OTHER FEMINISMS? MUSLIM ASSOCIATIONS AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN MOROCCO

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This article discusses some women's movements in Morocco. Through the analysis of the positions adopted by Islamic and Feminist groups about the construction of womanhood in these groups, the article tries to show that the dichotomous model (Islamists against Feminists) oversimplifies the explanation of these processes. Ethnography makes possible other more nuanced approaches to the topic.

KEYWORDS: women's movements, islamist associations, feminism, Morocco.

This article is the result of an on-going investigation of women's movements in Morocco that analyzes the gender models hidden behind the movements' Islamist and secular labels.[1] I intend to carry out an analysis of women's movements that claim to be feminist and bearers of specific changes for women within a Muslim framework and to reposition them, if possible, within the framework of Third World and Arab-Muslim feminisms. And I plan to do this from an ethnographical basis, which avoids, at least in theory, distortions such as the assumption that all non-European women's movements are culturally authentic and, indeed, post-colonial feminisms.

My approach needs to come with a warning since the basis of this study contains underlying tensions and raises uncomfortable considerations of the "Arab-Muslim" concept. The discomfort lies in the fact that use of this term in itself indicates a generalization, implicit in the concept of culture that in two works by Abu-Lughod (1991 and 1993) is depicted as an essentialization and raises doubts about the use of the concept. Given that I, along with a good number of anthropologists, share Abu-Lughod's discomfort with the term,[2] and that in this article I am going to use words like "Arab-Muslim" and "Islamic," I need to make my position within the framework of this discussion clear.

I am interested in situating the local specificities of the process.[3] With this, I want to indicate that despite the fact that these Muslim women's movements, which recognize Islam as their ideology, are present throughout the Arab-Muslim world, the specific economic and political context of Morocco must be considered. In this sense, and along with Mir-Hosseini (1999), I consider

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[1] In this discussion, I am going to use the term Islamist for a movement organized by people around a project for social and political change that seeks to Islamicise the society, finding its ideological basis in Islam, whatever its definition may be. When I use it associated with a person, I start from the premise that this person accepts these principals.

[2] See Sahlins (1999) and Brumann (1999) for an interesting discussion of this topic.

[3] The second phase of this research intends to shift to the analysis of the Moroccan diaspora and the new methods of associationism.

that there are several different levels present in the investigation: written sources by theologians and feminists, the former invoked as sources of authority by the Islamists; national and local politics, with their own discourse on gender; and finally, the experience of local individuals and communities. I will endeavour to distinguish between the three levels in my work.

In this discussion, I am going to put forward three hypotheses that form the paradigms for my current work. The first is that feminism with Islamic or Arab-Muslim roots is far less developed than other non-western feminisms which tend to be included in the controversial term "Third World feminism". My second hypothesis is that gender models with relation to Islamists are not generalizable to Islamism, and that attention must be given to local construction and the sociopolitical situation. This belief reinforces the idea that concepts that are too ambitious in the best of cases, such as Islamist or Arab-Muslim feminism, must be questioned. The third is that Islamism can be considered a form of agency for women.

In this discussion, I am going to take up the two first hypotheses. I will start with some definitions of feminism in general and of Third World feminism in particular so that I can then move on to applying some concepts to the area that concerns me. I intend, by using this ethnographic basis, to show that gender models of Islamist and feminist groups and their type of link with the "Islamic" and the "cultural" need to be interpreted using local factors.

On colonial and postcolonial and Arab world feminisms

Returning to the starting point of this article, the question is: What are we talking about when we talk about Arab feminism? And, of course, what are we talking about when we talk about Islamic feminism? How can we grapple with the superimposition of these two categories?

I would like to situate this discussion in the context of "Third World feminisms." With third wave feminism and the discussion about Third World women's movements, there has been a tendency to allocate "non-western" feminism to each area of the non-western world in which there is evidence of women's movements. It is usually thought that in non-European and non-North American areas there is a militant feminism that is by definition alternative and by definition different from western feminisms, and that this contradicts the claims of second wave feminism that universality exists.

When I refer to Third World feminisms, I am referring to the criticism by other non-white women's movements of white European and North American feminism, which is included in the so-called third wave feminism, which includes Black and Chicana feminism and, indeed, Arab feminism. However, Chicana feminism is not the same as Black feminism or Indian feminism or Arab feminism.

The levels of development, of militancy and of the relationship between activism and literature, are quite different. In general terms, I hold that the development or militancy of Arab-Islamic feminism is not at the same level as those of other Third World feminist projects

In any case, it must be said that the term "Third World feminisms" is very criticized. In an article that could be called a classic, Talpade Mohanty (1991) criticized the term "Third World feminisms." Talpade's criticism of western feminism is comparable to that of Asad's (1973) with respect to the relationship between anthropology and colonialism in the sense that western feminism, without being conscious of the correlation of powers, constructed Third World feminism. For Talpade, the main issue is that the term "Third World women" homogenizes very different groups of women.

Other authors use it (Ahmed, 1986; Nash, 2004; Moraga and Anzaldua, 1981) and given some of their positions, they do not exactly find the term "white feminism" questionable. The fact is that criticism by some feminists in the Arab--Muslim world exists – criticism with different terminologies and different levels of consciousness about their use – that looks at what colonial intervention meant and the colonial interference that exists even today and has unmasked European feminism as racist and imperialist.

For Bull, Diamond and Marsh (2000), there was a significant change in feminist theory in the early 1980s. If feminism until then had emphasized the equality between men and women, now authors like Julia Kristeva were stressing the difference between them. But the significant diversity of feminisms really began with the influence of Black feminists in the United States. The criticism made by these feminists was that the feminism founded by white middle-class women overlooked race and ethnicity. Additionally, a new phenomenon took place within European feminism when radical, socialist, Marxist, Black and lesbian feminisms began to appear. Postmodernism, as an ideological paradigm, influenced feminism into starting to emphasize cultural diversity. In any case, what is interesting is that it is no longer possible to say that there is one European feminism, but that there are multiple and diverse feminisms, especially considering the diversity of areas in which different women's movements, which are beginning to be included in the rubric of feminism, are springing up. The consideration of other non-western cultural frameworks in the construction of other feminisms and above all, the criticism of imperialism that feminist criticism itself has placed on white feminism, means that feminism has had an important role in post-colonial studies. However, in other disciplines, this contribution of feminist criticism to post-colonial studies has been taken into account and the genealogy of these studies has been constructed without this criticism. Currently for Lewis and Mills (2003), post-colonial feminist criticism exercises a strong pressure on mainstream post-colonial studies to consider the question of gender. But what is true is that here lies the origin of the new feminisms coming from

the United States. Chicana feminism and Black feminism have forced a revision of the history of feminism, forcing this "third wave" to characterize itself exactly according to this revision and to question the hegemony of white feminism.

If we question whether what some Muslim-based feminist movements in Morocco have proposed is or is not feminism, the answer probably would not take us very far. The reason is that the diversity of definitions of feminism is so great that if a sufficiently comprehensive one is selected, all different manifestations can be included in it. Bull, Diamond and Marsh (2000) return to Dahlerup's 1986 definition of feminism, according to which feminism refers to "the ideologies, activities and politics with the purpose of ending discrimination against women and breaking male domination."[4] It is certainly interesting that so recent a publication intended to revise the histories of different feminisms in Europe continues to use a definition from fifteen years ago, when feminism was so different from what it is today. Another definition, one that was formulated in another classic work and widely cited by different theorists, is much more concrete. Delmar (1986) defines a feminist as someone who says that women are discriminated against according to their sex and that because of their sex they have specific needs that are denied and not satisfied and that the satisfaction of these needs requires a radical change, even, according to some, a revolution, in the political, social and economic order (p. 8).

Any of these definitions is valid for a large number of groups in different parts of the world, groups or movements of women or men who are using very different approaches to try and change the situation of women. They are also valid for paradigms that start from segregationist principals and are never recognized as feminist. For this reason, the question as well as the answer to whether something is or is not feminism, can be productive, but can also lead us down a dead end.[5] However, it is interesting to review briefly how academics and/or militants in the field have defined this feminism.

On Arab-Muslim feminism

First and foremost, we must consider the question of vocabulary, since we are now talking about a problem of looking at feminism in an "area" and want to avoid the hasty use of "culture." If we are talking about Islamic feminism, we have to consider that this paradigm would include Indonesian and Egyptian feminisms and a part of Indian feminism and African feminism, all of which do not seem to have much in common.

But Muslim feminism, bibliographically speaking, is usually considered to be a territorial — and not religious — reference, as in the classical concept of

[4] Dahlerup (1986: 6).
[5] See Ramírez Fernández (2004).

culture. We can thus speak of Arab-Muslim feminism. "Arab-Muslim" is usually translated directly into "Middle Easterner". This area would include all the Arab world, plus Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, the diversity of the situations in the area is so large that it does not seem to make sense to use this term, although it continues to be useful for reasons of economy. The issue is that if we talk about Muslim feminism, just like Arab feminism or Arab-Muslim feminism, we have to start from the admission that some sort of cultural area that can be labeled in this way exists. If not, we are inventing something new, an "area," a "culture" over the basis of women's movements without clarifying what "cultural" basis we are referring to. And this is one of the problems with Arab-Muslim feminism: that the existence of a cultural basis that responds to these limits is taken for granted when the limits are nearly always very diffuse. This "taking for granted" becomes axiomatic and it does not solve the problem. However, I think that it is interesting to enter into the different discussions on feminism in areas that already exist and that have been put forward by Arab and Muslim feminist academics themselves, albeit not exclusively, as well as to investigate the idea of the existence of a Muslim-based feminism in the Moroccan context.

With regard to the first point, there are deep disagreements. There are two lines of thought: one that tends to speak of feminism when it comes to classifying women's movements in Islamist groups and the other that denies it. Abou-Bakr (2001) starts from the fact that concern about roles, rights and conditions for women means that it must be placed in a specific cultural context and that feminism is any type of demand that seeks to improve the condition of women. For Moghissi (1999) on the other hand, a religion that supports the hierarchy of gender, such as Islam, cannot be adopted as a basis for fighting for equality and thus cannot be considered capable of feminism. However, the question is also complicated in this case because most Muslims agree that Islam is not an egalitarian religion. For many Arab-Muslim women, both militants in Islamist groups[6] and academics such as Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed specializing in these questions, Islam is an egalitarian religion but has, in its practice, reproduced a gender hierarchy that existed before in Islamicized places.[7]

In my opinion, it is very important to distinguish between, on the one hand, the feminism of groups of Moroccan women who consider themselves feminists, incorporate Arab-Islamic cultural roots at different levels and eventually form a criticism of European feminism, and, on the other hand, a Moroccan Islamist movement that demands the rights of women within an

[6] Some Islamists have a key phrase, which is that the Prophet was the first feminist.

[7] During the beginning of Islam, these authors would say, women enjoyed a freedom that they later lost. For Ahmed, the advantages that women enjoyed in the early days of Islam are the remains of the pre-Islamic period and the first stages of Islam, and for Mernissi, Islam simply does not create inequality, although the latter is generally quite ambiguous.

Islamization of society and an Islamic state. The first, and not just the second as is usually believed, could be situated along the lines of other feminisms termed ethnic.[8] The connection with the Arab and Muslim is not denied by Moroccan feminist groups. Here, studies such as those that Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed have carried out on the early period of Islam infer some processes of reconstruction or searching for feminist figures.

But Islamist women's movements are located in a different place. It is true that here there is an enormous diversity and that many distance themselves from the pattern of "traditional" domesticity in women and demand a greater presence in public life.[9] However, they all begin from an Islamic state or a softer version, from a reislamicization of society and in this environment, they put forward women's rights. It is an expression of demands for women's rights using a religious language and structure.

The two currents, that of feminism with a culturally Arab and/or Muslim root or recognition and that of Islamism are very different. I think that it is interesting to establish the distinction in which the two groups are usually referred to as secularists and Islamists. In this sense, the latter are seen as more committed to this new feminism, that of third wave feminism, which recognizes and assumes cultural diversity. This is the case with Nash (2004), who in a section relating to Islamic feminism in an excellent text on women's movements, does not resolve the ambiguity that figures like Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi put forward with respect to these movements. And this is because, in the end, the so-called secularists have not ceased to recognize this cultural inheritance, which in no way is seen as contradictory to their feminism, but on occasions, is not well understood.

I find some of the discussions coming from research that assumes a reconciliation of views between feminists and Islamists very interesting. This is not the case with militants. In Morocco, Moroccan feminists do not accept these discourses and consider Islamists to be their opponents. For Moroccan feminists, the understanding that is extolled by authors such as Nash (2004) or Badran and Cooke (2004), is impossible by definition. Nor would they advocate other theses, such as that of Maumoon (1999), for whom the Islamic revival, despite the emphasis on traditional aspects found in some of its manifestations, has supposedly increased feminist consciousness in Muslim women. Furthermore, a Muslim state is irreconcilable with the type of country and type of society in which these feminists want to live.

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[8] However, the use of the name, which I have used, can also reproduce the cultural imperialism that it is trying to check. And it would mean that the other feminism, European feminism, is not ethnic, but "general," "universal" as if no specific cultural roots existed. It is the same when ethnic minorities are used for Gypsies or Moroccans and not for Germans or English, for example. And this can also be applied to ethnic music, ethnic food or even ethnic commerce.

[9] See Hatem (1994), which includes an analysis of different Islamic discourses.

However, feminist women in Morocco have taken up different cultural and even religious arguments so that their discourse is heard and considered legitimate and not a threat to the social fabric. Mernissi (1988) explains this when she says that to speak of feminism and to speak of women is sufficient to be accused of going against their cultural heritage. Al-Jibali (2003), for example, says that there is no reason to be afraid of using religious arguments to speak about women's rights and that the fight for women's rights requires a new social and religious approximation. Is this Islamic feminism? Well, the editors of the volume that includes the interview with Al-Jibali (Badran and Cooke *op. cit.*) believe so. But in many cases, the incorporation of the religious argument in the discourses of feminists can be a strategic element for fighting for the rights of women. This is what seems to be happening in the Argumentaire (Réseau de Soutien 2000), where Moroccan feminists "use" Islam to show that their demands do not break with any religious conventions. But this in no manner means that the demands of Moroccan feminists are laid out within a religious framework. In the case of Morocco, it is therefore important to recognize that feminists are not demanding their feminism or their militancy within a specific Arab model, or a Muslim one, although some academics put special emphasis on the Islamic referent of Moroccan feminists.[10] In the case of Moroccan Islamists, however, the framework is very different. They are trying to reinstate the fight for women's rights in the religious framework, which to them is legitimate. And this is the difference. But on a daily basis, the divisions are not so sharp in the models of women and ideology that they are trying to transmit. In the next section, I will comment briefly on these questions.

Islamist associationsim in Morocco

The distinction between the two types of movements, feminism and women within Islamist movements, is consequently not sufficient to analyze what is happening in Morocco with regard to women's movements. As I mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, the local context is fundamental for the ideological definition, which also leads to significant differences from the point of view of the concept of gender between the two main Islamic groups.

There are two women's movements with Muslim roots in Morocco, which are contained within two political movements and have until now been totally dependent on them: Insaf, which depends on Adl ua al Ihsán (Justice and Spirituality Movement), and Orcofe[11] – (Organization for the Renovation of Women's Consciousness), which depends on the PJD (Justice and Development

[10] Interview with Mohamed Darif. Casablanca, October, 2003.
[11] The acronym is mine, intended for easier reading. I used it in Ramírez Fernández (2004)

Party). Moroccan feminists absolutely reject the idea that these groups of women should be called feminists. However, the first of these groups, Insaf, as we will see below, uses this term with connection to their religious roots. It is therefore interesting not to find a final answer, a "yes" or "no" to the question of feminism, but to investigate the relationships between both groups in Morocco and the interactions of their models for women.

I would like to propose that the two Islamist associations in Morocco provide a valid working paradigm that makes it possible to compare two of the trends that exist today in some Arab-Muslim countries in the definition of the relationship between feminism and Islamism. I believe that one of them, Orcofe, represents a vision more associated with the practice of continuing the division of roles in the society between men and women which does not imply a revision of this question up to now while the second, Insaf, implies a reinterpretation and a repositioning of the contents.

The first association that I am going to discuss is Orcofe. It is linked to the PJD, which is an Islamist party that combines several trends and is represented in parliament. Orcofe was formed in 1997 and is officially independent of the party. However, its president is a member of parliament and its most notable members are militants. Orcofe's members do not stray from the party line about women. In fact, the president of the association speaks of women in the name of the party. The association and the party share one discourse with respect to women. In general, they do not propose great changes with respect to the current situation, but rather, according to Del Olmo (2000), they want to stimulate a renewed women's consciousness via a revision of legal documents with the goal of "preserving the identity of our society and the dignity of its members" (*op. cit*: 53.). It is important to add that this party is not very different from the nationalist Moroccan party, Istiqlal, in their thinking with respect to women, although their form of action against the feminist movement, for example, has been much more virulent (Tozy 1999).

The other women's movement is called Insaf, and belongs, as already mentioned, to Adl ua al Ihsán. As an association, Al Adl has an irregular but not illegal status. This irregularity, however, is politically capitalized on by the organization, which reinforces its principal feature: frontal opposition to the regime. This group not only refuses to participate in the political game, but also raises doubts about the most important factor of its legitimacy, the sanguinary nature of the monarchy.

Orcofe-PJD, whose militant members do not call themselves feminists, share a model of women and family with other traditionalist Moroccan currents that are not identified as Islamist.[12] Coherent with the position that they maintained during the discussion of the Plan of Action for the Integration of

[12] Interview with a leader, October 2003.

Women in Development, they hold a model of the family associated with what is "traditional" in Morocco and represented by the old family law, the Moudawana, inspired by Islam and changed in 2003: the requirement that a woman must have the legal approval of a guardian in order to marry, authorization for women aged fifteen to marry and the maintenance of polygamy.[13] They showed themselves to be more reluctant to answer positively the question about the legal subordination of women within marriage. In the Arab media they appeared to have fewer problems defending some questions.[14] Polygamy was accepted as written in the Koran. The only condition for polygamy is that, as stated in the Koran, the spouse must treat his wives equally without making distinctions. The defense and acceptance of the current state of affairs could be based on the acceptance of certain family models like polygamy in the life of one of the organization's leaders. They emphasize the role of women as the bastions of the family.

Insaf has adopted certain terms such as Islamist feminism, citizenship and emancipation. This is despite the fact that a spokesperson for the movement has recognized that feminism belongs to another tradition that is not innate to Morocco. He justifies its use in the interest of "understanding" on the part of the western public, without forgetting, in this case, that Al Adl ua al Ihsán "market" is foreign and that this is a form of protection.[15] First, they must confront a state that considers them to be radicals. Second, they must confront international public opinion that sees the subordination of women as one of its weakest and easiest to criticize flanks.

Insaf speaks of the emancipation of women through education. Here, a distinction must be made between the individual or private sphere and the broader sphere of rights and responsibilities within the framework of a hypothetical state governed by the movement. In the private sphere, Insaf defends the education of women as an important basis for their model. They also support the egalitarian implication of men and women in family and professional obligations. However, their idea of the model of rights and responsibilities of men and women as citizens remains to be defined. They do not clearly commit themselves to an equal model of rights and responsibilities. They mention a "complementariness" in the roles of men and women instead of the full equality demanded by feminists. This complementariness is neither fully explained nor fully planned. However, some texts by notable militants (Bahraoui 2003) mention

[13] This plan, under the auspices of the World Bank and worked out in the Moroccan government, contemplated in 1999 a series of reforms that had as their objective ending the instability that characterized the lives of women in Morocco, including in the legal sphere. This Plan, especially in the aspect of legal reform, revealed a fracture in Moroccan society, represented by different visions of the role that Islam should have in social and political life. And this occured around the legal aspect because it implied, for many, a change in the Islamic base of the regulations of the law regarding the family.

[14] Interview with Basima Hakaoui, *As-sabah*, October 15, 2003, p. 2.

[15] Nadia Yassine. Public conference, Granada, January, 2004.

the equality of rights and responsibilities between men and women that existed in the times of the Prophet Muhammad, the model of society that Al Adl ua al Ihsán aspires to. Further, this gender model will only be put into practice in an Islamic state and will happen peacefully after an educational process of the Moroccan people to which the movement is fully committed. They start from the premise that rights and responsibilities will be assumed by the community of believers as an act of moral responsibility and that courts will hardly be needed in a sort of spiritually-based anarchism.[16] In these conditions, the women's project is placed within a utopian framework and becomes equally utopian. What kind of project supposes that polygamy, to give an example, will only occur in exceptional circumstances and when the husband considers he can treat both with absolute justice? Insaf works with women in neighbourhoods, it teaches them, speaks to them about equality and rights and gives them a religious education. On the political level (affecting policies), however, it is not active, apart from statements to the media.

In this sense, if Insaf's project is stripped of its political project and is put in terms of gender models for Moroccan women, it can be considered to be not very distant from the classic patterns of emancipation. Its project is to "islamicize modernity" — and I take that phrase from a book by the movement's spiritual leader[17] — to islamicize society, but with a clear objective: to end up with a Muslim society with a legitimate state that emanates from this society, as they declare was the case in the early days of Islam. For Orcofe, however, it is different. They do not have this islamicization or this educational project in mind, and their function seems to be, from this point of view, to ensure that Islam is present in social life. Their main tool is not education, as with Adl ua al Ihsán, but political participation in parliament, although they also encourage the associative panorama. Their gender model is closer to that which we might associate with the "traditional" one: division of roles and acceptance of the basic points of the political and social system. In both cases, the connection that the leaders establish with "the Moroccan case" by using nationalism that links Islam to the country is interesting. They distance themselves from the influence of Saudi Arabia as well as Europe and North America, and present themselves as a more authentic movement than the others. In both cases, these are women's movements that are dependent on a political project and do not seem to be autonomous in this respect. This has been a constant in the history of Moroccan feminist movements as well.[18]

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[16] Interview with Nadia Yassine, October, 2003

[17] This is the title of a text by Yassine, published in 1998 in Morocco by Al Ofok and translated into English in 2000 with the title, *Winning the Modern World for Islam.*

[18] For a history of social movements in general in Morocco with an interesting history of the timeline of feminism, see Feliu i Martínez (2004)

By way of a conclusion

My article reviews the conceptual and methodological framework of this research. I have tried to respond to some relativist visions that assume the authenticity of different women's movements outside Europe and North America on the basis of cultural issues that are specific to these areas. If the term Arab-Muslim feminism is allowed, it recognizes the existence of a cultural area with this label and this would form the basis of these women's movements. Something similar happens with the term Third World feminism, as the opposite of classic white European and North American feminism.

The key for working with different movements is the local and national context and how it falls into an international context, including the academic one. I think that, similarly with other topics, referring to the Arab-Muslim world must serve as the backdrop but never the starting point. In this sense, ethnography becomes the obligatory route for studying these processes and does not exclude analysis of the discourses and writings of militants, which are very important in political movements.

From the point of view of ethnography, the first results reveal involvement in movements as a new form of agency for Moroccan women, a discussion that is not developed in this article, but one that is part of the research. Furthermore, the importance of international migration in the case of Morocco adds one more element to the configuration of belonging to these groups. The reconstruction of Muslim associationalism beyond the borders of the country and the existence of new situations for immigrant men and women present a considerable number of goals for the research, because they introduce a fundamental variation in the elements women grapple with in these forms of agency. The combination of this framework and that of transnationalism provides new keys for interpreting what is already consolidated in reality.

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OUTROS FEMINISMOS? ASSOCIAÇÕES MUÇULMANAS E PARTICIPAÇÃO FEMININA EM MARROCOS

Este ensaio debate alguns movimentos femininos em Marrocos. Através da análise das posições adoptadas por grupos islâmicos e feministas sobre a construção da "condição de mulher" no seu seio, o artigo procura demonstrar como o modelo dicotómico (islamistas contra feministas) é redutor para a explicação destes processos. Neste sentido, através da etnografia é possível elaborar aproximações mais complexificadas ao tópico em questão.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: movimentos femininos, associações islamistas, feminismo, Marrocos.