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# From Private to Public Women's Cooperatives and the Construction of a Public Sphere

Cecilia Garza

*SIT Graduate Institute - Study Abroad*, [cecilia\\_garza@brown.edu](mailto:cecilia_garza@brown.edu)

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## From Private to Public

Women's Cooperatives and the Construction of a Public Sphere

Cecilia Garza

SIT MOM Fall 2015



### ABSTRACT

This independent study project will explore how participation in the economy benefits women in more ways than just economically. Using the example of five cooperatives functioning in the Moroccan Rif, this paper will investigate how access to the economy not only provides women with supplemental income but also allows them to leave the home and build networks within

their communities. These examples will illustrate how illiterate, rural women, who would usually be seen as powerless in the public eye, are taking advantage of the trainings, income and communities they gain from their participation in cooperatives to claim independence and prove their competencies. Through entering the economy and building networks women are not only reaping benefits but also actively forging a space for themselves within the public sphere, a space typically dominated by men in Morocco. It is in the public sphere that the benefits of joining a cooperative truly come together allowing women to become a part of the daily interactions that influence social and political change in their country.

*Key terms:* women, rural women, feminism, alternative employment, cooperative, empowerment, public sphere, Morocco, Moroccan Rif, economic integration

Pictured above from left to right: Khadija from the women’s cooperative in Izemmouren displays her current project; a work room in the Bouiya cooperative of Rouadi

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### **Research Question**

This project is meant to explore how participation in the economy benefits women in more ways than just economically by providing them with space within the public sphere in which they can develop skills and networks necessary to participate in enabling social change

### Literary Review

My inspiration for an Independent Study Project on the benefits of cooperatives as a form of employment came from an article by Teresa Cruz e Silva called *The General Union of Cooperatives of Maputo: An Alternative Production System?*. The article discusses the General Union of Cooperatives (UGC) in Maputo, Mozambique, a group of women's cooperatives "rooted in the poorest strata of society..." that are working towards not only involving women economically but also "making them aware of their citizenship and thus giving them access to power and contributing to changes in gender relations in the family and society" through the use of urban farming (Cruz e Silva 2006: 98, 115). The UGC in Maputo was born from the labor of unemployed women who had little formal education or technical training and grew to encompass 185 cooperatives and 5,500 members, providing them and their families with not only foodstuff but also a series of social benefits.

Although this article provided a beautiful example of women coming together and succeeding in more ways than one, it is not representative of what I encountered in the Rif. Firstly, the essence of the work by the women in Maputo is completely different than the work being done in the cooperatives I visited. Additionally, the UGC cooperatives mentioned in this article grew to be extremely successful and well recognized network of cooperatives. Although some of the cooperatives I visited were quite successful, they seemed to function for the most part independently (save solidaristic ties with sister cooperatives). These issues make comparing the two cooperatives almost impossible. However, the UGC serves as a powerful example to the

type of grassroots development and empowerment that is possible for women living in the marginalized populations within a marginalized country.

Another article I read that discussed cooperatives was *Cooperatives and Community Development: a Perspective on the use of Cooperatives in Development* by Wilson Majee and Ann Hoyt which argues that collective enterprises like cooperatives help build communities and therefore foster development through cooperation among community ties. Additionally, they maintain that these “people-and-place centered development strategies” encourage local participation from the communities they function within. According to this article, “improvement in well-being is shaped by the nature and extent of social interaction among individuals” (Majee and Hoyt 2011), this improvement in wellbeing can then be seen as a type of localized development within the community.

This article was especially helpful because it touched specifically on the importance of networks in the promotion of human development. My issue with the article came in its definition of what cooperatives are. As they quoted: “Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others”. Although I believe this is a good and truly beautiful definition that in many ways fits the women of the Rif, I also feel that it creates a very narrow frame for cooperatives, a frame that is in some ways hard to measure and therefore not a definition I wish to use (Majee and Hoyt 2011).

I also chose to look at the official blog of the International Year of Cooperatives, *Cooperatives and Women: Promoting Self-Empowerment*, to gain information on what the social and economic benefits of cooperatives for women are according to a different source. According to the article, taking part in a collective enterprise, such as a cooperative, “enables women to unite in solidarity and provides a network of mutual support to overcome restrictions to pursuing commercial or economic activities” – through this there is not only “increased economic security [but also] increased contributions to the economic wellbeing of their families...communities and nations” (Cooperatives and Women: Promoting Self-Empowerment). The theme of support and networks was one that was extremely important to my project. According to what we have learned in class over the past semester and in line with much of my research, women in Morocco function almost exclusively within the private sphere (home) and are hardly seen as a part of the

public sphere. This is especially true to rural areas like the Rif when compared to other urban areas in Morocco that are more “modern” in that sense. Meaning that the creation of external networks is especially hard for the women I spoke to.

Although the articles mentioned above offered useful information, they do not necessarily apply to Morocco or the Rif. The article *Women as Agents of Grassroots Change: Illustrating Micro-Empowerment in Morocco* by Stephanie Willman Bordat, Susan Schaefer Davis, Saida Kouzzi is one that I will reference several times throughout my ISP. It was also the only article I found that provided case studies of Moroccan cooperatives. It was one of the most helpful articles I read because it aligned well with several of the topics I focused on in my study. In particular it gave ample insight on the meaning and implications of empowerment.

Although this article helped me frame my study in many ways, it did not go so far as to directly outline what implications the empowerment of these women had in Moroccan society. For me in particular, it was missing the connection of grass-root empowerment and collective action, which is what I hope my study will offer.

Another text I will reference often is a book written by Rachid Touhtou called *Debating Civil Society in Morocco: Dynamics of Gender, Development and Social Capital*. This book focused on how women in NGOs interact and help shape Moroccan civil society. Despite the fact that these NGOs are often directly involved in founding and supporting cooperatives, they function differently than cooperatives and often begin in urban centers by individuals already involved in liberal political debates, a context vastly different than that of the cooperatives I visited. Additionally, NGOs as grassroots movements tend to be under different social and political pressures and scrutiny than cooperatives, especially cooperatives that are still relatively small in scale like those in the Rif. Despite this, this book was extremely helpful for understanding civil society and gender in Morocco and the effects that social capital and grassroots movements have on development discourse and interaction between civil society and the state. The book not only provided me with several important definitions and concepts but also outlined several of the important themes I encountered in my interviews, specifically those that related to the importance of social capital. Despite the fact that I don't necessarily believe the women I encountered adhere to typical liberal feminist ideals, the book also provided me with a lot of information of feminist movements in Morocco that often help shape liberal discourse on the public sphere, civil society and women in Morocco and therefore comprise a



large portion of how the topic is seen and interpreted by others.

Yet another book I will use often which talks about Moroccan civil society and women is *Civil Society and Political Change in Morocco* by James Sater. In his book, Sater looks into how political change is enacted by domestic discourses. This book was especially useful for the attainment of definitions I will use throughout my project. It also provided the quote by Hannah Arendt that inspired the focus of my project to be the benefits of collective work: “[p]ower corresponds to the human ability not just to act but act in concert” (Sater 2007:9).

Saud Joseph’s *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle Eastern States* was another article that played heavily into my understanding and explaining of the current context lived by women in Morocco. This article provided most of my context on the interaction between Islam, the state and gender—topics that were central to contextualizing my study and the atmosphere in which the cooperatives I visited were born and function today. Nancy Frasers’s article *From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Post-Socialist’ Age* and Souad Eddouada and Renata Pepicelli’s article *Morocco: Towards an “Islamic State Feminism”* also served as important insights into how the state of women in Morocco is affected by several factors which are both politically and socially shaped. Frasers article focused on women in the economy while Eddouada and Pepicelli focused on the struggle between modern and traditional and the existence of feminism. Both articles added to my understanding of feminism in Morocco, however both were also specific to liberal discourse on feminism which, as I mentioned earlier, may not readily apply to the women of the Rif who are functioning in a remote part of Morocco, far from urban centers of liberal discourse, in a part of the country known for being more conservative.

*Women and Resistance to Colonialism in Morocco: The Rif 1916-1926* by C. R. Pennell was one of the few articles I came across that spoke specifically about Rifi women (an issue she obviously understood given the first sentence of her article “One of the many difficulties in writing about the history of the rural Middle East and North Africa is that sources are far more limited than they are for urban areas” (107)). Her article argued that women who are often seen as powerless due to the stark segregation of men and women, actually hold power in a ‘distinct female space’. According to the author this space in which females hold power has had a long history in the Rif. However this space is exclusively in the private sphere. My work instead focuses on women gaining power within the public sphere. However I find this article to be an

important reminder that just because women's voices are silenced in one arena does not mean they are voiceless.

Another text that focused on the life of Rifi women was *Behind the Courtyard Door: The Daily Life of Tribeswomen in Northern Morocco* by Ursula Kingsmill Hart. After reading a few chapters of this book I chose not to include it in my study at all for several reasons. Originally I had planned to include a few parts of the chapter entitled "A Women's Place is in the Home", which talk about a women's role as being restricted to the household and included some dialogue with women who full-heartedly believed this. However I decided that I did not want to use the stories of women as they were remembered, interpreted and written by someone. I therefore instead chose to keep with more empirical interpretations of social life in Morocco so as to not generalize the situation of women but instead discuss social and political and legal matters as they are argued in academic literature.

Lastly, another text that looked to challenge the typical way women in Muslim societies are viewed was *The Active Social Life of "Muslim Women's Rights": A Plea for Ethnography, not Polemic* by Lila Abu-Lughod. In her article, Abu-Lughod provided descriptions of how "Muslim women's rights" are manifested in Egypt and Palestine. I chose not to engage too deeply with the case study on Palestine because Morocco is not under the political tension or constant stress of occupation and violence and therefore experiences human rights, women's rights and external influences differently. Egypt on the other hand is in North Africa and, although its political history (especially recent history) is very different to that of Morocco, it is more easily compared. Many of the topics the author touched upon in her article seemed relevant to my topic at first but upon further scrutiny I chose not to include her work in my ISP. I made this decision because there was no talk about religion during my interviews. It didn't come up once. What we did talk about was respect for the lives of each woman as an individual. Because of this I chose not to include the parts of Abu-Lughod's argument that had to do with criticism between women about 'goodness' in terms of values and religiosity. Additionally, the article focused on the work of women in NGO's, which as I mentioned before, I believe are under a different type of pressure and organizational plan than the cooperatives I visited and therefore not completely relevant to my study. My study will instead focus more on how the relationship between Islam and the state is directly related to citizenship and less on how Islam affects interactions between women.

I found that all in all it was very difficult to come by information about the Rif that focused on the rights or economic integration of rural women, especially that connected these topics to women in the public sphere. It is here where I hope to situate my study. Adding on a novel layer to the idea of what constitutes feminism, empowerment and power for rural Rifi women and how that is connected to the creation of public spaces by means of cooperative work.

### **Methods and Methodologies**

This study is meant to highlight the social, economic and political benefits experienced by women who take part in cooperatives. In a world where success is measured by profits and growth, my intent was to focus on what success meant to the people involved in grassroots development. Because the purpose of this project, and therefore the purpose of these interviews, was to highlight the benefits of the work these women and associations are doing I chose to focus on the creation of networks and safe spaces for women to enter the public sphere and act collectively and spoke little about their lives outside of the cooperative so as to not imply that their triumphs had to be in some way justified when compared to social or political context they live in.

I was connected to these cooperatives and organizations through contacts given to me by Souad Eddouada, Hakim Messaoudi, Mohammed Bahaj and the AFFA President. I was fortunate enough to be welcomed and encouraged by each individual I met. Every person I talked to was more than willing to help me with everything from transportation to translation. Mohammed Bahaj in particular kindly connected me to two cooperatives and two organizations as well as traveled with me to each place to act as my translator.

All in all, in my four weeks I visited five cooperatives in the Rif, two associations working on local development and women's rights, met the founder of an online platform for Moroccan artisans and had breakfast with a couple who spoke to me about Rifi history and culture. In total I conducted five one-on-one interviews and two focus group interviews. I chose not to include the case of the Anou because, despite being extremely informative and interesting, it happened early on in my ISP process and no longer felt relevant once writing my paper. My interviews all lasted between forty minutes to an hour and all but two were conducted in the headquarter of the cooperative or organization involved. Interviews were conducted in Darija,

English or Spanish. As mentioned above, Mohammed Bahaj acted as my translator for all interviews in Darija. No translator was needed for interviews conducted in English or Spanish.

In my three interviews with cooperatives, two were focus group interviews with cooperative members and one was an individual interview with the cooperative's founder. Originally my plan was to hold focus group interviews with cooperative members and one-on-one interviews with founders, however I found that most cooperatives were not founded by the efforts of an individual but instead by that of an association, most likely one working on development or women's rights. Ultimately focus group interviews proved, in my opinion, to be the most informative because they allowed for discussion. However, one or two members of the cooperative often dominated these discussions, usually older ones with more say in the cooperatives. Although this was to be expected I do wish I had put more emphasis on hearing the opinion of each member. In retrospect, I would have also preferred my individual meeting with a cooperative's founder to have had included some of the members as well.

Participant observation also played a small role in my research but was not as developed as I had hoped in that not enough time was spent with any of the five cooperatives for me truly get a feel for the atmosphere. However I will try to not as much as possible what little I saw of each cooperative. Out of the five cooperatives I visited, my information on two (Souani and Imzouren) is comprised completely of a few minutes of participant observation and second hand data. I would have liked to interview the women in these cooperatives given that they were close to each other in proximity but very far from each other in terms of growth. However, upon arriving I could tell they were not expecting me and chose instead to observe and speak informally with the women rather than pressure them into an interview they were not expecting.

I feel that my study lacked a lot more interaction with the women I worked with as well as more thorough participant observation to get a real feel of how life/work for these women is, something I couldn't get from having the interviews be my only interaction with them. As mentioned above, I also wish I had put more emphasis on having all the women give their opinion during the focus group interviews. I often left my interviews feeling that I had missed out on the opinion of members who were not necessarily leaders which most likely narrowed the results of my study. Were I to do this study again I would have a) spent more time with each cooperative b) spent more time with Association Forum de Femmes Al-Hoceima. After my interview with this association I felt that it would have been interesting to learn more about

AFFA's work and connect specifically with cooperatives they've helped found being that AFFA itself is a women run NGO which helps start women run enterprises and therefore adds to the female networks functioning within the public sphere that became an important part of my project.

## Key Terms and Associations

### *Cooperatives:*

This essay will focus on cooperatives as collective enterprises that serves as a type of employment opportunity meant to empower those involved. Cooperatives are defined as “organizations that are autonomous and private in nature, but where capital and means of production are collective” (Neamtan 2002:3), these collective enterprises are characterized by putting workers at the center of every decision. Cooperatives serve to build trust and cooperation within communities as well as establish social capital by building ties within a community (Majee and Hoyt 2011:58).

### *Social Capital*

As quoted in Rachid Touhtou's book *Debating Civil Society in Morocco: Dynamics of Gender, Development and Social Capital*, social capital is “the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person” in this case “both individual and collective are linked to social capital. Also the family is very important in [this] conception of social capital”. Social capital, particularly this definition of social capital, is an especially important part of what women gain from their work in cooperatives. Social capital is important because, as “Field explains, ‘people who are able to draw on others for support are healthier than those who can not; they are also happier and wealthier; their children do better at school, and their communities suffer less from anti-social behavior’” (Touhtou 2012:21-23).

### *Empowerment:*

Empowerment is a tricky term to define and an even trickier concept to qualify. The question of “how does one measure empowerment?” is something that I have struggled with throughout this process. The article *Women as Agents of Grassroots Change: Illustrating Micro-*

*Empowerment in Morocco* provides several definitions of this term that ranged from economic to social and back. For this paper, empowerment will be defined as “the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices... In an individual sense, a woman achieves more control over her own life, including family decisions or expenditures. In a collective sense, women as a group work together to overcome structures that limit them in society, such as in community mobilization for advocacy campaigns” (Bordat et. al. 2011:92). I believe this is the best way to define this term because it allows for a broad interpretation and encompasses all ways in which one gains the ability to make those “strategic life choices”. Additionally, it accounts for the individual and the collective, a concept that will be important to this paper.

#### *Emancipatory education:*

I will be using this term throughout the paper not only to imply formal education achieved through a traditional setting but also any and all learning done from leaving ones home and partaking in activities which require one to gain any sort of skill, whether conscious or not. In the case of these women, emancipatory education covers everything from literacy to technical and administrative skills to learning how to be “working women”. This type of education not only helps the women build social capital but also provides them with the skills necessary to reach the type of empowerment defined above.

#### *Public Sphere:*

For this study the public sphere will encompass all and every interaction between actors in a state outside of the family home (or private sphere). These interactions may be economic or political but are not confined to only political and economic interactions. Instead they also encompass all types of social interaction between people within a given society. “Habermas defines the public sphere as: A network of communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes); the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions”, he “viewed the public sphere as offering possibilities for organizations and actors to influence decision-making processes and at the same time remain independent from the state”. (Touhtou 2012:19)

*Civil Society:*

For the purpose of this study, "civil society [will] be defined as the sphere of human interaction between the state and the family, in which private citizens act on behalf of public issues, through which they constitute and shape the ever-changing borders of, and discourses within, the public sphere." (Sater 2007:10) In essence, civil society functions within the public sphere and is a space for formalized collective action which transform "private individuals and private social issues into public issues—a characteristic of the emerging social actors in Morocco" (Touhtou 2012:20)

*Associations*

AIDC – Association d'Izemmouren Pour le Développement et la Coopération

AFFA – Association Forum de Femmes Al-Hoceïma

MPDL – Movimiento por La Paz, el Desarme y la Libertad

INDH – Initiative Nationale de Développement Humain

**Context:****The Intersection between Gender, Religion, The State and the Patriarchy**

For women living in a country in which gender roles are only beginning to be challenged in the public sphere, employment opportunities run from slim to non-existent. Such is the case for many women in the Rif. The women in these societies are often portrayed both within their country and internationally as being powerless—at the whim of their country, the economy, and their husbands. Although in some cases this is true, I believe that this type of dialogue (which dominates international discourse on women in Islam) is detrimental to the view of Moroccan and Rifi women and ignores the many instances in which women are actively participating in the creation of their own platforms and networks from which to derive power. The cooperatives I visited in the Rif are examples of such triumphs that are important to note when speaking about these so-called "powerless" women because they serve as example of women forging a space for themselves within the public sphere and attaining the necessary tools to impact their society directly.

I hope that discussing these instances, and the benefits women experience as a result, will allow us to challenge the typical understanding of “success”, “empowerment” and “development”. Usually, development efforts tend to be towards the goal of modernizing or urbanizing. These methods often focus on a large-scale change and subsequently ignore the needs and capabilities of the people on the ground—the men and women who are experiencing development on a daily basis. How development is perceived and experienced can therefore be seen as not only a societal phenomenon but also an individual one. That being said, common top-down approaches to development fail to take the experience of the individual into account and therefore view success as something to be attained that is manifested through monetary growth. I, on the other hand, truly believe that there is a case to be made that individual development at the grassroots level is worth investing in and investigating further. Development and empowerment, as experienced by the individuals, can be incremental and slow as well as manifested in a multitude of ways, such as economic and social involvement of women.

The Moroccan Rif consists of the mountainous, northern most part of Morocco. Although commonly bulked with the rest of the country, the Moroccan Rif has experienced a different history and is inhabited by Amazigh people who have both a different culture and a language. Additionally, due to a history of revolts and the subsequent marginalization of the Rif during the reign of Hassan the 2<sup>nd</sup>, most Moroccans view the Rif as a place filled with rebels. According to those that I spoke to on Rifi history, it wasn't until the reign of Mohamed the 6<sup>th</sup> that national development efforts, industries such as tourism, and liberal discourses began to reach the area.

According to those I spoke to, the Rif is also widely thought of as being one of the most conservative parts of Morocco when it comes to women in society. Several times throughout my research I heard Rifi people say: “just ten years ago you wouldn't see a woman outside the home/sitting in this café/working”. This is a reality that was especially true for villages in rural parts of the Rif. However, according to Rachid Touhtou's book on Moroccan civil society, there has been a recent trend of the “coexistence of radicalism and democratization as all actors in the socio-political arena including the Monarch use and exploit the universal discourse, tactics and resources on rights and freedom of the individual” (Touhtou 2012:75). Due to changing international and domestic political agendas, the issue of women's rights and integration into the economy has become a particular interest to the Moroccan government.

In recent years, women's rights and the promotion of gender equality has been at the



center of Morocco's attempt to promote its own 'brand' of Islam that is characterized by being more moderate and tolerant than the Islam that is currently (always) under the scrutiny of the West and Islamophobes around the world. Because critical discourse about Islam often revolves around the perceived oppression of women, Morocco looked to combat that belief through a moderate Islam characterized by a liberal stance on women in society. In the past, issues of women's rights were taken on by human rights organizations, such as *Association Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme* (AMDH), however, in recent years, human rights movements began "losing ground to the Islamic movement..." due to the common belief "that social changes... seem to be connected with a decrease in public morality" (Sater 2007:58). Because of this, many Moroccans are currently caught between denouncing western values that do not coincide with their Islamic values on women while their government tries to promote a moderate and tolerant Islam by encouraging equal view of women.

Part of this national concern for women's rights is manifested through national initiatives to include women in development plans around the country that provide women with the necessary push to integrate into the Moroccan economy. For Moroccan women, entry into the labor force is difficult to say the least. Due to high rates of illiteracy, little education, and lack of access to funds women are hardly seen as able to enter the labor market on their own. According to the World Bank development indicators, people "ages 15-64, in 2008, only 28.7 percent of women and 83.6 percent of men were in the Moroccan labor force. This is similar to that of women in other North African and Middle Eastern countries, but less than the 53 percent of women in other lower middle income countries" (Bordat et. al. 2011:96).

According to several of the people I spoke to, being that the majority of the Rif is rural, most Rifi women are expected work in agriculture. To the people of the Rif, this falls under the role of house keeping and includes tending land, animals and crops. This work, though physically taxing and immensely important, is part of what is expected of women and is thus not legally recognized as formal labor. Therefore the women do not directly reap any benefits from their efforts. This is especially problematic being that "social welfare legislation gives citizens' benefits often on the basis of participation in the labor market, making women who are not employed dependent on working men" (Joseph 2015), leaving unemployed women economically dependent and vulnerable.

However, “due to increasing education...as well as to families’ perceived material needs, inflation, and male unemployment, more women are working outside of the household. Increasingly, development projects are including women, often focusing on economic roles for them” (Bordat et. al. 2011:105). The growing role of women in the labor force has also been enhanced by Morocco’s push to promote the moderate Islam mentioned above. This recent push is where women’s cooperatives come in. It is through starting or supporting women in collective enterprises that the government has honed its efforts on promoting a transformed view of women, especially in rural areas such as the Rif. However these pushes do little to actually change common opinion on women in the work place.

Owed to the fact that the Moroccan government is essentially using women—“or more particularly their status and relations with others—in competing claims to modernity and tradition” Moroccan women are left with the task of fulfilling two roles that are not always complementary to each other (Joseph 2015). For example, although the Moroccan government has altered many policies to fit the expectations of the international conventions to which it is a signatory, and therefore does maintain “that the family is under the joint responsibility of the two spouses, it does not contradict the principle of *qiwama* – in other words, the husband’s responsibility as head of the family that is specified in the Sura verse from the Qur’an, “Al-Nisa” (The Women)” (Souad 6). In this way, the only change that is happening is an added expectation on women to work outside the home, which is contradicted by social expectation and lacks a change in male gender roles, meaning that little has actually been altered. In this way, as Saud Joseph argued, “issues of gender and citizenship...are not limited to legal issues, but also raise issues of practice...What the law affords in principle and what women experience in practice is often quite different” (Joseph 2015). This was a reality I encountered and will discuss later in this paper. Effectively, women are encouraged by local, national and even international development initiatives to enter the work place through the cooperatives or micro-enterprises while still being expected to be fully responsible of the household duties that are seen as a women’s obligation. The disconnect between encouragement to work and social expectation to stay in the home poses a problem when it comes to enacting actual social change.

Additionally, the fact that most countries in the MENA region have either “elevated religious codes to state law or deferred personal status laws to religious courts” has resulted in a tight link between citizenship and religious identity which has subsequently led to the

“conflation of gender with discourses of family and religion as maintained or advanced by the state” (Joseph 2015). It is this merging of categories which has in turn meant that a women’s citizenship, and thus her legal claim to rights, is in most situation dependent on her social status and a daughter, sister, wife or mother with ‘the family’ acting as the only political sphere she’s afforded space in. Legally this means that a women’s voice is interpreted almost exclusively through the family, which makes claiming individual rights difficult to say the least. However, this is not necessarily a problem of Islam and it’s views on women. Instead the problem is born when the state and religion are joined and complimented by the patriarchy. According to Saud Joseph, “the patriarchy weaves together civil society, state, market and family.... [meaning a women’s] relationship to the state is often mediated through family ties (Joseph 2015). It is at the intersection of these three spheres that “communalist views of citizenship, which tend to diminish women’s roles and rights as citizens” are created and reinforced (Joseph 2015). For this reason and “despite the fact that constitutions have been written in the (gender-neutral) language of the universal citizen”...Most “state institutions and political processes have presumed the citizen to be male and females to be dependent second-class members of the political community” (Joseph 2015). This political reality is in many ways paralleled to the daily social reality the women I met experience in the Rif.

Moreover, it should be mentioned that these governmental documents that claim women rights, not deny them, are not regularly seen by citizen. What is seen is how many women work outside the home, how many are integrated in the public sphere, have high ranking jobs, make it to university, etc. Those are the type of daily interactions that happen within the public sphere that change public opinion on women in the work place. However, as mentioned before, Moroccan women, especially those in the rural part of the Rif, have not been in the public sphere for very long.

As mentioned in the key terms section, the public sphere is comprised of all interactions that happen outside of the family and help form a public opinion that can then mobilize and change political discourse. According to Rachid Touhtou, the public sphere functions as a “new site of contestation” (Touhtou 2012:80). Being that this space has, for many years, been deemed a male space women have often been excluded from directly participating in the building of public opinions and civil society organizations which have helped shape the Moroccan government’s current relationship with its public. It is here that I argue cooperatives do the most

good because they provide women with a door into the public sphere while also providing them with necessary tools to strengthen and use their platform and therefore enable social change as women who are a part of a society and not just a member in a family.

## **Cooperatives**

### *Spaces for social change*

The case studies below are meant to offer concrete examples of cooperative in the Rif and how women are using these cooperatives and the subsequent benefits to empower themselves and others.

### **The Women's Cooperative of Izemmouren**

The women's cooperative of Izemmouren was conceived in 2000 by the *Association d'Izemmouren Pour le Développement et la Coopération* (AIDC), an organization dedicated to local development of Izemmouren, with the help of the Spanish association "Movimiento Por la Paz, el Desarme y la Libertad" (MPDL). The process of conceiving and proposing the project was taken on by AIDC before the two associations began a two-year training for those women interested in the prospects of having a job outside the home. Teachers, doctors and lawyers were brought in from the nearby urban center, Al-Hoceima, to provide technical and professional training for the women as well as courses in "sensitizing things" such as health and their status as women under the new family law (Personal communication 18 November 2015).

At the beginning there were two groups of interested women—one focused on knitting and the other on clothes making—with a total of about 50 girls and women involved in the trainings. Now, the clothes making cooperative is the only one of the two still in service. There are currently seven women working with this cooperative. All the women but one are over the age of thirty, have had little more than an elementary education and none are married. The cooperative is located in the same building as AIDC and consists of one large workroom filled with machines and materials.

For the women who have continued their work, perseverance has not been easy. According to the members I met, public opinion of them has not always been positive. Due to the fact that a venture like theirs had never been taken on, most people in the village looked down on them, saying that they would not be successful. Another common objection came from families who objected to them leaving the home because to them this was simply an excuse to escape from the housework. As my translator explained: "They live in a rural area so they have cattle to

look after, they have no other income sources, only to look after the chickens and cattle and that requires labor force. They are that labor force. When they come to spend the day here who is going to do those tasks?”. Yet the women persevered. To combat the idea that they were escaping their duties, the women took it upon themselves to wake up earlier in order to do their household work before heading to the cooperative.

Other families, on the other hand, were happy at the prospect that the women would be bringing in some money. However, when they realized very little profits were being made they started to dissent, saying it was useless and that they needed instead to focus on their housework. Many women who started also decided to leave upon their getting married, believing that it was no longer useful for them to stay.

Three years ago the cooperative decided to partake in a national environmental project on switching from plastics to cloth bags that proved to be profitable for the cooperative. Upon discussing this the women said that the profits meant that attitude towards them was starting to change. Yet all the women agreed that they would still prefer a job that offered them a steady income and that the only reason they haven’t left was that no alternatives are available to them. They also mentioned however that, despite the obstacles they face, the cooperative was a job and, most importantly, an opportunity to leave the house and gain experiences they have never had the opportunity to have. To get to know people they have never met and to become qualified to do things they otherwise couldn’t. Ultimately the women seemed to view their work as a way “to prove [their] competencies on how well [they] can do things and put things in practice” (Personal communication 18 November 2015).

### **The Bouiya Cooperative of Rouadi**

The Bouiya cooperative of Rouadi was inaugurated by the King in 2010 as a spin off to the Bouiya Association. Women from the association, who had until then been working as volunteers, were encouraged by the *Initiative Nationale de Développement Humain* (INDH) to set up a cooperative as a way for them to make an income. After a year of training, the Bouiya cooperative started with nine members working on traditional crafts made completely from the natural resources in their area. There are now twelve members in the Bouiya cooperative working independently of the Bouiya Association and under supervision of the Delegation of Handicrafts located in Al-Hoceima. According to the President of both the

association and the cooperative, the Bouiya cooperative has survived because of their creativity and patience.

The Bouiya cooperative has been heavily supported by national initiatives to put forward their products in fairs and markets. They have been equip with machines, and provided with basic technical trainings needed to start the cooperative, however not many learning opportunities are available near or in Al-Hoceima. In order to venture into new practices the women had to learn novel techniques that were not offered in the surrounding area. To respond to this they invested in sending some members to trainings offered in other parts of Morocco to learn from others and then come back and teach new techniques to their members. For example, the President of the cooperative spent a year in Oujda learning a new technique called Rabati, which is now widely used by cooperative members.

Many of the women have also invested in literacy programs in order to bolster the growth of the cooperative as well as personal growth of the members. The Treasurer of the Bouiya cooperative went through a literacy program, which provided her with a diploma to teach. This diploma also enables her to get loans from banks, start businesses, etc. All members are encouraged to take part in these types of literacy campaigns being that most members did not finish their high school education and others have never been to school.

In terms of community engagement, the women spoke about the difficulties of getting people accustom to the idea of women coming into the village, which prior had been exclusively a space for men. According to the cooperative's treasurer, "it was not normal to see a girl or a woman coming from distant villages into the center", a reality that made claiming a space difficult to do. When asked why they chose to work in the cooperative they said it was "an opportunity to meet other people, to promote [their] heritage and [their] products, to be known by strangers" adding at the end how meeting me was proof of this. At this point they mentioned their participation in several fairs and markets. They spoke with particular pride about their participation in a yearly film festival held in Nador, for which they produced 150 bags made out of dwarf palm leaves, saying that it was an opportunity for their product to go "beyond the frontier" (Personal communication 23 November 2015). They have participated in this festival two years in a row and plan to continue to partake as long as they can.

Another important point made in my interview was that the cooperative was not a actually a job for most of the women. According to the President, no matter how productive it

may be, a cooperative is not an 'alternative' but a 'part time job' for Rifi women who live in the country side and are expected to divide their time and efforts to include (if not prioritize) house work and maintenance of their home and land. In her words: "the Rifi woman divides her labor among her family, farming and the cooperative". As they spoke about this, the president laughed and asks my translator if he remembered seeing her the day before. They converse for a while laughing and then explain to me that they had run into each other the day before as my translator helped my roommate with her project. When they met she was busy tending to her families donkeys. My translator laughed and said "she looked like a different person", she responded saying she was working her other job (Personal communication 23 November 2015).

### **COPITADAL of Al-Hoceima**

COPITADAL was started in 2003 by an artist originally from Casablanca. It was the first cooperative in Morocco to do art and decorative work, painting glass, pottery, wood, canvas, etc., and though it has since branched out into other projects, such as textiles and knitting, it has maintained its respect as one of the most recognized decorative cooperatives in Morocco.

COPITADAL is located in Al-Hoceima and was the only cooperative I visited that was situated in an urban center. It was also one of the most impressive and well organized in terms of their locale. Their building consisted of several rooms that functioned as workshops for different crafts. The front room (the room you enter as you walk in) acts as an elaborate show room that artfully displays all types of crafts that were undertaken in the cooperative as well as some work from a sister cooperative. On the back wall of this room there was a space displaying the typical portrait of Mohammed 6th (though this one was obviously hand painted by someone with, what seemed to my untrained eye, incredible skill). Under the portrait are several group photos of COPITADAL members with the King and his family. This type of recognition was not a characteristic of the other cooperatives I visited. In this way COPITADAL seemed to be one of the more successful cooperatives both in national and international recognition.

According to the COPITADAL's founder, most the women working with them are below the age of thirty and several are married. As for education she said most didn't go past high school, though she did mention that some were in university. In terms of skills needed for the crafts the cooperative offers courses in professional information but also several training sessions in all types of art, sewing and even some in baking.

One interesting thing about COPITADAL that did not arise in my other interviews was

that many of the women who work in the cooperative also branch off into their own work from home, doing things like baking or tailoring by order. According to the founder, this is something very important that the cooperative supports whole heartedly because it shows that the women are applying what they learn in the cooperative in ways that better themselves. To the founder, like most women I spoke to, the cooperative was most importantly about getting women out of the house and providing them with an income. She was particularly passionate about making the point that the cooperative served as a place for the women to find support, often referring to the members as a family. Walking into COPITADAL one could feel the camaraderie among the women. Each time I visited the building there were women sitting at the large table in the show room, working and chatting. Women filter in and out, talking, arguing, laughing, and debating. The women working often turn to those around them asking for advice or critics. According the COPITADAL's founder, support and trust are of the most important parts of their work (Personal communication 1 December 2015).

### **The Cooperatives of Imzouren and Souani**

The cooperatives in Souani and Imzouren serve as two other interesting examples of cooperatives in the Rif that are functioning at completely different levels despite both specializing in the same practice. Both cooperatives are filled with women working as seamstresses and tailors and both were started in the early 2000's with the help of *Association Forum de Femmes Al-Hoceima* (AFFA). Souani however has managed to become one of the most productive cooperatives in the Rif while Imzouren has remained a modest size.

Souani is located in an out of the way building down an unpaved road. The building itself was white with very little external signs indicating its existence. Inside, however the building comes to life. There are currently 24 women, ages 18 – 50, working in Souani with about 17 coming in to work each day. Their locale consisted of three main rooms and a large room at the entrance. One room is used for storage, the other what seemed to be an office and the third is a large workroom with tables and chairs set up closely. The room you walked into was used both as a space to display work, with modern, traditional and uniform clothing displayed all around, and a place to organize orders that were in the process of being send out. According to AFFA, Souani has become one of the most productive cooperatives they've supported. It now makes and exports uniforms to companies all over Morocco and Europe.



The cooperative in Imzouren is about a twenty-minute drive away from the cooperative in Souani. It's a smaller cooperative with only 8 women working with the. Its locale was less out of the way than Souani, it was located in the center of the city of Imzouren near the town hall and the cities daily market. It is located in the upstairs portion of a large two-story building. I saw two main rooms: a workroom with a few women working on different textiles and another room which I was told was used for training. The training room was a long, narrow room packed it tables and sewing machines along each wall and down the middle. At the time I visited, it was filled with young girls learning to sew. Everyone was talking and laughing as they worked. According to AFFA, those courses are offered to the women regardless of whether or not they plan to work in the cooperative. They are simply to teach a craft for the women to gain a new skill if they so choose.

### **Who is Starting Cooperatives and Why?**

Originally I had expected to find that cooperatives were mostly started by individuals or groups of women with a marketable skill who saw a lack in their community. However in most of my interviews this was not case. COPITADAL served as the only example I found of an individual choosing to begin a cooperative as a way of providing women with something she, as a member of the community, knew was lacking. She spoke passionately of the affect moving to Al-Hoceima, had on her after having spent the past few years working in a position of notable power in the Casablanca airport. Several times she said that she needed a reason to leave the home, as did other women in the Rif. She chose to use her pervious experience to create a cooperative that focused on a skill she knew and could teach. Most of the cooperatives I visited were not started in this way. Instead they were started as one of the “many types of economic development initiatives for women in Morocco” that have recently been supported by “the national government, local associations, and international donor agencies” (Bordat et. al. 2011:106). Below I will provide some examples of these commencement stories as they were encountered in my research.

### **National and International Support**

Due to the fact that Morocco has, in recent years, become more accepting of civil society, several actors, both governmental and none, have begun arising all over the country which work

on development and more specifically, female integration. Some examples of these organizations include, but are not limited to: *Union Action Féminine*, which partakes in the fight discrimination against women, violence against women and illiteracy among rural women by holding literacy courses, campaigns and founding cooperatives; *Plan d'Intégration de la Femme au Développement*, which focuses its efforts on the literacy and education of women and girls by working with the other civil society actors to create a new educational framework which would strengthen education of girls as well as raising awareness of the detriments of illiteracy and poor education; and *Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc*, an NGO which mobilizes around the violation of women's rights *Association Forum de Femmes Al-Hoceima (AFFA)*, an association that will be looked at more closely later in this section also falls under this category of initiatives). These types of external forces were seen in action within the Bouiya cooperative in Rouadi. As mentioned in the case study, this cooperative has received much support from the Initiative Nationale de Développement Humain (INDH), a development program launched by the Moroccan government in 2005 as a way to “mobilize the countries institutional and financial resources to improve living conditions among the population and raise national social indicators” (Martín 2006:1). These are the types of initiatives that were covered in the context section of this paper that dealt with the national push to include women in the economy. Critics of these types of initiatives argue that they compromise the autonomy of cooperatives by subjecting them to government agendas. Conversely, however, the initiatives were talked about highly by the women in Rouadi whose success was in many ways contingent to them.

The affect of international development efforts can be seen all around the Rif. Not many invest on bottom-up or grassroots projects like cooperatives, instead they fund top-down projects meant to reach a development “goal”. A few however, usually non-governmental organizations, choose to promote human development through grassroots projects like cooperatives. An example of this was the Spanish organization that helped start the women's cooperative in Izemmouren: *Movimiento por La Paz, el Desarme y la Libertad (MPDL)*. MPDL is a secular, Spanish organization that has worked on advancing human rights, democracy, equality and solidarity since 1983. As an organization MPDL claims that their goal is to “build a more just and equal world” through the promotion of the values mentioned above. Internationally, it works on issues of human right and development within developing countries within Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. According to their website, in Morocco they focus on “fortifying

democracy and participation of civil society”. MPDL centers its work around the region of Al-Hoceima, partnering with associations such as *Réseau des ONG de Développement CEurvrant dans le Parc National d’Al-Hoceima* (RODPAL), in order to support them as actors in civil society that take part in the development of the region. In particular, they “promote the rights and employment of rural women through women’s cooperatives” (mpdl.org). Similar to national initiatives, international initiative are subject to several critiques. As outlined by Rachid Touhtou: “these international NGOs work through local associations implementing development projects mainly through cooperatives and micro-credit loans, imposing agendas, reporting via expertise and consulting the progress to international organizations” (Touhtou 2012:75). Again, these critiques were not mentioned in my conversations with the women of Izemmouren or with the interview with the president of one of the local development organizations MPDL has partnered with.

### **Association d’Izemmouren Pour le Développement et la Coopération (AIDC)**

Other actors involved in the founding of cooperatives are local development associations that focus on the development of specific regions through bottom-up efforts of human development. In 1998, people from the village of Izemmouren set up the *Association d’Izemmouren Pour le Développement et la Coopération* (AIDC), which consists of a group of doctors, teachers, lawyers, engineers who, according to their president, “thought it was their historical responsibility to participate in the development of their village”. With the help of several local and international partnerships, the association is able to fund small-scale, bottom-up development projects that reflect the needs of the community. AIDC views development as the building of human capital, which can only come from availability of resources and education. It approaches local development as a way to meet people’s needs and consults individuals from the community on the projects they want funded. As the president of AIDC put it, local development and membership in cooperatives is a way of “training people to participate” in their community and subsequently prove that rural people are not “the bottom” but instead “the social foundation” of the Rif. With this in mind, AIDC has funded several projects for the people of Izemmouren. Some projects include building small bridges, participating in environmental conservation by providing residents with stoves, and starting cooperatives. AIDC also emphasizes education as one of the main avenues to human development, funding projects like the provision of school

transportation that allow children, especially girls, growing up in Izemmouren a chance to go past primary education.

When the association receives a grant they go through the process of finding where it is best suited in the community. After the project is identified they go to the people to gauge interest, if the interest is there then the project continued and the money is invested accordingly. After the money is invested, the job of the local development agency is over. According to the president of AIDC, their “role is to identify, to elaborate and to execute the project”, with little to no involvement in the lives or choices of the beneficiaries in regards to the projects. Their little involvement in the lives of beneficiaries after projects are executed comes in the form of periodic conferences or trainings meant to keep beneficiaries involved and informed (Personal communication 18 November 2015).

### **Association Forum de Femmes Al-Hoceima (AFFA)**

*Association Forum de Femmes Al-Hoceima* (AFFA) is an association located in the city center of Al-Hoceima that has spent the last fifteen years working with women in Al-Hoceima and surrounding areas. The association was started and continues to be run, by Rifi women for Rifi women. They work with women and communities on issues of equality, gender, violence against women, and promotion of integration of women into social and solidarity economies. They offer women of all ages courses in literacy (with an emphasis on legal literacy), popular education, professional information, employability, marketing, management and more in addition to courses meant to sensitizing youth in the area on issues of equality and women’s rights. They work to promote values of women’s rights as human rights and push for participation, democracy and solidarity between women as well as autonomy and sustainability. Additionally, since 2001, they have worked to help women etch their path to employment through cooperatives or micro-enterprises.

When they first started they went door to door informing women that there were courses available for them to take. During these initial phases attitudes towards them were not very favorable. According to the AFFA president they were often approached by people who would say “look at these crazy women, an association for women in the Rif, that will never work”

(Personal communication 30 November 2015). In light of these beliefs, initial phases for AFFA were very difficult; they were forced to avoid terms like “legal literacy” when informing women of their initial efforts and had a difficult time encouraging women to enter the courses being that leaving the home will still not something seen as acceptable. Now AFFA oversee several cooperatives in the region of various scales, continues to offer several courses to women from all over the region and provides women a safe space to discuss and share stories of abuse and violence.

My particular interest was in the courses AFFA offers women, which give them the skill necessary to become cooperative members and leaders within their communities. To them the courses they offer have less to do with skills and more to do with the creation of a safe space for women to speak and express themselves freely. They believe the courses provide a place for them to develop confidence in themselves and their ability to make decisions, where they can connect with other women and learn from each other.

By starting with literacy courses, then moving on to professional training courses and finally courses on the creation and maintenance of cooperatives, rural women who had otherwise never received any formal education or training are able to work for themselves and provide their families with an additional income, an income that is their own. According to the wonderful women I met at AFFA, the women who make up these cooperatives have always worked. As rural women they are both in charge of their families well beings and expected to take on a good amount, if not all, up keeping of a rural household. However, this is not work that is formally recognized, but instead expected. Because of this, all the benefits of that work are “owned” by the patriarch of the family and not able to be claimed by the women. Their work in cooperatives, on the other hand it allows them to claim benefits autonomously and decide where they are invested more freely.

According to AFFA, their work is more in the realm of providing women with the information, skills and support they need to claim independence and do with that what they will. In the case of the women who have chosen to start cooperatives, AFFA provides them with needed knowledge at the administrative level about management, distribution of work and marketing. They have no say as to the business the women choose to go into or how the cooperative is run.

According to AFFA attitudes toward the work these women do varies depending on where you are. Some women view these courses and the subsequent capability to start procuring an income as just that—a way of procuring an income, a job. Others view their participation in these courses and in cooperatives as a form social work that adds to the lives of their family and community. Others still respond to the work more warily, not allowing the women to participate in fairs or certain courses. They did mention, however, that most the women view their participation as a way to gain independence. Because most of the women have very little formal education, they see the entirety of their participation as a growth process: they have left the home, they have taken courses in literacy and taken part in technical training and they can now go off on their own and do something that is worthy of an income.

As put by AFFA’s president, “through these cooperatives we don’t plan to promote centers of productions, of exploitation or anything like that. For us it’s a process of communal production; a process for a community of women that can be used to promote individual development more than to earn who knows how much money through exploitation of others. That’s not what this is for”. The AFFA president emphasized that she views these cooperatives not as economic groups but as spaces for social change. As she stated, “these women are together, they have power to make decisions and can debate decisions amongst themselves, they feel that they can solve their own problems. I am sure that they will use at least a small percentage of what they learned here in their daily life, with their children, with their daughters...And with [the income] they have a means to make those changes for themselves. That’s what this is, an association of women in a cooperative who are claiming a social role”. It is in this way that AFFA is hoping to influence the life of Rifi women. Most of their work focuses not on income or growth but on autonomy and empowerment—on the women’s ability to make decisions that affect their lives in a way they choose (Personal communication 30 November 2015).

### **“Not an alternative but a part time job”**

At this point I would like to note how social expectations and opinions shape the lives and work of women. As mentioned in the context section of this paper, workingwomen in Morocco are currently caught in a struggle between being encouraged to leave the home while still being expected to fulfill all household duties. As Saud Joseph put it, “given the importance

of family in patriarchal structures, women are expected to continue to prioritize their subordinate familial roles even when they achieve public status as individuals” (Joseph 2015). Because of this I think it is important to challenging the idea that cooperatives are always an alternative form of employment (a term commonly used to describe cooperatives) for women. I say this because ‘alternative’ means that it is taking the place of something which 1) implies there are other employment opportunities for women and B) implies that this is all these women invest their time in – both of which were false in the cases I mentioned above.

In the case of Izemmouren, families believed that work in the cooperative was merely a way of escaping housework. Many women were told to stop their work when income was not being brought home to the family; others chose to leave once married. The women chose to solve this not by choosing one over the other but by waking up earlier in order to be able to fulfill expectation and continue their work. In Rouadi the women made a point of telling me that the cooperative was not a job in the traditional sense because it was by no means their only responsibility nor was it the only place they were investing their labor. They, like the women of Izemmouren were still expected to fulfill their household duties and subsequently viewed their work in the cooperative as "not an alternative but a part time job” (Personal communication 23 November 2015). The women I spoke to in Rouadi juggled leadership positions in both the Bouiya cooperative and the Bouiya association, training themselves, teaching others and participating in the cooperative while still taking time to fulfill duties at home. They essentially are expected to live two lives and they do not deny this expectation but instead choose to find ways in which they can do both.

Moreover there is the lack of other employment opportunities all together which invalidate the idea that cooperatives are always alternative employment opportunities. In Izemmouren there was specific reference to the lack of opportunities. The women even agreed that were there an alternative that offered them a steady income they would take it. However the alternatives do not exist. In Rouadi and COPITADAL the reference to lack of opportunities was less direct. However, both groups mentioned that they chose to start or take part in the cooperative because it was a way to leave the home, which they would otherwise not be able to do. This was especially obvious in Rouadi when mention was made to the lack of women’s presence in the village before their cooperative began.

In my opinion this is an important reality to keep in mind when discussing just how

difficult the situation for some of these women can be. What they are doing is not a small feat. It also shows how the concepts mentioned in the context section of this paper are manifested into very real actualities for women in Morocco who respond by adapting. In this way I believe the women of these cooperatives represent a type of feminism that is often not discussed in liberal discourse. It is a type of resistance that does not take form in complete denial of societal expectations or large demonstrations of liberal ideologies but instead adapts to its context while continuing to persist in the direction of autonomy and strength for women in the public sphere.

### **Talking of Triumphs: The Benefits of Cooperative Work**

#### *Supplemental Income: Their work, their income*

One of the most unanimously talked about benefits was gaining a supplemental income that women have a legal right to. Income was mentioned in all three cooperatives I visited as first and foremost the reason why they chose to get involved in a cooperative. The extent to which income persisted as a reason for participation varied from cooperative to cooperative. In Izemmouren the women laughed as they unanimously agreed that the reason they chose to join was in order to make a regular income, adding that some families only agreed to their working outside of the home because of this prospect. However, several times throughout the interview there was mention of the fact that income had not been as regular as they had hoped. For Izemmouren the lack of regular income meant the loss of several members of the cooperative. They also mentioned that, were the option available, they would choose to work where a regular income is guaranteed. However, they seemed proud to mention that since their participation in the national project to eliminate plastic bags had been successful several people tried to enter the cooperative. In Rouadi there was very little talk of income except for when asked about why the cooperative was started. As mentioned earlier, the founding of Bouiya cooperative was encouraged as a way to provide women, who were already voluntarily working in the Bouiya Association, with an income. In Al-Hoceima, the founder of COPITADAL made it clear that money was not the goal, however she mentioned several times that it was one of the benefits the members enjoyed. Many members of COPITADAL have even branched out and created home businesses of their own to use their skills to supplement their earnings from the cooperative. She proudly told the story of a cooperative member who, after a large order was completed, gave part of her earnings to her family and used the other part to buy herself a golden ring. She said that



the gold ring was nothing in comparison to the pride this woman felt that she bought it with money she earned for her work, saying that the confidence she gained was most important of all.

Due to the fact that success is often measured through profits and growth, these benefits may seem minimal. If the goal of these cooperatives were the usual big, profitable firm then the little income they make may not be seen as a substantial enough benefit to mention. However, being that the goal is empowerment, all the cooperatives I visited are, to varying extents, successful. Though in most cases the income was nominal it was still a step toward economic autonomy. According to the president of AFFA, it is the first time that many of the women are formally employed despite the fact that they have been working their entire lives. According to her, “all the women involved work in the fields, but those jobs don’t provide them with resources because the resource are taken by the men and the family. The idea of starting cooperatives was for these women to group together to create a job opportunity so they can be recognized as employees and take ownership of the resources they attain” (Personal communication 30 November 2015). The resources and income a women makes is still very likely to be invested in the family, however in these cases, the cooperatives give the women legal right to the income from their labor, an important step to economic autonomy. Additionally, because of this autonomy the women are more able to choose where money is invested. In this way, profits can also act as a way to leverage their rights in the eyes of the government because it turns them into public individuals who invest in social goods and services that are provided by the government.

*Beyond an income: Emancipatory Education and Empowerment*

Another benefit that was mentioned in every interview was that of education and training that accompanies participation in a cooperative. In each of the cooperatives I visited the women under went at least one to two years of training before actually starting to work as cooperative members. In Izemmouren the women went through two years of courses led by local officials on both administrative and social topics, including health and the new family law. In Rouadi, similar programs were participated in, in addition to literacy campaigns and regular trainings in new techniques.

For the cooperatives that started with AFFA, the training started in literacy programs that came before courses meant to provide women the skills necessary to found and run a cooperative independently. These skills not only allow women to transform their abilities and strengths but

also allow them to do so in a way that is profitable and efficient. Moreover, to the founder of AFFA, these trainings did more than just provide the women with necessary skills that act as “a way to support the autonomy of these women...they also act as spaces for communication, so the women can feel united...and able to participate in society” (Personal communication 30 November 2015). They are, in many ways, mini-public spheres where women are able to connect with other women, share their experiences, discuss their triumphs and woes and share information and skills that they otherwise could not have shared. It is here that social change is born—through learning and talking and sharing, through personal growth and ideals of solidarity. These women, who have always been seen as voiceless, use these places to exercise their voice, to stretch it out and prepare it to be heard. They use each other to amplify their voices; to solidify the platform from which they speak that alone was never heard.

Through their participation in regular trainings these women also gain the ability to influence future generations through becoming teachers and examples to community members. In the cooperative I visited, trainings are lead not by foreign experts but by local experts, by the women themselves who have chosen to share their skills and recycle their knowledge into their community. This flow of information and knowledge empowers not only the women directly involved but also allows them to empower future generations and begin a positive cycle of providing trainings to women of their community that were previously not available to them. Additionally, a few of the cooperatives I visited mentioned that cooperatives in the Rif often attend shared trainings. In this way the participation in training sessions allows not only for the learning of a new skill but also for the creation of large networks from which the women can draw on for strength. It allows them not only to create ties within their community but between communities as well. These types of ties, as well as the opportunity to travel, though not enjoyed by every member of the cooperative, adds a type of emancipatory education that is not necessarily done in a classroom but by simple exposure to new people and experiences.

Similarly, their participation in literacy campaigns allows them more than just the ability to read and write, it “helps women break their silence about difficult issues, opens up debate among them, and encourages them to exercise their right to express themselves” (Bordat et. al. 2011:103). The issue of education and illiteracy is something Morocco has struggled for years. According to data gathered from the World Bank, Morocco lags far behind other North African countries when it comes to enrollment ratios from primary to tertiary levels. Morocco is also the

lowest in North African in terms of primary school completion rate. Although completion rate and enrollment rates have consistently increased they are still of the lowest if not the lowest in the region. In terms of educating women and girls, Morocco was the lowest in North Africa when it came to the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education. It was also the lowest in the ratio of literate girls to boys ages 15-24.

Being that “illiteracy has been an important constraint on women knowing their rights” (Bordat et. al. 2011:106) literacy programs, like the one offered by several organizations working on women’s rights, provide women with the skill needed to learn about and advocate for their own rights. Due to these literacy campaigns, “women who have never been to school and would have never have dreamed of talking about the law before” are able to participate in such debates (Bordat et. al. 2011:103). Several articles I read about female illiteracy spoke of the issues faced by women who often have no knowledge of changing laws, such as the new family code which afforded women several rights they were previously denied. Without the ability to read or write, many women only know what they are told and therefore had a very weak platform to argue when things were unjust. The ability to read and write empowers women by providing them the necessary skills to legitimize their claims both to themselves and to others.

Additionally, women in cooperatives also gain from the act of getting their products to the market through displays in fairs and souks. Similar to the experience of shared trainings, these acts allow women to connect in public spaces with other women who are working in similar enterprises as them. In this way the women are able to learn and share with each other, expanding their network past their immediate community. At times those networks expand internationally as was seen in COPITADAL, whose exhibit in Barcelona lasted four days, and Souani who regularly ships their products to companies in Europe.

### *Infiltrating the Public Sphere: Networks, Support and Collective Strength*

The last benefit that will be discussed in this paper is that of the creation of networks and spaces for women outside of the home. As mentioned throughout this paper, the public sphere is defined as all and any interactions between individuals that happen outside of the home and help shape public opinion. In Morocco—due to the complex relationship between the state, religion and the patriarchy discussed in the context section of this paper—the public sphere is a space that has been historically controlled by men. Women have, for many years, held power only within

the private sphere - confining their voices and influence to the home and denying them the ability to be a part of the interactions and civil society organizations which build social capital and affect political atmospheres. According to Habermas the public sphere and civil society are the avenues the public uses to enact social and political change. If women do not have access to these spaces then they have very little direct affect on social and political change in their country. As mentioned before, the problem is created at the intersection of the state, religion and the patriarchy being “the patriarchy weaves together civil society, state, market and family.... [meaning a women’s] relationship to the state is often mediated through family ties (Joseph 2015). In my opinion participation in cooperatives and the courses, trainings and fairs that accompany them, allow the women to forge a space for themselves within the public sphere. This space in turn permits them to draw on their skills and networks in order to directly influence the public discourse and opinion that affects political and social atmospheres in Morocco thus enabling them to enact social change.

All of the benefits that have been discussed above come together within the public sphere to create the platform from which women are able to demand their rights. It is here where the women are able to use their education and skills to speak up about their rights and needs. It is here where their networks become more than just friends and coworkers—they become allies in social movements. It is here where their social capital is both created and reinforced. As put in the article *Women as Agents of Grassroots Change: Illustrating Micro-Empowerment in Morocco* by Stephanie Willman Bordat, Susan Schaefer Davis, Saida Kouzzi the importance of the networks and the ability to act collectively comes as “widespread knowledge of human and legal rights among women—and the development of their capacity to claim them in individual situations and organize collectively to defend them. [This] is one necessary step in pressuring state institutions, from the bottom up, to respond to citizen’s concerns” (Bordat et. al. 2011:104). Additionally, cooperatives “enable women to unite in solidarity and provide a network of mutual support to overcome restrictions to pursuing commercial or economic activities” – through this there is not only “increased economic security [but also] increased contributions to the economic wellbeing of their families...communities and nations” (Cooperatives and Women: Promoting Self-Empowerment 2012). Part of what allows for these networks of support, as well as part of what results from these networks, is the building of social capital, which is in many ways the culmination of benefits women experience.

To reiterate what was mentioned in the key terms section of this paper, and as quoted by Rachid Touhtou, social capital is “the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person”. Essentially it is the ties and skills that family members are able to recycle back into their family’s future generations. In most cases social capital is important because, “people who are able to draw on others for support are healthier than those who can not; they are also happier and wealthier; their children do better at school, and their communities suffer less from anti-social behavior” (Touhtou 2012:21-23). Additionally, social capital is often used to “resolve problems related to development, conflict resolution and lack of solidarity and network management” (Touhtou 2012:21). In this light one can see how important networks and public interactions are for women. In cases where women are denied access to the economy and the public sphere there is little social capital they can recycle into their families. When women partake in cooperatives they gain skills, ideas and abilities as well as social ties and networks that enrich their lives and the lives of their children. This was mentioned by the AFFA president when talking about the benefits of cooperatives, to quote her again on the topic she stated that “these women are together, they have power to make decisions and can debate decisions amongst themselves, they feel that they can solve their own problems. I am sure that they will use at least a small percentage of what they learned here in their daily life, with their children, with their daughters...”. Additionally, as stated in the article *Cooperatives and Women: Promoting Self-Empowerment*, “women members of collective organizations often report increased self-esteem and a sense of solidarity and support, particularly in times of need” (Cooperatives and Women: Promoting Self-Empowerment 2012). Increased self-esteem that comes along with the benefits of cooperative work positively affects not just the individuals involved but their families as well. It also benefits society in that it elicits important dialogue and brings in ideas and voices that would otherwise not be heard.

As mentioned before, every cooperative I visited stated that the biggest benefit was the ability to interact with people they would have otherwise never met. Both Izemmouren and Rouadi mentioned this as we spoke, using my presence as an example of just how far those connections reached. They spoke proudly of the fairs they’d been a part of and the connections they had made with women all over. The founder of COPITADAL also emphasized this in our conversation saying that the cooperative functioned most importantly as a safe space for women

to come and share their experiences and look for support or advice. Additionally she spoke about how cooperatives do not just benefit the members, they benefit their families and communities because it allows the women to give back knowledge they've gained and participate more actively than they would have before. The women of AFFA also held a similar belief in this realm. In particular they spoke of trainings as being important not only because they taught women skills but also because they provided women with a space to feel united and capable of expressing themselves, debating and sharing with other women. Essentially, cooperatives and all they entail function almost as trial run public spheres where women learn to demand rights and act collectively. As quoted by Rachid Touhtou, these experiences act as ““little schools of citizenship”” which help women become active members of the public sphere and civil society (Touhtou 2012:18)

These networks that exist for women in the public sphere thanks to cooperatives allow them to part take in collective action. According to Hannah Arendt, “[p]ower corresponds to the human ability not just to act but act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.” (Sater 2007:9). This is one way to view the importance of collective power among women who for so long have only associated with members of their own family. When women stay within the private sphere they unable to exercise their power to "act in concert" and demand right for themselves as women, as daughter, as mothers, and most importantly, as citizens

## **Issues**

### *Isolation and Limited Mobility*

One of the issues faced by these cooperatives is that they are for the most part isolated being that most are both being in that they are in rural areas, a ways away from the urban center, but also in a part of Morocco that is difficult to reach. Most the rural cooperatives had little daily traffic. The more successful of the cooperatives, for example those that took part in production of uniforms for domestic and international companies, reached that level of recognition through participation in fairs and events to display their work both in Morocco and abroad. However, even participating in these fairs poses a problem for women who “face obstacles getting their products to market because of their household duties and limited mobility” (Bordat et. al. 2011:96).

The cooperative in Izemmouren, for example, said that the issue of isolation and transportation was one they regularly struggled with, mentioning that getting their products to market was a constant problem. This is not only a problem for the expansion of the cooperative but also for the expansion of networks for its members. When I asked in the cooperative in Izemmouren had connections to other cooperatives they said “yes, of course” but then added that the cooperatives are far from one another so most their interactions happen in the few fairs they can attend. The Bouiya cooperative in Rouadi, which functioned at a slightly larger scale, seemed to have a slightly easier time getting their products to market and has already begun participating in big events in Morocco and abroad, like the film festival in Nador, which help promote their products and increase their recognition. However, they still mentioned that the cooperative does not have the money to send more than maybe one or two delegates to take part in these cooperatives. This means that although the cooperative as a whole benefits from the gained recognition, only a few women benefit from the experience of traveling and expanding their personal networks. The cooperative in Souani, one of the most productive cooperatives I visited, is not actively producing tradition, modern and uniform clothing for people and industries all over Morocco and Europe. When I visited they were busy working on work uniforms for a bakery in Marrakech while simultaneously packing and organizing a shipment of uniforms that to be sent out soon. According to AFFA, the Souani cooperative is one of the most successful cooperatives in the Rif that works with and is supported by several organization and cooperatives from all over the world and has participated in a myriad of national and international fairs. They even had a very professionally made pamphlet that displayed their clothes and the clothes of three other cooperatives. COPITADAL of Al-Hoceima is a very different story being that in the past few years it has become extremely successful, grown to encompass several crafts, become the first women’s cooperative to produce a Moroccan flag and been recognized by the King himself for their work. The founder spoke about several national and international fairs they have participated in, one in particular in Barcelona where they had an exhibit lasting a few days. At this point their network can be said to stretch throughout Morocco, into

Additionally, as I noticed in my many attempts to get from one cooperative to another, almost no one knows that these cooperatives even exist, often they believe that their buildings are just house some governmental association. In a small time like Izemmouren, this isn’t hard to

believe being that the cooperative is housed in the same building as the AIDC, a tall but modest white building with no visibly clear distinction between the development organization and the cooperative. However, the Bouiya cooperative of Rouadi is housed in a large, burnt orange building right at the edge of town which stands out from the rest of the village, making it hard to miss. Nonetheless, it seems only obvious to those who are looking. COPITADAL is located in Al-Hoceima and is very well known according to those I spoke to, yet not a single cab driver recognized the name of the cooperative (neither when I said it nor when they read it). Even AFFA was difficult to find on foot or by taxi. My first attempt at getting there without help by foot led to being told by several people on the street that they had no idea what I was talking about. My decision to take a taxi proved less futile only because the taxi driver recognized the street name and drove me around until I recognized the purple door of the organization.

This poses a problem for cooperatives and associations for several reasons. Most notably, in my opinion, it limits the growth of their networks. This is especially true for smaller scale cooperatives, especially those in rural settings, who, due to “both inadequate and relatively expensive public transportation and social constraints on women traveling alone” (Bordat et. al. 2011:96), cannot easily partake in the fairs that serve to connect cooperatives to each other and international actors. By limiting the growth of their networks and connections, it also limits their space in the public sphere to their locales. Additionally, though arguably less necessary when talking about forging a space in the public sphere, it means that the women are then unable to benefit from the ability to travel that accompanies membership in cooperatives and taking your products to international markets.

### *The Correlation between Profitability and Legal Leverage*

Another common issue commonly faced by cooperatives is that of profitability. Although this is one of the lesser benefits when it comes to entrance in the public sphere, it’s one of the more detrimental issues when it comes to the survival and legitimacy of the cooperative.

As in with all else, the extent to which cooperatives are profitable varies from cooperative to cooperative and is influenced by several factors. The dimension of the issue makes it impossible to provide cooperatives with a set plan, or blueprint, to success (which would go against one of the core aspects of cooperatives, anyway: the ability for trial and error). In large part profitability can be linked to, issues of isolation and limited mobility, mentioned



above and the subsequent difficulties bringing products to markets, especially markets where those products will sell. It may also be linked to the nature of the work. For example, a cooperative specializing in making clothes may struggle more to find buyers than a cooperative specializing in producing high-price art pieces or textiles. Regardless of why cooperatives are either profitable or not, there are several ways in which the ways profits affect them converge.

Moreover, despite the fact that profitability was not the goal of any of the cooperatives I visited, it does play a part in gaining power in the public sphere. According to Manuel Castells idea of the network society power relationships are the foundation of the institutions that organize society. Those same power relationships play a large role in shaping public opinion. Unfortunately, those with power, and therefore those with large platform are also those with a lot of capital. In this way, profits act as a way of legitimizing power in the public sphere and therefore expanding and strengthening your platform. In this way profitability and collective strength are in many ways intimately linked. Although lack of profitability does not deprive you of the ability to gain collective power, it does limit the ability for that power to grow, particularly in the eyes of others. Correspondingly, as put by the founder of The Anou, profits can also be used as “leverage” for lobbying the government and demanding rights. If a cooperative is not profitable it’s harder for them to demand rights because they are not seen as “worthy”. Cooperatives that experience little profitability can still collectively demand right, but in most cases the less profitable the smaller their platform thus the less they are heard. This is especially challenging because of the intimate link between isolation, lack of mobility, expansion of networks and profitability because it means that those smaller cooperatives who cannot afford to take part in fairs are not able to strengthen their platform in society through networks or legitimacy through profits.

### *Transparency*

Lastly, I think it is important to mention that this project is by no means trying to imply that work in cooperatives is always a good and positive alternative to all other types of enterprises or experience for all members. It is however arguing that the mere act of leaving the home to be a part of a community outside the “private” sphere can be extremely beneficial to women, especially when accompanied with the type of emancipatory education that can then be recycled into the community. If done correctly, cooperatives can act as a foundation to an alternative to capitalism known as the solidarity economy. In other words, it is important not to

assume that just by virtue of being a cooperative, every cooperative works to empower its members.

During our interview, the founder of The Anou, emphasized in his interview was the fact that many cooperative leaders shied away from joining the Anou when confronted with the expectation of transparency. He spoke of corruption among some cooperative leaders who do not want members knowing how much a product sells for so as to not be held accountable for providing artisans with a proper share. Ultimately he said that it was okay if a founder makes more money than the members so long as members are aware of where their money is going to. If cooperatives are run without transparency then they are ultimately just as exploitative as other means of getting products to the market (Personal communication 10 November 2015).

Additionally, cooperatives that change their models from being people centered to being profit center may also fall short of being truly empowering in the way cooperatives are thought to be. By taking on the typical capitalistic organization they fail to focus on the rights and well-being of their members and fall into the cycle of increased profits and the increased inequalities that tend to follow. These serves as an example as to how cooperatives, in order to be truly empowering, must be completely people and community centered. The point of cooperatives should not be to fight for power in the free market but instead to fight for the empowerment of people

### **Conclusion**

In a global reality in which women, especially Muslim women, are often deprived of a voice in the eyes of the world, examples like those I have presented above stand as illustrations of how women are actively engaging themselves in social change within their communities. These actions however are not always as loud or visible as other forms of social action. Instead they take form in a group of seven women, twelve women, twenty-four women sitting in a busy workroom in the middle of a quiet village. These seemingly unimpressible sites are the stepping-stones that are paving the way to true human development and equal participation of women in the public sphere. These cooperatives and organization embody people-centered alternatives to current economic organizations by offering a new means of production and organization that focus on the needs of its members and takes into account social, political and economic context. Taking part in cooperatives “enables women to unite in solidarity and provides a network of mutual support to overcome restrictions to pursuing commercial or

economic activities” providing them with not only “increased economic security [but also] increased contributions to the economic wellbeing of their families...communities and nations” (Cooperatives and Women: Promoting Self-Empowerment 2012).

They function in varying scales and with varying backgrounds but they are what people-centered development should be: more than just economic. Although I will not deny that profitability and power often go hand in hand, I maintain that cooperatives empower their members by providing with the a political and social power that they would otherwise not be afforded. That power comes not in the form of mass profits or a climbing of the socio-economic ladder, although independent income is one of the benefits these women experience, but instead in the form of enhanced social capital through networks and emancipatory education. Through their active participation in courses, trainings and fairs that accompany membership in cooperatives, women are provided not only technical skills that are monetarily profitable but social and political skills that are necessary in order to participate, with legitimacy and respect, in the public sphere. Through the extensive professional and technical training all women’s cooperatives and organizations I visited provide women are able to gain profitable skills, which they can then use as they please. Most importantly however, these cooperatives, courses, trainings, fairs, and markets serve to forge a space in the public sphere for women. It is in this space when all the benefits of collective work come together. It is a space of debate, of decisions, of solace. A safe space for women to exercise their voices, to discuss issues they would otherwise shy away from and to find solutions to problems they would otherwise never encounter. It is the space in which true skills and literacy and profits come together to create the social capital needed to act collectively. Acting collectively to make decisions then turns into the ability to act as a social force.

Cooperatives “have shown themselves as distinctly beneficial to improving women’s social and economic capacities” by encouraging their participation in the economy as well as making them aware of their agency and providing them with emancipatory education that often accompanies participation in cooperatives (Cooperatives and Women: Promoting Self-Empowerment 2012). By functioning within a community, cooperatives allow issues of illiteracy or lack of formal education to be overcome. Additionally the training and support provided by cooperatives and external association provide the women with both profitable skills and access to safe spaces and networks that can function as “little schools of citizenship”. In these ways

cooperatives “not only provide decent work for otherwise vulnerable or transitional individuals but also impart them with the labor force and entrepreneurial skills to further diversify their livelihood prospects” (Cooperatives and Women: Promoting Self-Empowerment 2012).

Through this the women build of social capital in a way that would otherwise not be possible.

Additionally, by empowering its members and encouraging them to demand rights and welfare, women’s cooperatives lead to more than just economic participation of women—they lead to women becoming direct participants in social change. This social change comes from providing women, who are often excluded from the economic and political sphere, a stronger grip on their livelihood and thus their rights. By participating in cooperatives women are creating a public space in which they can build networks and gain skills needed to become more active in the decisions that affect their daily lives and that of their family. Additionally, it provides them with supplementary income that they then have the liberty to allocate to what they deem as important or lacking.

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