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Female religious agents in Morocco: Old practices and new perspectives

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Chapter Six: Moroccan Feminist Activists' Reception of Historical Women Saints

Do historical women saints arouse the interest of activists in Morocco's current women movements? This chapter discusses this question, and it consists of five sections. In the first section, I will give a brief historical review of Moroccan feminism emphasizing its evolution in the pre-independence and post-independence periods. The second section will focus on current women organisations in Morocco, especially on three Islamist organisations – al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, al-‘Adāla wa al-Tanmiya and Muntadā al-Zahrā’ - and their different objectives, strategies and activities. This section questions whether these Islamist organisations can be seen as part of the Moroccan feminist movement. The third section will discuss the way the selected Moroccan Islamist associations draw on exemplary women in Islamic history so as to underpin their debate on women's rights. A fourth section, focuses on Moroccan Islamist feminists' reception of historical women saints. Some secular feminists are interviewed as well, but mainly the Islamist activists' points of view come to the fore, because of their embeddedness in Islam. Here I will conclude that they receive historical women saints as means of empowerment and as role models. In a final section, draw from my interviews so as to evaluate whether the three Islamist associations do belong to Moroccan feminism.

6-1 History of Moroccan Feminism

Moroccan feminism today is a compilation of several elements; basically; it is the encounter of indigenous Moroccan culture and civilization with Western culture.⁴⁶⁰ It is linked to the nationalist movement, processes of modernization and development, as well as to Morocco's cultural heritage, thus involving tensions between secular and religious tendencies. The birth of the feminist movement dates back to the late fifties after the independence. However, gender inequality had already been acknowledged by nationalist organizations during colonial times. My discussion of Moroccan feminism therefore entails a brief investigation of the historical context in which women organizations and feminist thought emerged and developed.

⁴⁶⁰ Sadiqi 2003, 20

6-1.1 The Beginning of the Women's Movement

In Morocco, the origins of the women's movement were closely linked to the rise of nationalism. Since women participated in the nationalist movement against French imperialism, they soon moved beyond traditional gender roles. They attended schools with men and broke out of their seclusion to participate in associations and political parties. These female nationalists, like Mālika al-Fāsī resisted the colonizer and at the same time challenged the traditional values and ideas that oppressed women. The nationalists “advocated the liberation of women in the name of Islam’s triumph, not in the name of any genuine modern global ideology.”⁴⁶¹ They sought equality between the sexes and women’s emancipation while simultaneously referring to their Arab Muslim identity.

Through contact with the West via colonization, as well as education and the pioneering discussions by Arab intellectuals on women’s issues, Moroccan nationalists opposed the subordinated position of women in society. They were influenced by the Egyptians Rifā`a Rāfi` al-Tahtāwī, who claimed that women should have access to education in his *The Honest Guide for Education of girls and boys* (1873); Qāsim Amīn, who insisted on women’s liberation in his famous work, *The Liberation of Women* (1992); and Hudā al-Sha`rāwī, author of *The Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1987), who famously removed her veil, in 1923, upon her return from an international women’s conference in Paris, and who fought for women’s right to vote.

Moroccan nationalists asked for the liberation of women and their participation in different domains. Women’s liberation was further emphasized during the 1940’s with the emergence of three separate women associations headed by nationalists. These three associations were La Commission des Femmes (1940), L’Union des Femmes du Maroc (1944), and Sisters of Purity (1944). Whether liberal or more conservative, they all based their ideology on social reform, directed against so-called superstition, including the non-orthodox cults surrounding holy men and women and other traditions.

The first demand of the nationalists was the education of girls. In the 1930’s, ‘Allāl al-Fāsī and other nationalists had already stressed the necessity of educating girls, considering it an effective tool to fight ignorance within society.⁴⁶² They urged parents to send their girls to schools, but the majority refused out of fear that their girls would be influenced by Western values. Consequently, girls’ schools, which focused on Arabic, Islam and nationalism, were

⁴⁶¹ Mernissi 1987, 8

⁴⁶² ‘Allāl al-Fāsī is a nationalist and the founder of the political party, al-Istiqlāl.

created. Ibn Jallūn (1948) sheds light on the history of some women who were given the opportunity to study in the West, usually in France, in order to make them active members in their own society.⁴⁶³

The intellectuals' efforts effectively contributed to the progress of female education during colonialism despite the barriers that limited it. It was not affected by the conservative claim that depicted educated women as immoral.⁴⁶⁴ With Morocco's independence in 1956, many girls started to go to school.⁴⁶⁵ Women also gained access to work. A few years later, they won the right to vote in the first parliamentary election in 1962. Some women's welfare organizations were led by nationalist women who had been active in the earlier women organizations.⁴⁶⁶

6-1.2 The Feminist Movement in Post-Independent Morocco

During the decades after the independence many women, who were members of associations created by men, increasingly felt marginalized. This experience made a number of these women become members of separate associations where the interest of women was taken up. Some of the associations that emerged in the 1980's were the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM), the Union for Women's Action (UAF) and the Moroccan Association for Women's Rights (AMDF).

These new women associations were representatives of secular feminism, a "modern trend, which seeks to improve the situation of women by adopting the Western style without discarding Moroccan religious culture."⁴⁶⁷ Their major demands were the achievement of parity (al-Munāṣafa) in all the domains of society and the elimination of sexual harassment and violence against women.

Secular feminism in Morocco soon got a religious counterpart. Islamist women organisations emerged in the late 1980's and the beginning of 1990's. Although the Islamist women organisations likewise emphasized women's and girls' education, they put primary focus on the protection of the family, which is "society in miniature." Their aim was the improvement of women's conditions within the scope of Islamic principles. Like the secular

⁴⁶³ Ibn jallūn 1948, 165

⁴⁶⁴ Daoud 1999, 225

⁴⁶⁵ Mouaid 2000, 181

⁴⁶⁶ Benadada 1999

⁴⁶⁷ Sadiqi 2003, 195

feminists, they asked for changes in the Mudawwana, the personal status code, as codified in 1957.

6-1.3 Legal Reforms

Just before Morocco's independence, the nationalist leader 'Allāl al-Fāsī had criticized the family law and proposed its reform in order to strengthen the position of women inside and outside the home.⁴⁶⁸ However, his reform suggestions were not taken into account in the 1957 codification of the Mudawwana.

The Mudawwana, based on Malikite rite, treated women throughout their lives as inferior entities. It obliged wives to unconditionally submit to and respect their husbands and their close relatives; it permitted polygamy, gave the right of divorce pre-dominantly to men and implied that the sexes were complementary rather than equal. The Mudawwana, instead of solving problems, inevitably contributed to the creation of extra conflicts and tensions.⁴⁶⁹ It described the personal status code as "a code that...dutifully respects the seventh century Shari 'a." Mernissi (1987), however, asserts that the Mudawwana is a transposition of *Al-Muwatta'* -a book about law written by the founder of the Malikite Law School Anas ibn Mālik - and the earlier Moroccan Code de Statue Personnel.⁴⁷⁰

After many years of debate to change this personal status code in favor of women, the late King Hasan II created a committee of religious scholars and judges, which was marked by the absence of women.⁴⁷¹ In 1993, he announced new reforms, which included some changes for women. Feminist associations and activists were, however, unsatisfied since they argued that it still left women in subordinate positions. The 1993 Mudawwana did not bring any essential changes concerning, for instance, polygamy and divorce.

By the ascent of Muḥammad VI to the throne in 1999, the demand for changing some articles of the Mudawwana re-emerged. The National Plan of Action, a plan that was introduced by the Ministry of Social and Economic Affairs to enhance women's development, was launched in March 2000. It seemed to split Moroccan society between, on the one hand, adherers of international feminist views, and those of Islamic perspectives on the other hand. Secular feminists, including Said Sa'adi, Latifa Jbabdi and Amīna Lamrini, supported the Plan

⁴⁶⁸ Among the reforms, 'Allāl al-Fāsī proposed a complete abolition of polygamy and the institution of a Wali, the guardian or the tutor

⁴⁶⁹ Mernissi 1987, 12

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 24

⁴⁷¹ Sadiqi 2003, 28

of Action, so as to bring in line the Mudawwana with international conventions. Islamist activists such as Aḥmad Raysūnī, Bāssima al-Ḥaqqāwī and Jamīla Muṣallī refused the Plan of Action, arguing that it had no Islamic reference. Two years later, the King appointed a committee in which three women participated. Soon after, in 2004, the Mudawwana was reformed on the basis of Shari‘a as well as on the universal human rights declarations.

The new reforms are briefly summarized in the following points. The two spouses are responsible for the household. They have similar rights and obligations. The minimal age of marriage is eighteen years old. A woman can marry herself with or without a tutor. Polygamy is restricted. The principle of divorce should be conducted by judicial supervision, and a woman has the right to ask for a divorce. Women have the right of custody. The minimum age for children, both girls and boys, to choose a custodian is the age of fifteen. A woman can transmit her citizenship to her children.⁴⁷²

Thanks to these reforms, the Moroccan woman has become the most legally emancipated woman in the Arab world.⁴⁷³ When Muḥammad VI became king, women’s political situation was marked by several other changes. For decades after independence, women had never held key political positions. Still, in June 1990 the Minister of Islamic Affairs had declared on TV that women could not assume political responsibilities in Morocco, which provoked the rage of feminist associations and human rights organizations.⁴⁷⁴ In 2000, apart from instigating the Plan of Action, King Muḥammad VI appointed a female royal advisor; a woman as the head the National Office of Oil Research and Exploitation; a female secretary of state and a woman as head of the National Office of Tourism. In the elections of September 2002, thirty women were elected in parliament. Recently their numbers have increased: more than fifty women are members of Parliament due to the ‘national list’ of women candidates that was recently instigated by the government so as to ensure the presence of women in parliament. In what follows I focus on Morocco’s current women organizations.

⁴⁷² For more details on the new reforms, see Harrak 2009

⁴⁷³ For many Moroccan activists the Mudawwana has not reached its perfect state though. The same applies to other codes of law. For example, Moroccan feminists have called for changes to criminal laws, including a statute that lets a rapist avoid punishment if he marries his victim, the so called law article 475. At the end of 2012 the Ministry of Justice promised to make the demanded changes.

⁴⁷⁴ Daoud 1999, 320

6-2 Islamist Women Associations

Morocco's current women organizations know two main strands: secular one and an Islamic one. The latter mainly consists of Islamist women organisations with Islamism being the political strand of Islam, which presumes that Islam should not only guide personal life, but social and political life as well.

The liberal feminist movement calls for gender equality, social justice, and the elimination of unequal power relations between the two sexes. It advocates universal human rights, and is enhanced by the state, political parties and civil society.⁴⁷⁵ However, Moroccan liberal feminism, as we will see below also integrates elements from Islamic culture, like Mernissi did from the beginning.

The Islamist women organizations advocate the return to the Shari 'a in their debate on women's rights. They call for the study of Islam to improve women's position. Their aims are gender equity and social justice grounded in an Islamic framework. For that purpose they advocate a true understanding of the Qur'an and Hadith to free Islamic religion from patriarchal ideologies and misunderstandings.

Dialmy (no date) discusses to what extent feminism and Islam are reconciled in current Moroccan women organizations.⁴⁷⁶ He distinguishes between two major strands in this respect, namely between, Islamic feminism and Islamist points of views regarding women's position. (By the way, the term Islamic feminism was coined by the feminist theoreticians Margot Badran (2007) and Ziba Mir Hosseini (2004)). According to Dialmy, Islamic feminists advocate women's rights within the context of Islam. It stresses the use of Ijtihād to achieve gender equality and the equal rights of men and women. Islamism on the other hand is a movement which stresses that men and women are not equal but different by nature: they use the notions of complementarity and equity instead of equality. The biological and natural differences between men and women make them play different roles and have different rights. Dialmy contends that Islamists do not reinterpret the Qur'an from a modern social perspective. As we have seen in Chapter Two, the latter is exactly the aim of authors such as Aḥmad (1989), Wadūd (1992) and Barlas (2004), who argue that so as to do justice to the 'egalitarian ethical Spirit' of the Qur'an, social change should be taken into consideration, which necessitates a revision of Islamic law.

⁴⁷⁵ Sadiqi 2003, 32

⁴⁷⁶ Dialmy (no date)

The Islamists argue that the correct application of women's rights as specified in the Quranic text suffices for women to be respected and guarantees them a just treatment, which corresponds with their interests. Dialmy (n.d.) sums up where the Islamists consider equal rights between women and men not applicable: namely where it concerns inheritance, polygamy, tutorship in marriage, as well as the right to marry a non-Muslim.

Dialmy distinguishes between three strands of Islamisms in Morocco. The first is radical Islamism which emerged in the 1990s, and which has a fierce hatred against the independent woman and against women's participation in public life. The second is a "semi-integrated" Islamism, such as is the association "Justice and Charity" (al-'Adl wa Ihsān), with its women section (al-Qiṭā' al-Nisā'ī), which considers gender injustice due to people's distance from the sources of the Islam the Qur'an and Sunna. It calls for an equitable society, where men's and women's roles are complementary. "L'Islamisme intégré" constitutes the third aspect of Moroccan political Islam, such as represented by the PJD, The Justice and Development Party. According to Dialmy, however, all three strands are antifeminist due to their emphasis on complementarity and equity instead of equality, which he characterizes as "l'anti-féminisme de l'Islamisme." He contends that:

l'islamisme ne peut pas être féministe dans la mesure
ou il refuse l'égalité des sexes et lui substitue la notion
d'équité. Pour l'islam politique, la différence
biologique induit la différence des droits.⁴⁷⁷

Only an Islamic perspective that aspires for gender equality, based on ijtihād and a reinterpretation of the Qur'anic text from a modern social approach, can reconcile Islam and feminism. For this, Dialmy proposes that feminism must be the point of departure and arrival, the primary reference and ultimate objective.

Departing from the above presumptions and much to my surprise, my research on the different Islamist associations on their reception of female saints included other findings. From my fieldwork on three Islamist women associations in Morocco, I came to other conclusions than Dialmy's; namely, that Islamism in Morocco is a movement that contains modern voices, to the extent that the Islamist women organisations can be considered part of the feminist movement in Morocco. Danish researcher Julie Pruzan-Jorgensen (2010), supports my findings in her study of Moroccan Islamists feminist associations, albeit tentatively. She asks

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

what precisely is the impact of the new Islamist women's activism in Morocco? Is it simply a new way of religiously sanctioning female submission, or does it profoundly challenge existing gender roles and offer new egalitarian visions? It is difficult to comprehend fully and thus categorize the significance of these different actors with respect to women's rights and empowerment more generally, as these aspirations fall in between, or may be rather beyond the liberal/secular vs. Islamist divide.⁴⁷⁸

Another researcher, Zakia Salime, points in her study *Between Feminism and Islam: Human Rights and Sharia Law in Morocco* (2011) to "some arenas where the feminist and the Islamist women's movement are now overlapping".⁴⁷⁹ In what follows these issues will come to the fore, through my discussion— based on my interviews with female Moroccan Islamists— of three Islamist women associations and their views on women in Islamic history in general and women saints in particular.

The informants I have selected and interviewed are representatives of their Islamist organizations. Five out of these ten Islamist activists are the official spokespersons of their associations. The latter are Nadia Yāssīne, the leader of the women's section of the association 'Adl wa al-Ihsān; Bāsima al-Ḥaqqāwī, head of the PJD women's organization as well as of ORWA (Organization of Renewal of Women's Awareness), and member of the government as head of the Ministry of Family and Women's Issues; Jamila Muṣālī, the leader of Wi'am Association and a member of PJD and of Muntadā Zahrā' (Forum al-Zahrā'); Butayna al-Qarurī, the president of Muntadā Zahrā'; Khadīja Mufīd is the leader of Hiḍn Association.

The other Islamist activists I interviewed are Aziza al-Baqqalī, a member of Parliament and a member of both Muntadā Zahrā' and ORWA; Raja Naji Mekkaoui, a representative of Karama Association, one of the associations affiliated to Muntadā Zahrā'; Soumayya ben Khaldun, the ex-president of Muntadā Zahrā' and a member of PJD and Muntadā Zahrā'; Malika Bou'nānī, a member of Muntadā; and finally Na'īma Oughanīm, a representative of 'Adl wa al-Ihsān. I have also chosen these activists because they are highly educated and active in academia as well as in politics.

⁴⁷⁸ Pruzan-Jorgensen 2010, 18

⁴⁷⁹ Salime 2011, xxx

It took some time, and many phone calls, to actually interview these ten Islamist activists. All the informants support the programs and written manifests of their organizations. I did not come across significant differences between their answers to the questions I posed them and the written documents and published papers on women's and family issues of their associations, as discussed below.

In the following section we will have a look at the Islamist associations that constitute the mouthpiece of the Islamist movement in Morocco. These are al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān (Justice and Spirituality), al-‘Adāla wa-l-Tanmiya (Justice and Development, PJD), which both have political orientations and the non-political Islamist association Muntadā al-Zahrā’. Most of the Islamist women affiliated with these Islamist associations enjoy high levels of education, and most of them have a PhD-degree in Islamic or non-Islamic sciences. Some of them are also members of political parties and of Parliament. The female Islamist activists who gained a seat in Parliament were not elected on regular terms, but were elected through the national list mentioned before.

6-2.1 Al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān

Al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān constitutes the largest Islamist jamā‘a in Morocco. Founded in 1983 by the late ‘Abd al-Salām Yāssīne, a charismatic leader and member of the Būtshīshī Sufī order before his politicization, it is a Sufi-inspired organization.⁴⁸⁰ As an Islamist party, al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān practices grassroots politics in a large network of charities and associations spread across Morocco and Europe as well as at the level of Morocco's civil society. The party also seeks to promote concrete social changes. It rejects the monarchy and strives towards a republican political system. Therefore it is not approved of by the Moroccan authorities. Contrary to the legalist Justice and Development Party, al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān it thus has not been allowed to transform itself into an official political party, nor partake part in Moroccan government.⁴⁸¹

Al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān's women's section constitutes an energetic force within the jamā‘a since its founding in the beginning. It has been headed by Nadia Yāssīne, holder of a BA in political sciences and daughter of ‘Abd al-Salām Yāssīne. The number of women affiliated with al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān exceeds 30% of all activists affiliated with the three

⁴⁸⁰ Sufi influences are still felt in this orthodox Islamist movement, for example in the recitation of wīrd's, religious poetic texts remembering God, thus resembling the mystical dhikr.

⁴⁸¹ An activist from al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, interviews, September 2011

associations. The women members have different levels of education, including BAs, MAs, and PhDs in a variety of fields.

Although the women's section is given priority on the agenda of al-`Adl wa al-Iḥsān, most of these women have played a symbolic role in its overall organization. In addition to their activism in the association, they hold regular employment positions. Among them are medical doctors, scientists, university teachers and government employees. Most of them are married, but some are single. Thus, many combine marriage and motherhood with participation in activism and in society as a whole.⁴⁸²

Al-`Adl wa al-Iḥsān's women's section pursues several objectives. The education of women constitutes the major one. The Islamists teach illiterate women not only to read and write, but they also teach them religion and Islamic studies. Al `Adl wa al-Iḥsān views women as the core of familial and societal development. According to most of its activists, ignorant mothers produce ignorant children, and ignorant children become ignorant adults and citizens. In this way, society remains underdeveloped.⁴⁸³ The association also seeks the fulfillment of justice for women, be they victims of violence, the unemployed, economically underprivileged or the uneducated. An activist in al-Jamā`a explains:

To achieve a successful education for women, justice is needed. A hungry woman cannot hear our preaching. Thus, a hungry, poor, and illiterate woman cannot respond to our preaching and religious education.⁴⁸⁴

The Islamists of al-`Adl wa al-Iḥsān also seek the re-education of women and their empowerment through a raising of their consciousness. In my interview with Nadia Yāssīne, she emphasized that most women have remained confined within poverty, ignorance and illiteracy, knowing nothing about the rights that Islam has given them. Male dominance, Yāssīne continued, takes women's ignorance and illiteracy as a means to enhance women's oppression and discrimination. For this reason, it is necessary to inform and educate women so that they can become conscious of their situation and of the rights that patriarchy has denied them.⁴⁸⁵

The women's section undertakes different strategies to reach the objectives stated above. A practical approach is helping women in crises, particularly illiterate and poor

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

women, through education projects and financial support. Despite its poor budget, al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, with the assistance of charitable members, finances women’s microprojects, such as wool production, baking and others. An activist says: “Our association is like an ambulance that we use in times of crisis to rescue people and satisfy their needs.”⁴⁸⁶ Another strategy of al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān is to outspokenly criticize different issues concerning Moroccan women’s daily lives, particularly those related to social injustice (such as sex segregation, women’s illiteracy and unemployment). Their aim is to make women conscious of what is going on around them and to sensitize them about the rights that Islam originally bestowed upon them, so as to help them become literate women with economic independence.⁴⁸⁷

Most of the activists in al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān reject Maliki fiqh (jurisprudence). They don’t want to go back to it and refuse to take it into consideration in their debates on the woman question. According to them, Maliki fiqh is the primary cause of Moroccan women’s backwardness, marginalization and oppression. Na‘īma, an activist in al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, says:

Al-fiqh al-Maliki is a traditional fiqh. It puts constraints on women because it failed to take into account women’s point of view in the composition of its texts. Thus, we have come to have a masculine and patriarchal fiqh, which does not reflect the real rights that Islam bestowed on women.⁴⁸⁸

Nādiya Yāssīne considered the Maliki law, on which the old family law code was based, a masculine law. The rights that Islam gave to women are trampled due to the patriarchal interpretation of the foundational texts of Islam. Early marriage, which Māliki fiqh advocated, is a clear example of such a violation of Islamic and human rights.⁴⁸⁹ The activists of al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān also showed a negative reaction to polygamy and divorce that the old Personal Code of Status advocate; they stress that polygamy and divorce of the old family law do not respect the Islamic instructions on polygamy and divorce. Thus, the Islamists contend that al-Fiqh al-Māliki hinders Moroccan women’s emancipation.

6-2.2 Al-‘Adāla wa al-Tanmiya (Justice and Development: PJD)

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

The PJD was founded in the 1990s out of concern for Morocco's Islamic identity, which became increasingly criticized in the current global era. The Islamist activists of the PJD observed that Western styles of life, which to them are in many ways contradictory to Islam, had started to invade Moroccan families negatively affecting them. According to PJD, Morocco's own cultural heritage and identity were severely under pressure.

At the same time, PJD female members began to worry about the oppressive and discriminatory situation facing women. In their opinion, Moroccan women's contemporary situation was characterized by illiteracy, poverty and ignorance. As a consequence, the PJD women's association engaged in activism to defend women's rights in a way that preserves their Islamic identity, while simultaneously being open to global discourses and development.⁴⁹⁰

The PJD women's section is composed of women with high levels of education, including BAs, MAs, and PhDs in different fields. Its agenda deals with women and family issues. The Qur'an and the Sunna constitute the major foundational sources in their debate on women's issues and the gender question. PJD Islamists rely on their own reading of the Qur'an and Hadith, using *ijtihad* (independent judgement) for the implementation of women's rights as described in these sources. Moreover, they explicitly acknowledge the importance of women's participation and input in *ijtihad*. They appreciate *al-Majlis al-'ilmī al-A'lā*, which comes to include *'ālimāt* (female religious scholars) as participants in the process of *ijtihad* and in the implementation of Qur'an and Sunna on women's issues.⁴⁹¹

Most of the PJD activists that I interviewed stressed other sources in dealing with women's questions, such as human rights, that in their opinion conform to Islam. They are thus open to external sources besides the primary sources of Shari'a.⁴⁹²

The PJD association participated in the foundation of the national Moroccan family committee, which opposed the Plan of Action, out of concern for the Moroccan family. It, however, also participated in different conferences and meetings both at the national and international level to promote women's rights, and in the debate over the old Code of Personal Status and the New Family Code, the *Mudawwana*. The PJD is very interested in women's political roles. Female PJD members of Parliament founded a special women section for themselves, which primarily seeks to encourage and empower them to participate in politics and in various political decision making processes.⁴⁹³ In connection with these

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² For more details on the relationship between Islamic law and human rights see Peters 1999.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

aims, PJD members wrote a book entitled *al-Mar'a wa al-Mushāraka al-Siyāsiyya* (Woman and Political Participation).

PJD members also teach illiterate women. They continuously offer courses to fight illiteracy, which are highly appreciated among Moroccan women. In addition to reading, writing and simple math, they teach them different kinds of crafts that can enable them to market their labor and achieve economic independence.

6-2.3 Muntadā al-Zahrā' li-l-Mar'a al-Maghribiya

Muntadā al-Zahrā' is a network of Islamist women associations. It was founded in 2002 by a number of highly educated Islamist women. Some of them hold PhDs in different areas, and others hold BAs in Islamic and other fields. Some of them are members of Parliament, although the network itself is not related to a political party. Others work as medical doctors, university teachers, administrative employees and in other professions. Muntadā is made up of thirty-five associations, which are scattered in different Moroccan regions. There is the association al-Karāma in Tangier, 'Umm al-Banīn in Rashīdiyya, Khumaysa in Meknes and others. Moroccan urban and rural areas have established associations of the Muntadā network to benefit from its agendas. The members I interviewed rely on the sources of Islam, but also refer to universal human rights to underpin their agenda's.

Muntadā was founded for a variety of reasons. The members I interviewed, express their concern about women being victims of oppression, discrimination and ignorance, and about the deterioration of the Moroccan family, which they see as the effect from changes inherent to modern life and the new global era. Ignorant, illiterate and poor mothers are unable to defend their own rights or those of their family members. They cannot direct their own lives or those of their children.⁴⁹⁴

For this reason, Muntadā has engaged in different strategies to achieve a range of purposes. The activists of Muntadā have offered courses to women to combat illiteracy. They have also provided religious lessons to women to teach them about Islam and the rights Islam bestowed on them. Muntadā members stress the importance of teaching women different crafts and professions such as embroidery, baking and other marketable skills. It also offers financial assistance to women affiliated with their network to found economic projects and establish small businesses, or to look for work, with the goal of making them financially independent. Khadīja, a woman who benefited from Muntadā's financial support, said:

⁴⁹⁴ An activist from Muntadā Zahra', interviews, November 2011

Thanks to Muntadā, I learned how to read and write. I also learned the Qur'an by heart. Thanks also to Muntadā, I learned the skills of baking different kinds of bread and cookies... I founded my own project and now I have my own store where I bake and sell bread and cookies.⁴⁹⁵

Muntadā thus promotes women's social, religious and economic independence and empowerment.

In addition, Muntadā has devised the strategy of *ṣulḥ* (reconciliation) in order to support women's judicial cases. It mediates between married couples in conflict so as to achieve reconciliation instead of divorce. According to interviewees, Muntadā receives a great number of couples contemplating divorce. Many oppressed women contact Muntadā for support and help. Reconciliation is also employed to rescue victims of domestic violence. Muntadā's preference for this strategy stems from the desire to perpetuate and proliferate healthy family lifestyles. An activist from Muntadā said:

One day a woman came to me crying and shouting. She asked for help in getting a divorce from her violent husband. After we had begun the legal procedures, she came back and asked me to stop the process because she wanted to return to her husband and her children... We invited her husband to our office, listened to him as we had listened to her, and we reconciled them. We also followed their situation after the reconciliation to ensure the success of our efforts and the continuous safety and well-being of the woman.⁴⁹⁶

Mālika, an activist in Muntadā, said: "We save 70% of the couples we work with from divorce."⁴⁹⁷ According to Mālika, *ṣulḥ* is strongly advocated by the Qur'an.⁴⁹⁸ For this reason, they stress this strategy before offering assistance with divorce.⁴⁹⁹ The Qur'anic method of reconciliation seeks to preserve women's rights as well as the family institution which, in the view of the Muntadā members, constitutes society in miniature. Muntadā's success in saving many families from divorce has come to the attention of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, which started sending Muntadā all the applications it receives from women

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

seeking a divorce.⁵⁰⁰ Muntadā's role has become more important than that of official judicial institutions, as far as it concerns the avoidance of divorce, which engenders dreadful social consequences such as poverty, delinquency and unemployment. Muntadā activists feel that they have found in reconciliation not only a way to develop the reputation of the activism of their network, but also a means to fight the deterioration of society.

Another activity of Muntadā is youth and teenagers' education. The association continuously offers courses to male and female teens to instruct them on religion, and to give them a space where they can talk about private problems and crises. Raḥma, an activist in Muntadā said:

I organize meetings with adolescents and youths to discuss their private problems. Sometimes I meet them in their schools or in youth houses to hear to them talk about the problems they are suffering from. Many issues are related to drugs, sex, and Internet. My aim is to create a relationship with them and teach them how to build a useful relationship, for example, with the Internet, and how to deal with drugs and sex.⁵⁰¹

Muntadā thus functions as a therapeutic and educational center where youths can become informed adults, and women can master their lives more successfully.

6-2.4 Similarities and Differences

Today's Moroccan Islamists associations constitute a heterogeneous group, with different views. Da'wa wa al-Ttablīgh (Preaching and Propagation) is a Salafī movement that was founded in 1975.⁵⁰² It is more radical than 'Adl wa al-Iḥsān towards women's issues, in as far as this organization bases its preaching on the Qur'an, Sunna and the book: *Riyāḍ al-Ṣṣāliḥīn*⁵⁰³ by the Imām al-Nnawawī. It propagates the original Qur'anic rules and religious instructions for men and women in urban and remote rural spaces. This movement has no official journal nor a published program, nor any manuscripts.

Both Da'wa wa al-Ttablīgh and 'Adl wa al-Iḥsān are radical Islamist organisations, whereas, the Islamists of PJD, ORWA, al-Hiḍn Association and Muntadā Zahrā' are

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Tozy 2008, 277-298

⁵⁰³ *Riyāḍ al-Ṣṣāliḥīn* by Shafī'ī scholar Aby Zakariyya Yahya al-Nnawawī is a collection of aḥādīth.

moderate. The Islamists of Da‘wa wa al-Ttablīgh refuse the use of ijtihād, meaning the exertion of conscientious and diligent effort in reinterpreting the primary sources of Islam.⁵⁰⁴

In contrast, ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, PJD, ORWA, al-Hiḍn and Muntada Zahrā’ do advocate the use of ijtihād where it concerns women’s and family rights. They consider the Qur’an and Sunna as the primary sources on family and women’s issues. However, they contend that the Islamic law that regulates women’s and family’s social status, is to be constantly reinterpreted so that Islamic law adapts itself to new social developments. Apart from Da‘wa wa al-Ttablīgh, ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, PJD, ORWA, al-Hiḍn and Muntadā Zahrā’ all Islamist organizations stress, on the one hand, the importance of preserving Islamic sources in dealing with women’s and family issues, and on the other hand the necessity of using ijtihād. On this basis they share a number of guiding principles and programs. The principle cause of women’s oppression to them is not Islam but the patriarchal interpretation of Islam.

The PJD published an article entitled “bayān ḥawla mashrū’ khuṭṭa idmāj al-Mar’a fī al-Ttanmiyya” (1999) (a report on a national plan for integrating women into development) in which its activists stress the importance of using ijtihād in dealing with women’s and family’s situations.⁵⁰⁵ For instance the issues of polygamy, repudiation and tutorship, in the views of the Islamists are to be reformed and are to be put under strict judicial control. The Islamists show satisfaction with these changes that are highly advocated by the new Moudawana because they conform to the Islamic law and preserve women’s and family’s rights.⁵⁰⁶

Rajaa Naji Mekkaoui, an ‘alima and a member of Karama Association that is affiliated to the platform Muntadā Zahrā’, states in her article, ‘munṭalaqāt al-Ttaḥdīt wa al-Ttajdīd: fī ‘ayu Sha’n?’ (2005) that the law regulating family issues has to be changed, while taking the sacredness of the family into consideration.

The Islamists of ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān state that the fiqh has to be changed. In her article *La Jurisprudence musulmane est machiste*’ (2003) Nadia Yāssīne argues that it is necessary to re-interpret the fiqh, which entails a masculine and patriarchal interpretation of Islamic religion, through the process of ijtihād. She stresses the inclusion of women as participants in this process so that women enjoy equal rights as men. In another article entitled ‘Ishrāk al-Mar’a fī al-Ijtiḥād shart fī al-Taghyyīr wa al-Binā’ (2012) (Women’s participation in al-Ijtiḥād is a condition in change and building society), Yāssīne repeats that there is no ijtiḥād without women’s participation.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁴ An Islamist, Interviews, December

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Mufid 2005, 18-19

⁵⁰⁷ Yāssīne 2012

Naji Mekkaoui⁵⁰⁸ also argues, in her article mentioned above, for a continuous change of family law, and for the necessity to adapt it to new social developments while at the same time preserving the Islamic heritage of Morocco.⁵⁰⁹

Aziza al-Baqqālī, an activist of ORWA and Muntadā Forum and a member of Parliament, argues in her article entitled ‘mas’ūliyāt al-Ddawla fī ḥimāyat ḥuqūq al-Ṭīfl,’ (the responsibility of the state in the protection of the child’s rights) (2005) that the old Mudawana discriminated not only against women but against their children as well.⁵¹⁰ She emphasizes that through ijtihād new amendments to the Mudawana should be implemented that preserve Moroccan’s Islamic background and the importance of the family as a social institution and as a space where the rights of its members (father, mother and children) are guaranteed.

In her article ‘mudawanat al-’usra: ’ayyu jadīd?,’ (2005) (The family code: what is new?) the leader of al-Hiḍn Association, Mufīd, stresses the importance of changing the family law through the use of collective scientific ijtihād that includes the views of expert jurists, religious scholars, social scientists, activists and researchers.⁵¹¹ Major issues in this respect are violence against women, sexual violence and early marriages.

The Islamists of Muntadā Zahrā’ seek to highlight the rights Islam gave to women and Islam’s positive image of women. They engage in the construction of women associations and activism to educate and empower women and families. In the book *Dawr al-Mar’a al-’arabiya fī al-Tanmiya al-Mustdāma* (2010) (Arab woman’s role in continuous development) the activists and researchers of Muntadā discuss the necessity of creating a program to enhance women’s education and integration in society.⁵¹² They seek to eliminate women’s illiteracy so that women can fully participate.

In *Şawt al-Muntadā*, a magazine of the Islamist association Muntadā Zahrā’, Butayna al-Qarūrī refers to the progress of its activities. In her article, ‘Shabakatu al-Muntadā ta’rifu taḥassunan naw’iyyan wa kamiyyan,’ (2011) al-Qarūrī contends that Muntadā consists of fifty-four associations. She argues that Muntadā constantly works to improve Moroccan women’s situation, in particular where it concerns the issues of violence against women and their early marriage. Muntadā Forum organizes national and international conferences and meetings to discuss Moroccan women’s positions.

⁵⁰⁸ Naji Mekaoui is a legal scholar and the first woman who presented a religious course in Durus al-Hassaniya.

⁵⁰⁹ Naji Mekkaoui 2005, 53

⁵¹⁰ al-Baqqālī 2005, 129

⁵¹¹ Mufīd 2005, 17

⁵¹² See Muntadā Zahrā’ 2011

Apart from Da‘wa wa al-Tablīgh, all other Islamist organizations thus argue in favor of women’s rights and full participation in society. In their programs, they emphasize that women should have a role in all domains, so not only in the private sphere but also in public life, in politics and in decision-making processes.

Yāssīne argues: ‘our jama‘a encourages women’s participation in political life. We actually have women as members of our majlis al-Shūra (council) and as political decision makers.’ She stresses the importance of women’s education and participation in public life in fighting women’s marginalization.⁵¹³ In *Tanwīr al-Mu‘mināt* (1996) her father, ‘Abd al-Salām Yāssīne, discusses the necessity of women’s religious and modern education and public participation.⁵¹⁴ The book also presents procedures for women’s education, and advice for women to emancipate themselves from the slavery that they lived for centuries, so as to be able to work for God and society.⁵¹⁵

In *mushāraka al-Siyāsiyya li al-Mar‘a bayna al-Wāqi’ wa al-Ma‘mūl*, (2011) (Woman’s political participation: between reality and expectation) Muṣālī discusses the procedures that women should follow to become active participants in public and political life. The obstacles that hinder Moroccan women’s political participation are patriarchal culture and political corruption. Muṣālī proposes several steps towards the integration of women into Moroccan society: first, the revision of social norms, second, the consolidation of democracy and the foundation of citizenship, and finally the strengthening of the legal system of the state in favor of women.⁵¹⁶

In sum, only the radical Islamist organization Da‘wa wa al-Tablīgh refuses ijtihād, concerning family issues and the improvement of women’s positions. The radical organization ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, next to the other, moderate, Islamists, does underline the necessity of ijtihād to improve women’s positions. However, ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān is a more radical Islamist organization, in that it refuses to take into account the Universal Declarations of Human Rights.

Besides addressing Islam, the Islamist activists I interviewed also attend the international norms and regulations on women’s issues, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Not all of the Islamist organizations I interviewed approve of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in toto. Da‘wa wa al-Tablīgh and ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān in particular oppose the use of universal values. In

⁵¹³ Yāssīne 2012

⁵¹⁴ Yāssīne 1996

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Muṣālī 2011, 3-4

contrast, the Islamist organizations PJD, ORWA, al-Hiḍn Association and Muntada stress that it is possible to reconcile their Islamic approach with the international conventions.

As such Morocco and other Arab Muslim countries have put forward certain reservations regarding CEDAW. Article Nine, which deals with the transmission of nationality to children, and Article Sixteen, which concerns the equality of men and women in the marital relationship, are considered to be in contradiction with Islamic religion. However, in 2003 on the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Moroccan king Mohammed the Sixth, however, announced that Morocco retracted its reservations on CEDAW. ‘Our reservations,’ the monarch said, ‘have become obsolete due to the advanced legislation that has been adopted by our country.’⁵¹⁷ The king’s announcement had an impact on society, and stimulated the improvement of women’s rights.⁵¹⁸

Activists of non-governmental organizations and women’s organizations welcomed this progress. In contrast, all the Islamists associations mentioned above are worried about this elimination of reservations, particularly concerning article Sixteen because, in their view, it contradicts Islamic religion.

They argue that the total equality between men and women in terms of *tamātul* (symmetry) that is propagated by CEDAW, is not approved by the *Sharī’a*. These Islamists advocate another kind of equality. Whereas they consider the roles of men and women similar in the public sphere, they conceive of their roles as complementary in the private sphere. Equity instead of equality is the norm here, meaning fairness and justice.⁵¹⁹ Naji Mekkaoui and Mufīd both stress that women and men should live in harmony, cooperation and intimacy, and that no hierarchy or domination should exist in the family.⁵²⁰ Moroccan Islamists thus differ in their appreciation of the international conventions of human rights. The Ulama likewise stress that their attitude towards the reservations won’t be changed.⁵²¹

6-3 Moroccan Activists on Exemplary Women in Islamic History

Another source the three Islamist associations rely on to underpin women’s rights, is the study of Islamic history, so as to uncover the major roles women played in the past.

⁵¹⁷ Touahri 2008

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Burqiyya 2005, 65

⁵²⁰ Naji Mekkaoui 2005, 56; Mufīd 2005, 23

⁵²¹ Touahri 2008

In the colonial era, it was the pioneers of the new Salafist movement - not to be equated with current fundamentalist Salafism - `Allāl al-Fāsī and Ḥasan al-Wazzānī, who appealed for the consideration of women who played outstanding roles in history to support their advocacy of women's rights.⁵²² For example, they invited Moroccans and Muslims in general to take the Prophet's wives as exemplary models. Al-Wazzānī writes:

The Prophet's wives were exemplary models for Muslim women. Hafṣa and Umm Kalthūm were writers, and `Āyisha's position in knowledge is known.⁵²³

Likewise, al-Fāsī refers to the Prophet's wife `Āyisha as the greatest and most important example of a woman who played a crucial role in the history of the Muslim umma. He also points to Umm al-Dardā', who was a muftiya (deliverer of formal legal opinions, fatwa's) in the mosque, and to the fact that the Umayyad sultan, Sulaymān, regularly attended her religion courses. Al-Fāsī also mentions Nafīsa, the knowledgeable woman, whose knowledge impressed Imām al-Shāfi'ī⁵²⁴ and inspired him to continually attend her religious lectures and to become one of her faithful disciples.⁵²⁵

Akhawāt al-Ṣafā, which, as we saw, was one of the women associations of the 1940s, evoked Islamic history to underpin women's right to education and employment. The association explicitly referred to women who played important roles in Islamic history, such as in the companionship of the Prophet.

During the last decade, Islamist activists in the field of women's issues increasingly refer to important Muslim women in history. They rely on Muslim scholars who wrote on these women, such as Abdallāh Ḥalīm Abū Shuqqa, whose book *Taḥrīr al-Mar'a fī 'Aṣr al-Risāla* (Women's Emancipation in the Era of the Revelation) deals with social life in the Prophet's time. In this work women come forward as playing important social, economic and political roles. They are thus presented as exemplary models for women today.⁵²⁶

From my interviews with the members of the three Islamist associations mentioned above, I found that they equally emphasize the significant roles women played in Islamic history. A female activist from al-`Adl wa al-Iḥsān argues:

⁵²² See the section above

⁵²³ al-Wazzānī 1987

⁵²⁴ The leader of the Shāfi'ī school

⁵²⁵ al-Fāsī 2008, 254

⁵²⁶ Abū Chuqqa 1999

In the pre-Islamic era, female infants were buried alive and female adults were sold in the *nakhāsa* (slave trade market). They remained victims of slavery, male oppression and dominance for hundreds of years until the coming of Islam. Islam rescued women and moved them from a state of weakness to a state of power. Islam offered women a place next to men in every domain of life. Our Prophet offered a place to women next to him in the mosque (...). The mosque at that time was not only a space of *‘ibāda* (worship) but a kind of parliament where the political and social affairs of the whole Muslim *umma* were discussed and preserved. Umm Salam, for example, was one of the Prophet’s companions. She always participated in the Prophet’s meetings and was consulted on war matters. *‘Āyisha*, the Prophet’s second wife, was a *muftiya* and political advisor for the entire *umma*. There is a long list of women who played a role in Islamic history. The heroic roles of women are very significant. They impressed the Prophet’s companions, such as *‘Umar*, who said: “We used to consider women nothing”. But women, thanks to Islam, showed the opposite. Thanks to Muhammad’s teachings, we started to have useful women able to participate in the ruling of the whole *umma*.⁵²⁷

Clearly, the activist didn't want to stop her story there. She had mentioned the advanced position of women in the Islamic past to contrast it with their present situation. She bent her head for a while, then she raised her eyes and continued:

One might ask where these exemplary women are? What happened to them? And what makes women today unlike these historical women? We need to go back to history to understand what’s going on with women today (...) It is of course the change of the political system from *shūrā* (consultation) to authoritarian models that worsened women’s situation.⁵²⁸

I interrupted her and asked her what she considered to be the relationship between the dominant political system and the oppressive elements in women’s situation. She replied:

The relationship is that women were forced by authoritarian men to be confined within their private

⁵²⁷ An activist from al-‘Adl wa al-Ihsān, interviews, September 2011

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

spaces so as not to be exposed to the public eye and to the greed of people in power. Women here remained prisoners within their homes. They were prevented from attending schools and mosques to study and participate in the social and political Muslim umma affairs... what was worse is that women became victims of illiteracy, ignorance and poverty. They no longer lived the rights Islam gave them. They remained in this awful situation for years and years until Western colonialism arrived. This was the *ṭamma al-Kubrā* (big disaster). Western ideologies which call for a total freedom that transgresses the limits set by Islamic religion. Women became torn between Western emancipation ideologies and oppressive Maliki instruction. There are women who are impressed by Western ideologies and forget about their religion, and there are others who remained under the oppression of dominant Māliki fiqh (...). To rescue women, we need to reread the Qur'an and the Sunna, and we need to reconsider Islamic history.⁵²⁹

In order to make this strong comparison between the past and the present, the activist from al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān had to know about Islamic history and about the development of women’s positions through time. Historical references make them understand how women became dominated by men, and enable them to argue that Islam doesn’t give any justification for legal and social domination.

Islamist referees do not only refer to women’s role in Arabic and Islamic history in general, they also refer to Moroccan women as discussed by, among others, ‘Allāl al-Fāsī, who in the 1950s had equally pointed to women who played important roles in Moroccan history such as Fāṭima al-Fihriyya, the founder of al-Qarawiyyīn University, and Zaynab al-Nafzāwiyya, the wife of Sultan Idrīs, who played a role in her husband’s political system.⁵³⁰ PJD member al-‘Uthmānī, who took an interest in Morocco’s female cultural heritage, stresses in his writings that the Islamic perception of women, which is based on the Qur’an and the Sunna, derives from three important principles: equality, emancipation and participation. These principles, in the opinion of al-‘Uthmānī, are distinctly displayed by historical Moroccan women.⁵³¹

Muṣalī, a present day PJD Islamist activist, explicitly appreciates both Arab and Moroccan researchers’ writings on women in history, and their desire to understand the

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ al-Fāsī 2008, 95

⁵³¹ al-‘Uthmānī 1998, 13

significance of women's historical roles so as to underpin women's rights. All the historical women concerned refused to be confined to their private spaces, freed themselves from the chains of the patriarchal system and succeeded in creating public personalities.

Female saints hold a more ambiguous position. Although they are part of Moroccan religious history, there is the overall rejection of saint veneration by Islamists. The question then arises as to how Islamist feminists receive Morocco's female saints. (How) do they interpret these devote women's roles in terms of empowerment? Do they use these women as role models?

6-4 Activists' Reception of Moroccan Women Saints as Sources of Empowerment

For reasons explained above, this section mainly concerns the Islamists' reception of Moroccan women saints. I will only occasionally refer to some of my interviews with secular feminists.

Although the Islamist interviewees disapprove of saint veneration because it is not permissible in orthodox Islam, from my interviews it turns out that they approve of the use of Moroccan history and women saints as original sources to inform their debate on women's rights. Many of the Islamist activists I interviewed have a limited knowledge of Moroccan female saints. As one of them explained:

There is a rarity of women in written history. It is man who thinks that religion is his own space and not that of women. Man considers women's religious role secondary and of no importance. In reality, there aren't a lot of references on women saints.⁵³²

I will therefore focus on a more limited group of activists who do have an extensive knowledge of Moroccan women saints. One of them is al-Ḥaqqāwī. She said:

Women saints who attained spiritual and political leadership are a marji'iyā (reference), that emanates from Islamic and Moroccan ethnic backgrounds. These historical women make us consider Moroccan cultural and historical heritage as a further source in our debate on women today.⁵³³

⁵³² An Islamist activist, interviews, October 2011

⁵³³ al-Ḥaqqāwī, interviews, October 2011

She acknowledged the importance of understanding the historical roles of women saints. Modern women should employ this understanding to face the future and to build strong personalities. Otherwise, the status of women will remain underdeveloped.⁵³⁴

However, the relationship between the Islamist activists and women saints is in no way created by pilgrimages since Islamist activists refuse to visit saints' shrines. Some of them said that they did frequent sacred tombs in their childhood. They would go with their mothers and grandmothers to spend the day in the vicinity of their favorite women saints. It is their orthodox religious education that stopped them from following the example of their female family members.⁵³⁵

The Islamists' understanding of baraka, thus, is different from that of the saint venerated we met in the previous chapter. The latter visit women saints and establish a very close relationship with them to gain some of the women saints' baraka. In this way they hope to find answers to their wishes, solutions for the problems and the hardships of modern daily life. Baraka is considered the core impetus of the pilgrims' visits and the rituals they perform within shrines. The Islamists, however, do not believe in women saints as holders of baraka in the sense of blessing power. They reject the pilgrims' understanding of baraka, which defines it as a force for curing the ill, sheltering the homeless, facilitating girls' marriages and other therapeutic services. The Islamists offer another understanding of baraka. Al-Ḥaqqāwī argues:

The baraka of a saint is the knowledge (ma`rifa) and wisdom (ḥikma) that women saints succeeded in acquiring (...). The baraka of a woman saint also encompasses her ability to acquire knowledge that enables her to attain decision making positions.⁵³⁶

Al-Ḥaqqāwī defines baraka not in terms of a divine force that fulfills a particular wish, but rather in terms of the wisdom and knowledge a woman saint succeeds in acquiring and that she passes on. Also, al-Ḥaqqāwī refers to baraka as the abilities and capacities that a woman saint develops to reach fame, power and authority. According to her, baraka, in the sense that pilgrims attribute to it, cannot help a saint (male or female) attain power. The proof is that there are many saints with so-called strong baraka who fail to reach decision-making

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

positions. Thus, al-Ḥaqqāwī acknowledges that baraka is the ability to acquire knowledge and wisdom that enable its holder to impact the public order. Thus, baraka as knowledge and wisdom is highly appreciated in the Islamist feminists' discourses.

Related to the popular notion of baraka is saintly intercession. The Islamist activists have a negative attitude toward such intercession. They disapprove of pilgrims who treat the women saints they visit as intermediaries between them and the Divine. They also disagree with the different rituals pilgrims celebrate around saints, in the hope of meeting the saints' spirits to fulfill their wishes and answer their prayers. The only permitted intercession a believer may consider is the Prophet's. In general, Islam is based on direct worship of God without intercession or mediation.⁵³⁷

However, despite the rejection of intercession by female (or male) saints, and saint veneration as such, Islamist activists respect the saintly female personalities themselves. Most of the activists argue that a feeling of admiration and even of love towards women saints started to rise inside of them when they learned of the stories about their lives and about the heroic role these women played in the past. Although the activists did not visit the saints' shrines to bond directly with them, they felt an emotional bond with them from a distance.

The impact women saints have on Moroccan Islamist activists becomes clear when they describe their relationship with women in history as strong and mutual. Al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān-activists refer in their discourses to women saints in history as their sisters. They establish a relation of sisterhood with the women saints because they share religious doctrinal ties with them and because they will encounter them in the hereafter.⁵³⁸ Na`īma, an activist in the Spirituality and Justice Association, contends: “We refer to the life stories on women saints and historical women so as to establish an emotional bond with them (*rābiṭa ḥamīmiyya*).” In her opinion, the role played by these women in history should be remembered and be present in their daily lives.

Most of the Islamists I interviewed employ a number of terms to designate women saints as role models. These terms are: *fakhr* (honor), *qudwā* (model), *mathal* (example) and the Berber word *tamghārt*, meaning “leader” or “greatest”. The activists used this terminology in their discourses to express their pride, respect and admiration vis-à-vis these historical women saints and their achievement of saintly personalities. When asked about her knowledge of `Azīza al-Saksāwiyya, one respondent said:

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

Well! She is a pride and a model. Let's say a reference. I am interested in the conditions of her life and in the things she did, and what she avoided and what she mastered to achieve her strong personality.⁵³⁹

Most of the interviewees confirmed that they receive historical women saints as great inspirators of empowerment. This empowerment is characterized by a taking up of several different self-techniques of the female saints, or elements of their examples, which the interviewees integrate in their own self-techniques and ethical self-formation.

6-4.1 Ethnic Identities

Islamist activists value Moroccan local cultural heritage with the exception of the ritual of saint veneration. Muntadā Berber Islamists even name their associations after the Berber women saints who belong to their Berber tribes and regions, such as Lalla Zaynab. Likewise, Arab Islamist activists choose names of Arab women saints who are buried in the urban and rural locations of Morocco, for their associations, schools, youth houses and other institutions, such as Khumaysa, Umm al-Banīn. The life stories of female saints inspire activists to revive the cultural heritage as an element of their ethical values, albeit without disregarding modernity. Al-Ḥaqqāwī again says:

I am attached to my Berber origin and to my Islamic country. You might see me always wearing a jellaba (Moroccan traditional garment). But at the same time I am interested in all that is modern. I studied foreign languages, I participate in international conferences, and I have a lot of foreign friends... Thus, I can describe myself not only *aṣīla* (traditional, authentic) but also as *ḥadāthiyya* (modern).⁵⁴⁰

Interestingly, the reappraisal of local cultures doesn't create tensions in the Moroccan Islamist activists' debates on women saints as constituents of their ethnic background. Although their ethnicity is recognized by them, most of the Islamists treat women saints from different ethnicities in a similar manner. According to them, women saints, whether Berber or Arab, are all Muslims and are to be appreciated regardless of their different origins. What is

⁵³⁹ Summaya ben Khaldun, interviews, October 2011

⁵⁴⁰ al-Ḥaqqāwī, Interviews, October 2011

essential to them is the way these historical women achieved sainthood and ethical personalities that marked history. Al-Ḥaqqāwī contends:

What is important is not the Berber or Arab origin of a person, but the fact that these historical women saints independently sought and acquired the knowledge and wisdom that empowered them to experience the public space and to be highly respected and honored by people belonging to different ethnic groups.⁵⁴¹

Thus al-Ḥaqqāwī acknowledges that women saints bridged cultural boundaries and ethnic specificities, and, as such, can empower Islamist feminists today. According to the interviewees, women saints have indeed taught them to appreciate their Moroccan ethnicity and their Islamic background in building their ethical personalities, or ethical self-formation.

6-4.2 Spirituality and Knowledge

The activists are interested in some of the spiritual aspects of historical women's sainthood. They value women saints' abilities to achieve strong piety and the spirituality that enabled them to reach God's closeness. Attaining Divine proximity is not an easy task, al-Ḥaqqāwī asserts. She calls the women saints educators of piety and religion. Women saints were spiritual masters who taught Sufis how to reach the Divine and to become models of women engaged in mysticism so as to achieve pious personalities.

The feminist activists do, however, appreciate women saints' style of achieving great social and knowledgeable personalities more than their strictly pious efforts. Their self-techniques of attaining greatness through education are the most important reasons why activists consider women saints role models.

Some of the activists assert that these women saints' knowledge and education empowered them to become more interested in education. Al-Ḥaqqāwī says:

Lalla `Azīza al-Saksāwiyya's life story is very important to study because it shows how women become educated, wise and knowledgeable. Her education empowers me to think more of my post-graduate studies. I got my master degree in psychiatric sciences, and I am now working on my PhD on the

⁵⁴¹ al-Ḥaqqāwī, Interviews, October 2011

same subject.⁵⁴²

The activists also refer other women to knowledgeable and educated women saints so as to empower them to educate themselves and become knowledgeable too. They are conscious of the phenomenon of illiteracy, which is still high particularly among women (40% of illiterate women in urban spaces and around 60% in rural areas).⁵⁴³ For this reason, feminist activists keep stressing in their discourses the education historical women achieved. They even discuss how many women in history postponed or even challenged traditional early marriages for the sake of the achievement of educated and knowledgeable personalities. In this way Mālīka, an activist of Muntadā, said that she succeeded to convince illiterate mothers to attend her courses. She taught them how to read and write and also how to educate their children and orient their lives. Another activist from UAF also explained illiterate women how their education could help them cultivate the seeds of education and knowledge in themselves and in their children's minds.⁵⁴⁴

Being conscious of the importance of women saints' education, the activists became persuaded by their studies of women in history that more examples of historical women had to be researched and presented in educational centers. The revival of historical women's biographies and life stories is one of these strategies. The Justice and Spirituality Association includes in its agendas the study of forgotten historical female figures. Its members founded a school affiliated with their association called Akhawāt al-Ākhira (Sisters of the Hereafter) where women are continuously studying the archives and oral tradition on women in history.

Similarly, Farīda Zumurrud, an activist and a 'ālīma (a female religious scholar) in the high 'ulama council in Rabat, founded the cultural center Iḥyā' al-Turāth wal-l-Mar'a (Revival of the Heritage and the Woman) in 2010 in Rabat for research on Moroccan women in history. According to Zumurrud, the activist researchers, volunteers and students, in the center are engaged in collecting biographies and life stories mentioned in written history.⁵⁴⁵ Another way the Islamist activists have chosen to keep historical women saints present in the activists' daily lives is the propagation of their biographies on the Internet. The Akhawāt al-Ākhira does this so, and Zumurrud's center is said to soon follow their example so that all people can benefit from the gathered study materials.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Sadiqi 2008, 13

⁵⁴⁴ Mālīka, interviews, November 2011

⁵⁴⁵ Zumurrud, interviews, October 2011

The Islamist feminists also spread information on female saints and other important women in Islamic history via national and international meetings and conferences. Actually, the activists I interviewed continually organize round table meetings and conferences to which they invite specialists in the field to discuss the meaning of women in religious and social history. Seminar titles like 'Ishrāqāt khālida (Eternal lightness) and Nisā' khālidāt (Eternal women) often highlight the historical women as exemplars.

The Akhawāt al-Ākhira-school organizes monthly meetings in which they discuss life stories of women known for their sainthood and piety. The aim of their discussions is, as leader Nādiya Yāssīne puts it, to understand the way these historical women created saintly personalities and lived in a context that enabled them to attain sainthood.⁵⁴⁶ The example of educated historical women saints also encourages women to carry on their higher studies, as is supported by the Akhawāt al-Ākhira school, giving them the opportunity to follow courses in different Islamic sciences. It trained female students and guides their higher studies. Until now it has produced until now one hundred 'ālimāt. All trained women take gender perspectives into consideration.

6-4.3 Transgressing Patriarchal Limits

Islamist activists contend that it was exactly their self-transformation into knowledgeable, spiritual leaders that empowered female saints to challenge the conventional roles that oppress women. From my interviews, the Islamists' positive feelings toward female saints were fed because these historical women created personalities that transgressed the patriarchal order. This was also the case for secular feminists that I interviewed. An activist from ADFM said:

Historical women saints followed the way of piety and Sufism to resist their conventional patriarchal rules and to uncover women's abilities to become not only pious, but also educated, knowledgeable and effective.⁵⁴⁷

Khadija, another liberal activist of the ADFM added that education empowers women to make their voices heard and to change the patriarchal rules and the gender division of labor.⁵⁴⁸

Another activist from UAF asserted:

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ An activist from ADFM, interviews, December 2011

⁵⁴⁸ Khadija, interviews, December 2011

what I admire in these women saints is that they had chosen piety to achieve personalities that serve their environment and resist the dominant system.⁵⁴⁹

In their opinion, these historical women used Sufism as a technique to resist their local patriarchal ideologies that privileged men and discriminated women. Secular feminists thus take on board Morocco's cultural heritage to underpin their feminist struggle for women's rights.

Most of the Islamist activists also said that they wanted to propagate women saints' historical role because it constituted a challenge to the dominant system not only of their time but of any other historical era. They admired the way Moroccan female saints were able to play a role in the private as well as in the public sphere serving as spiritual, social and sometimes even political leaders. One of the activists said: "I insist on education because it will empower women to impose themselves not only in the private space but the public one as well."⁵⁵⁰

Historical Muslim women have shown that women and men should equally participate in all domains of life. The Islamist activists turn out to experience a sense of continuity in relation to them, especially where it concerns these social and political roles especially. Sumāyya Ben Khaldūn argued:

Sainthood is shared among all the Muslims. Each person is able to become a saint. We as activists follow these historical women saints. Let's say we are successors to them in their spiritual, political and social roles. We follow the way these women saints achieved their saintly personalities and we seek to develop them as well. Thus, I see there is no qaṭī'a (cut) with the past.⁵⁵¹

Ben Khaldūn asserts that modern activists can be viewed as successors to the women saints in that they are continuing their social activities. In fact, all activists stressed that activism and voluntary work have their roots in history. Her PJD colleague activist Muṣālī explains that it started with the Jamā'a and Zāwiya, Dar al-Faqīrāt, Dār al-Ma'alima and Dār al-Ḍamāna.⁵⁵² These names cover different religious traditional houses of charity some of which still exist. The Islamist activists consider these religious and social houses as forms of civil society and

⁵⁴⁹ Secular activist, interviews, December 2011

⁵⁵⁰ Islamist activist, interviews, December 2011

⁵⁵¹ Sumayya ben Khaldūn, interviews, October 2011

⁵⁵² Muṣālī, interviews, October 2011

voluntary associations of equals in which the participants (women saints, Sufis and other women) were united by common goals, namely, teaching the Qur'an, education of the Murids, feeding the poor and sheltering the refugees and the homeless. Women at times of crisis were offered help and trained to learn different kinds of crafts. These women saints and Sufis, in the opinion of Ben Khaldūn, could be considered as the pioneers of activism.

We can conclude that Islamist activists are inspired by women saints especially the self-techniques involved in their development into socially and politically active women. The Islamist activists emphasize women saints' social role in the public sphere as a strategy to impact other women to be participants in voluntary associations. Activists organize meetings in which they sensitize other women of the important role historical women played in their times. As a collective group, the Islamist activists seek to influence other women to participate in activism and voluntary associations. The Islamist activist Muṣalī argues this necessity:

Although we have female members in Parliament, different medical doctors, university teachers and other employees, we find that women's presence in voluntary work is very rare. We actually have fifty thousand associations in Morocco among which we have only one thousand women as participants in these associations. This number is of course very weak in comparison to the current Moroccan population. Thus, we are in need of these historical female activists, I mean here women in history, to empower contemporary women to participate in voluntary activism.⁵⁵³

An activist from ADFM affirms:

Women's participation in civil society and voluntary activism is still weak in Morocco. We have very highly educated women, but they refuse to contribute to social activism.⁵⁵⁴

Moroccan activists make reference to exemplary women in history, hoping to impact women to participate in social activism and in the development of today's society. Historical examples should show the way to a modern follow-up. Islamist feminists thus want women

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Activist, interviews, December 2011

to become much more active in public life and society, much like the female saints and other Muslim women in history and like they themselves.

But how does this relate to their views on gender equity and complementarity as normative ideals, instead of as equality? During my interviews I explicitly asked for their opinion on these issues. As we saw before, the Islamists' ideas about complementary roles for the sexes are based on the conviction that men and women are different by nature. They argue that women's hormonal constitution and bodily roles as mothers predispose them to certain emotions and, therefore, to certain preferences in terms of types of work. These are connected to a natural tendency to be passive and in need to be protected by men, who, as a result of their own hormonal constitution, tend to be physically stronger and more aggressive and inclined to take on the role of protecting women.

But from my interviews, I found that most of them stress their approval of gender equality in the public sphere and limit complementarity to the private sphere. Al-Ḥaqqāwī said: "We believe in gender complementarity in the private sphere, but in the public sphere we believe in strict gender equality and parity."⁵⁵⁵ They argue that, in spite of their natural constitution and dispositions, women are able to realize what they need and want in various situations. They can work toward, insist on, and even fight for the right to fulfill these needs and wants. Some of them see no contradiction between women's natural dispositions and the desire to pursue higher education and employment in a variety of areas and at multiple levels. Some believe that holding high-level positions is not incompatible with their natural constitution and dispositions provided they are also able to incorporate their roles as wives and mothers into the lives and lifestyles that such positions demand them to lead.

They don't see a contradiction or incompatibility between being passive and protected in the private sphere and being assertive and strong in the public sphere at the same time. Sāmiya, an Islamist who works as a physical doctor, argued: "I am proud of taking care of my husband, children and the whole family... and I am also proud of my duties in the hospital."⁵⁵⁶ Being assertive and strong has an impact on the way they think and act in general, and enables them to live according to a gendered division in the home, and simultaneously stand up for their rights in the public sphere.

One respondent argued that the perspective of complementarity entails that it is up to women themselves to decide if they want to remain in the private sphere. Women should have

⁵⁵⁵ al-Ḥaqqāwī, interviews, October 2011

⁵⁵⁶ Islamist activist, interviews, November 2011

the choice to go out and enter the public sphere. Their responsibilities at home sometimes demand sacrifices, but it's the other way around as well.

In some cases, some of the men are taking on new responsibilities in the private sphere. They are doing things that they weren't doing before. Some of the efforts of the Islamist activists thus are leading to changes in the attitudes and actions of the men in their lives. Sāmiya says again: "When I came back home, I found my children and my husband having done at least half of the housework". This shows that the Islamists see themselves as promoting change in both the private and public sphere, even though they would reject a principal elimination of gender-based rules and practices. It is therefore difficult to speak in terms of a strict complementarity between the sexes. The Islamist women I talked to are seeking change in the private and the public sphere, and aim to gain access to the latter through education, activism and employment, so as to eliminate oppression and attain equality. In other words, they are seeking to have more say, more control, more power over the conditions of their lives, making them, in that sense, similar to secular feminists.

6-5 Islamist Feminism

In this section I will evaluate from my interviews with members of the three Islamist women associations -which were basically about the role of female saints- whether the Islamists activists do or do not belong to Moroccan feminism. In what follows I will sum up what I have found as the main characteristics of their outlooks.

The first principle stressed by the Islamists I talked to is gender equality. It is seen as inherent to Islam, as is clear from the Qur'anic verse that articulates that man and woman are created from the same soul, and from the Prophet's ḥadith which states that al-Nisā' shaqā'iq al-Rijāl (women are siblings of men). Both references support the idea that men and women's equality is al-Aṣl (the origin or basis) of Islamic law.⁵⁵⁷ Researcher, psychiatrist and ex-president of the PJD al-'Uthmānī, also declares that gender equality is inherent to Islam. Islamists define equality between man and woman in terms of having similar rights and similar opportunities in all domains of life.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁷ al-'Uthmānī 1998, 13

⁵⁵⁸ See the document: 'Lajnat qaḍayā al-Mar'a wa al-Tanmiya, al-Waraqā al-Taṣawwuriyya li qaḍayā al-Mar'a wa al-'Usra', 2, (unpublished document).

A second principle the Islamists stress is emancipation. According to the PJD, women should be emancipated, and emancipation, according to PJD members, means that women are free in their choices, not dependent.⁵⁵⁹

Complementarity constitutes the third principle of their discourses. i.e. the idea that a man complements a woman, and a woman complements a man.⁵⁶⁰ Islamist activists are keenly aware that the idea that men and women need to complement each other in order to create harmony and cooperation within the family arouses suspicion among secularists. That is why many of them assert that the idea simply refers to physics, the biological and emotional differences between the sexes, and accordingly, a possible preference of women for motherhood and certain types of work. They stress that it does not refer to diverging gender roles outside the home that may limit women's choices for education, work and activism. In short: a woman should be able to choose what she wants. In that sense Islamists are definitely demanding changes, outside and inside the home.

The fourth principle that the Islamists are greatly concerned with is the family. The latter, in the Islamists' opinion, constitutes the primary basis around which women's issues revolve. Family dynamics gets emphasis in Islamist agendas, because, as we saw, the family is seen as society in miniature. Most of the Islamists advocate the cultivation of gender equality in the education of children, the future generation. This necessitates, in the opinion of the Islamists, the re-education of mothers and the advancement of their roles.⁵⁶¹ For them, the prioritization of mothers logically follows from their non-existent or poor education, which is not beneficial to the upbringing of children in which they nevertheless play a major role. This does not mean that fathers should not play a larger role in their offspring's education. On the contrary, Islamists believe they should.

A fifth point of interest for Islamists is the relationship between *ijtihād* (re-interpretation of the Islamic sources), modernity and modernization. They define modernity in terms of the quest for progress, development and renewal in all areas of life, with *ijtihād* being the key element in the transition to a new phase; one, in which human beings can fulfill their aspirations, and justice and equality can prevail. The Islamists' reinterpretations concerning gender relations take social change into consideration. To them, *ijtihād* can facilitate a revolution in tradition and conservative thinking, which has so far negatively impacted the understanding of religion vis-à-vis women's rights.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁹ Muṣalī 2011, 285

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid, 286

⁵⁶¹ Ibid, 287

⁵⁶² Ibid., 288-89

The last principle emphasized by the Islamists' discourses is women's participation in politics and public life. They believe that both men and women have to be present in public life. The feminization of the public religious sphere is inherent. The Islamists all assert that the public religious sphere, which is often conceived of as a masculine space, has come to be increasingly marked by a feminine presence. An important aspect of Islamist feminists' struggle is the public recognition of women's right to full participation in this sphere.

From my interviews, the Islamist activists are impressed by the women saints' strong and ethical personalities, and by their abilities to challenge male domination. They esteem historical women saints as role models and are determined to follow these historical women's footsteps by carrying on their religious, social and political activities, which they take up in the context of their own ethical self-formation. Out of principle, they do not visit the female saints' graves, but they do ensure the continuing presence of these historical women saints in modern life by accumulating accounts of their lives, and by using their names for their institutions and schools. The revival of women saints' stories supports their agendas as they empower women to educate themselves and to reach high and respectable positions in society. They also remind Moroccans that women are not obliged to submit to the customary system that seeks to disempower them and render them inactive.

The interviewed activists use historical women saints in different ways to show how pious women of history are inspiring to them. Most of the Islamists activists include the study of women saints and Sufis in their programs. As mentioned above, 'Adl wa al-Iḥsān shows a great interest in women saints and their roles in history and keeps studying the archives in search for women saints and their life stories.

Yāssīne states that her women section organizes courses in which women saints' lives are continuously discussed.⁵⁶³ The PJD and Muntadā Zahrā' organize seminars and meetings under the motto of a particular woman saint or any woman who played an important role in history. In addition, the Muntadā organize meetings with the names of women saints and invite scholars and researchers to present papers on women in history. Muṣālī refers in her published thesis to 'Akhawāt Ṣafa as the first feminist association in Morocco. This association, in her opinion, is founded by Sufi women who were considered as the pioneers of feminist movement in Morocco.⁵⁶⁴ Muḥīd organizes academic meetings on historical women. She invites specialists in history to discuss family issues, in particular historical women who

⁵⁶³ Yāssīne, interviews, December 2011

⁵⁶⁴ Muṣālī 2010

played a role in maintaining the survival of the institutions of the family and society.⁵⁶⁵ Muqri' al-Idrissī abū Zīd, a PJD researcher and a religious scholar, presents a paper in one of the meetings organized by al-Hiḍn Association about the Sufi woman Zaynab al-Nafzāwiya's life, services and roles during the Almoravīds' dynasty.⁵⁶⁶ Butayna al-Qarūrī also headed seminars organized for the revival of women in history like saints, Sufis and other exemplary women so as to correct the stereotypes around women today.⁵⁶⁷ In the magazine of her association, *Muntadā Zahrā'*, She contends that this is the reason why she organizes annual meetings about women saints and women who played a role in history.⁵⁶⁸ In one of her papers she explains that women saints and Sufis constitute a role model that we, modern women, should be proud of and should take up.⁵⁶⁹ Yāssīne also keeps referring to her father's book, *tanwīr al-Mu'mināt*,⁵⁷⁰ in her discussion on the Prophet's wives and the prophet's female companions who played a role in history. Moroccan Islamists actively use women saints and Sufis as inspiring role models.

Like these Islamist women organizations, the liberal feminist movement as well accounts on historical women and history as important references to underpin their fight against patriarchy and for women's rights, as was discussed before. Both Moroccan Islamist and secularist activists receive historical women saints as a source of empowerment from which they gain power and in which they invest power.

What struck me from my research, was that, whereas Islamist women's organizations are often described as traditional and conservative with regard to women's issues, I more or less found the opposite to be the case.

Moroccan Islamist associations' discourses and practices seek the political, social and economic empowerment of women to such a degree that they, in my view, can be called Islamist feminist organizations. As such, they belong to Moroccan women's ethical freedom practices, which underpin women's empowerment and women's rights in a critique of women's oppression.

6-6 Conclusion

⁵⁶⁵ Mufīd 2009, 7-9

⁵⁶⁶ Abū Zīd al-Idrissī 2011, 19-28

⁵⁶⁷ *Muntadā Zahrā'* 2012

⁵⁶⁸ al-Qarūrī 2011, 4

⁵⁶⁹ *Muntadā Zahrā'* 2012

⁵⁷⁰ Yāssīne 1996

Islamist activists base their struggle for the improvement of women's positions on different sources. They count on the primary sources of Islam, the Qur'an and Sunna and on their own interpretation of these sources. They strongly believe that Mālikī jurisprudence's definition of women's status is a patriarchal interpretation of Islam and the primary cause of Moroccan women's oppression and discrimination. More importantly, Islamist associations also make reference to Islamic history and to Moroccan local cultural heritage in their debate on women's issues. They continually organize meetings to discuss Muslim and Moroccan women and the role they played in history, such as female saints, and the way these historical women created themselves as ethical personalities and role models.

Finally, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights constitutes another source that Moroccan Islamist feminists count on for their discourses on women's issues. They strongly believe that humanism advocated by human rights discourses is part of Islam. This additional adoption of universal human rights may be considered remarkable. However Fāṭima Sadiqi states in a forthcoming book that what Morocco is witnessing at the present is the secularization of Islamist feminism and the Islamization of liberal feminism. Moroccan Islamist feminism and secular feminism have similar objectives: to fight patriarchy at all levels of society and personal life. Islamist feminism is thus part of Moroccan feminism, which, as such, is poly-vocal one.