminism had to adapt to political systems, one of which is a secularist autocracy while the other one is an Islamist theocracy, which are different from the Moroccan system which despite being an absolute monarchy is practically vague in its ideological orientations and appears to try to "hold the stick from the middle." Observing those

experiences individually brings new perspectives into the feminist debate and helps envision the prospects of feminist reform without projecting one model on the others.

Funding: This work received no external funding.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of Interest.

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