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Market Feminism in Morocco
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Abstract

Despite widespread views of “Moroccan Exceptionalism,” Morocco continues to rank poorly on international evaluations of gender equality. This project seeks to understand the extent of the influence neoliberal economic forces in Morocco have had on the feminist landscape. Analysis of Moroccan political history, Foucauldian theories of power relations, and relevant literature on state feminism set the groundwork for the evaluation of the extent state feminism in Morocco can be understood as market-based, in accordance with the definition from From State Feminism to Market Feminism (2012) by Kantola and Squires. Through interviews of three experts, three meetings with women’s empowerment NGOs, and a review of relevant literature, it is theorized that neoliberalism has played a role in the development of Islamic state feminism under King Mohammed VI, which has in turn led to women’s NGO dynamics as more professional, transnational, and controlled by the state. In other words, feminism in Morocco is utilized by the state to create a balance between a positive international image and control of cultural and religious Islamic identity. This balance serves the country’s foreign policy and economic goals which have merged through war-on-terror neoliberalism, as well as the ruling monarchy's desire for domestic control. This project concludes that market forces are just one variable affecting the success of feminist activism in Morocco, but should be part of the discussion when considering best practices moving forward.

Key Words: Political Science, Sociology, Gender Studies, Regional Studies: Middle East North Africa
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Introduction

According to the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) 2021 Global Gender Gap Report, Morocco ranked 144th place out of 156 surveyed countries in the Gender Gap Index, down one place from 2020 (WEF, 2020, p. 10). The report surveyed Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment in terms of women’s economic and political positions respective to their individual counties (WEF, 2020, p. 11). Although women’s rights in Morocco are far more complex than a number on a list from the WEF, the findings of the report showcase stark gender inequality by European standards. The WEF findings invite further research into the feminist landscape in Morocco, to better understand the genuine situation for women and the forces affecting the current circumstances. By evaluating these forces, better judgments on best practices for improving the situation for women can be made from a place of improved knowledge. This project seeks to evaluate feminism in Morocco, analyzing the role market forces play in women's movements and organizations.

This research is especially significant given recent developments which have caused political and economic change in the Kingdom. Notably, the country follows a constitutional monarchical system and has been ruled under the Alaouite dynasty's twenty-third King, Mohammed VI, since 1999 (Barbour 2022). The inauguration of a new king of the 21st century, who is considered more progressive than the previous King Hassan II, is relevant to all aspects of Moroccan society. The Moroccan king exercises tremendous powers, including but not limited to, promulgating legislation, approving legislative appointments, and appointing the prime minister for the party with a plurality in parliament. He also controls the armed forces, national security, and is referred to as the “commander of the faithful,” thus positioned as the highest
religious authority in the nation (Barbour 2022). This involves observing adherence to laws, and social norms, and following Maliki Islam (Borillo 2021). Maliki Islam is one of the four significant schools of law of Sunni Islam, which is a major component of the religious life and the cultural milieu of the Moroccan people and is the official religion of the country (Barbour 2022).

The country has a parliamentary constitutional monarchy, and notably, recent political events have led to changes in the political framework. The bombings in Casablanca in 2003 caused a growing fear of religious extremism which catalyzed the 2004 change to the Family Code, and the February 20th movement catalyzed the new Constitution in 2011 (Borillo 2021). The February 20th movement occurred when the Arab Spring reached Rabat, in which people of all ages and identities took to the streets to protest many topics including censorship, treatment of women, and education. Seven months later, in July 2011, Moroccan voters approved a new constitution that expanded the powers of the parliament and increased democratization which was proposed by King Muhammed VI (Eddouada 9/29/2022). However, both the impact and intent of Moroccan legislative changes over the past two decades continue to be up for debate. And at the center of this debate is the so-called “woman question.”

Within the context of these political changes, this project seeks to understand how interpretations of the *woman question* can be understood in the intersection of (geo)political forces, domestic Islamic forces, feminist forces, and international neoliberal forces. This is attempted through the evaluation of the implication of market forces within the feminist sphere in Morocco. To do so, I will assess the compatibility of the Moroccan situation with the definition of market-based feminism provided by Johanna Kantola and Judith Squires in *From state feminism to market feminism?* (2021). This definition, as will be elaborated on further,
refers to state feminist policies with neoliberal motivations or conduits in postindustrial societies, involving the emergence of policy agencies becoming embedded in private business interests on both a private and state level (Kantola & Squires, 2012, p. 385). This assessment must be considered alongside secular domestic activism, bureaucratic international feminism, and culturally relativist views of Islam as contributing to the current situation. These qualitative assessments will be performed through the lens of the following research focus: To what extent is Islamic State Feminism market-based, according to the perceptions of Moroccan scholars, domestic NGOs, and relevant literature? This project contributes to a growing field of research evaluating the relationship between economic policy and NGO reform. More specifically, the paper contributes to a developing body of literature evaluating market-based feminism by including the perspective of neoliberalism in the Moroccan kingdom in the discussion.

Methods

This project is based on political theory, through qualitative analysis. The foundation of this paper will be research conducted through a review of relevant literature, to identify trends of women’s organizations in Morocco shifting towards approaches to achieve their goals through market forces as opposed to governmental institutions. In addition to a review of relevant literature through political and economic lenses, I will conduct my research through an interview format. I interviewed three Moroccan scholars who are experts in my field of study, Dr. Souad Eddouada, Dr. Mourad Mkinsi, and Dr. Soumaya Belhabib. Dr. Eddouada holds a Ph.D. in cultural and gender studies from Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco, and works as a researcher and professor at Ibn Tofail University in Kenitra, Morocco. She is an expert on feminism in Morocco and has been conducting fieldwork on the rural women’s land claims movement, which is very relevant to the neoliberal component of my research. Dr. Mkinsi is also
a writer and professor at Ibn Tofail University and received his Ph.D. in cultural studies at the Open University in Milton Keynes, England. His expertise in cultural studies allowed him to share insights on the intersectionality of feminism in Morocco through many lenses, including economic, social, political, and socioeconomic. Further, Dr. Belhabib is a professor who designed a gender studies master's program at Ibn Tofail University, the first of its kind. Additionally, she is the vice president of a women's empowerment NGO in Kenitra, called Chaml. Dr. Belhabib's interview allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the content from the perspective of someone who has experience as both a scholar and NGO employee.

In these interviews, appropriate consideration was given to informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality of research participants, in keeping with human subject protocols and the LRB-approved ISP proposal. Additionally, some of my research was conducted through site visits to NGOs or attending presentations from NGO employees. I was able to use site visits and presentations attended as part of the class period of SIT Migration and Transnational Identity as part of my research. Three NGO visits were most relevant to my research: Chaml in Kenitra, 100% Mamans in Tangier, and Tawaza in Tetouan.

Academic literature was sourced primarily through searches of databases and included peer-reviewed journal articles in international and national scientific journals and chapters of books. Some research was also found in PDFs of historical books published online, such as the works of Michel Foucault mentioned in the review of the literature. Additionally, in order to establish a baseline background on current and historical events affecting the political and cultural climate in Morocco, information was taken from lectures during the class period and online encyclopedias. Further, one op-ed is mentioned as an example of current scholarly
discourse. However, given the topic's positions at the intersection of political science and sociology, the majority of works included are academic.

In terms of examination, the methodology of this project is a qualitative analysis. An inductive framework is the best fit for my research question and hypothesis. A topical approach will be used concentrating on political theory, feminism in Morocco, neoliberalism in Morocco, and differentiation between Islamic State Feminism with Kantola and Squire’s market-based feminism definition. Evaluation of this kind reveals catalysts and motivations of political change and thus allows for a deeper understanding of the changing political landscape in Morocco which can in turn be used to make predictions in future policy enactments. This analysis is important for the evaluation of the motivations–as well as the limitations– of political actors. Further, insights from this comparison may be used to evaluate best practices for women’s policy agencies and women’s organizations to achieve their goals in Morocco.

Limitations for my project stem from the primary research sources. In particular, I had a very small interview pool due to complications with scheduling and language barriers. I do not fluently speak the official languages of Morocco, Darijia and French, which limited my research both in person and online. Additionally, time constraints prevented me from visiting the sites of Moroccan NGOs which could have allowed me to perform more comprehensive primary research. Further, my position as an outsider and my positionality as a Caucasian American woman affected the extent of ethical on-site research. For this reason, I tried to use research methods online and with experts in the field in order to engage in ethical research. Therefore, the perspectives from my primary research are relatively narrow.
Literature Review

To understand the subject matter of the research question, one must consider relevant literature pertaining to the field of power and policy in Political Science studies. It is widely believed that Nicolo Machiavelli first used the word state in his seminal realpolitik work *The Prince (1532)*. Although it is still contested by political theorists precisely what Machiavelli meant by the term and its scope, it is broadly understood that he referred to the state as a strong authority within a set territorial boundary (Nederman, 2022). This conception of state set the framework for centuries of discourse addressing the role and best practices of states. In Victorian philosopher Henry Sidgwick’s work *The Elements of Politics (1891)*, he defines the state in chapter 14 writing,

I must begin by distinguishing between (1) the narrower use of the word “State” to denote the community considered exclusively in its corporate capacity, as the subject of public as distinct from private rights and obligations; and (2) its wider use to denote the community however considered (Edgeworth 1891).

Sidgwick acknowledges the wide range of implications of the term state, which can create confusion and ambiguity of meaning. An example is the debts of the state referring to the debts of a nation's government as opposed to the debts of a citizenry or body politic. For the purpose of this project, State will refer to Sidgwick’s narrower conception of state—i.e., the community in its corporate/public capacity. However, to understand the implications of State Feminism, Foucault’s framework of the state will be used. Michel Foucault’s 1980 essay *Truth and Power* provides a definition of the state as “superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology, and so forth” (Foucault, 1980, p. 123). Foucault's conception of the state is that the power relations of a state are not vertical, and gain legitimacy through a series of many simultaneous power
relations (Ibid). He refers to this phenomenon as an economy of power that allows the effects of power to circulate through a social body itself, and become maintained by a social body continuously (Ibid, 119). He writes that what makes power legitimate is that it “traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” (Ibid). Further, more specifically to gender studies and power, Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, describes how the political power of the state has weaponized binaries of sexuality and gender. Although Foucault’s work focuses on Western Democracies, his theories of state power repressing sex and the “citizen opposite of the state” is relevant to Moroccan society (Foucault, 1921, pp. 85). Similarly, Foucault describes this power as self-reproducing, as relations of sex and gender not only being top-down but simultaneously bottom-up. In other words, power creates public discourse which creates domination. According to Foucault, part of this self-reproduction is what he calls a *hysterization of women’s bodies*: “a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analyzed-qualified and disqualified-as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality.” (Ibid, 104). Deconstruction of the hysterization of women’s bodies has been a pillar of feminist movements globally.

According to the qualitative paper *Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State*, by Saptoka and Dahal, “feminist scholars are critical to the hegemonic nature of power that disempowers and subjugates women in the state, society, culture and politics” (Sapkota & Dahal, 2022, pp 82). It is precisely these power dynamics that make up the state. Sapkota and Dahal quote MacKinnon (1983) in the following observation:

Feminism has no theory of the state. It has a theory of power: sexuality is gendered as gender is sexualized…. feminism distinctively as such comprehends that what counts as truth is produced in the interest of those with power to shape reality and that this process is as pervasive as it is necessary as it is changeable (Sapkota & Dahal, 2022, p. 635-658).
The feminist critique of the state thus focuses on the androcentric and patriarchal power
dynamics intrinsic to state. The feminist critique of the state must be carefully distinguished from
so-called State Feminism.

According to *State feminism revisited as knowledge history: The case of Norway* by
Eirinn Larsen, State Feminism emerged in Norway through an interplay of political institutions,
inter-nordic cooperation, and gender studies research in the 1960s and 70s. According to Larsen,
the origins of state feminism can be traced back to post-World War II financing of research to
reconstruct Western Democracies (Larsen, 2020, pp. 153), which gender studies movement as
part of Norwegian identity. This culminated in Norweigan political scientist Helga Hernes
The book contributed to a new feminist ethos, using the extent of political power women hold
within the bureaucracies of a state as a metric for measuring women’s success, using
Scandanaivia as an example (Larsen, 2020, pp. 152).

Since its conception, contemporary state feminism has become a growing field in
political science. According to the book, *The Politics of State Feminism: Innovation in
Comparative Research* by Dorothy E. McBride and Amy G. Mazur, state feminism has emerged
as political actors responded to feminist activism by creating government institutions specifically
designed to address demands from nongovernmental women's organizations (McBride et al, p.
3). State feminists call these government institutions women’s policy agencies, and suggest that
WPMs have become a characteristic of democratic governance in the post-industrial era
(McBride et al., 2010, p. 4). McBride and Mazur describe their own conception of state feminism
as the “degree to which women's policy agencies forge alliances with women’s movements”
(Ibid, p. 4). Further, Mcbride and Mazure use the framework of the RNGS or *Research Network*
on Gender Politics and the State to evaluate the effectiveness of women’s policy agencies. RNGS projects have created tools for analysis within state feminism scholarship. They have analyzed the effectiveness of state feminism through factor analysis, including the political circumstances and nature of the organizations. RGNS projects have coined the term “transformative state feminism,” to describe the success of a dual response from the state where the state accepts female individuals and organizations into the process of change, and then makes a change that coincides with feminist goals (Ibid, p. 250). The validity of both the terminology and concept of state feminism has been a contentious topic for scholars. Jennifer Alssopp’s opinion piece State feminism: co-opting women’s voices for Open Democracy expresses the opinion that state feminism is a “political proxy for real change” that has been “damaging women all over.” Therefore, questions about the effectiveness of state feminism are relevant as a women’s rights issue.

According to Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State, market feminism emerged as a corollary to the subset of feminism advocating for women's financial independence and literacy (Sapkota & Dahal, 2022, p. 84). Some economists in the early 2000s believed the state couldn’t provide emancipation for women, but instead Locke’s invisible hand of the free market held the metaphorical key (Sapkota & Dahal, 2022, p. 84). However, for purposes of this project, Kantola and Squire’s definition of market feminism in From State Feminism to Market Feminism? will be used for critical comparison in the context of Moroccan politics.

The purpose of From State Feminism to Market Feminism? was to introduce a separate concept of market feminism to better describe contemporary interactions between governance and feminism in neoliberal postindustrial societies. According to Kantola and Squires, “femocrats” are increasingly turning to the market to pursue their agendas as opposed to state
institutions (Kantola and Squires, 2012, p. 383). With accelerating neoliberal reform, women’s policy agencies must adapt to a new political and economic environment. Kantola and Squires describe their reasoning as follows:

We coin the term ‘market feminism’ as distinct from ‘state feminism’ to analyse the ways in which feminist engagements with public policy agendas are increasingly mediated via private sector organizations according to the logic of the market. This results in gender equality machineries in nation states becoming ever more embedded in neoliberal market reform (Kantola and Squires, 2012, p. 383).

Kantola and Squires suggest the shift to the market is cyclical reform, as in time market mechanisms have become a ‘test’ of an efficient state and thus shape new policy. This reform can manifest in many ways including a general trend towards funding private foundations, as well as the professionalization and transnationalization of NGOs. The increased professionalization and transnationalization is a result of evidence-based policymaking, as NGOs produce knowledge to legitimize their work in order to gain funding, both nationally and internationally (Ibid, 387).

Evidence-based policy, contrasted with common-sense-based policy, is an empirical analytical approach to legitimizing policy. Kantola and Squires suggest that the evidence-based policy is aligned with the emphasis on the economic objectivity of neoliberalism, which has played a role in creating a new paradigm of institutionalized feminism. This new paradigm has shifted from focusing on the state to focusing on economic market forces, whether indirectly or directly.

Analysis

Feminism in Morocco

Despite orientalist tropes that paint Arab women as helpless victims, feminism in Morocco is a vibrant and complex process that pre-dates the country’s independence from French colonial rule in 1956 (M. Mkinsi, Personal Communication, November 14th, 2022). Some
historians have sectioned the process into three phases of development. The first phase, from the 1940s to the 1970s, is characterized by domestic political parties’ affiliations to feminist organizations, combining issues of colonial struggle with women’s education and social empowerment (Bouzghaya 2021). After the country's 1956 independence, women's sections rose within left-wing political parties and trade unions (Borillo 2021). The second period, from the 70s to the 90s, is aligned with the rise of liberal women’s demands and institution development after Moroccan independence, and a continued alliance with leftist political parties (Bouzghaya 2021). Activists within these political groups created associations such as the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM) and the Union of Women’s Action (UAF) (Borillo 2021). Further, during the 1980s secular feminism was invigorated as the international landscape was affected by the UN’s decade for women’s rights from 1975 to 1985 (Ibid). However, activists became disenchanted with the traditional party structure as not much had changed, and the focus shifted dramatically to civil society. This created the emergence of a “moving away” from political parties during the mid-1980s to 1990s (M. Mkinsi, Personal Communication, November 14th, 2022). The third period, the focus of this paper, from the mid-1990s into modernity, has been characterized by the “NGOization” of the movement, and the organizational fracturing of parties and feminist organizations. Additionally, this period is characterized by the Islamic awakening (Borillo 2021).

In the 1990s, gradual political changes culminated in the constitutional reform of 1996, which formed a bicameral legislature and expanded parliamentary powers. This reform in the 90s was part of a process to prepare for the succession from notoriously conservative King Hassan II to his son, King Mohammed VI, upon his death (Eddouada 9/29/2022). Additionally, the purpose of the constitutional reform in 1996 was to get ready for the shift towards a parliament consisting
of parties of the Nationalist bloc. These reforms engaged women in making laws and saw the promotion of feminist voices, and Islamic scholarship modifying the discourse internally. As discussed below the monarchy adopted further reforms in response to the bombings of Casablanca in 2003, the Moroccan 2011 uprisings, and the February 20th Movement in order to appease both the populace and international institutions.

**Family Code**

The family code, or mudawannah, was reformed in 1993 and again in 2004, and is a set of laws regarding marriage, inheritance, and divorce. According to Sara Borillo in *Between Gender Equality and Islam: Feminisms in Morocco*, it establishes patriarchal familial structures outlined in Malaki teachings. After pressure from human rights organizations, as well as increased incentives to liberalize after the Casablanca bombings in 2003, King Mohammed VI brought the code in front of the parliament in 2004. Some reforms to the code include: defining marriage as a partnership between equals, abolishing the Maliki doctrine of compulsory guardianship in marriage, divorce regulation, and guarantee of rights and setting a minimum age of marriage at 18 for both sexes (Eddouada 9/29/2022). However, caveats in the code exist. For example, articles 18, 19, and 20 include loopholes allowing for the marriage of a child if approved by a judge (Al-Zahra Aloush 9/22/22). Additionally, children born out of wedlock continue to be unacknowledged by the state, although, as of 2004, if the parents have evidence of betrothal their offspring may be legitimized (Eddouada 9/29/2022).

The family code continues to fuel the debate, especially considering its position as one of the only non-secular Moroccan civil laws. Feminist activists continued to fight for reform during the Moroccan Arab Spring, commonly known as the February 20th Movement in 2011. This resulted in significant reform including a new Constitution, only a few months later (Eddouada
9/29/2022). The constitution addressed the women question in article 19, which now states that

*The man and the woman enjoy, in equality, the rights and freedoms of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental character.* This holds precedence in Malaki interpretation of the Quran, specifically in Surah-An Nisa 4:34-35.¹ An especially interesting element of the 2004 revision of the code was the fact that the reforms opened up space for women to occupy positions of authority in religious institutions, paving the towards Islamic state feminism (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 7).

**State Feminism**

State feminism existed in Morocco prior to the 2004 code revisions. An example of this is a quota system under Mohammed VI that brought 35 women into Parliament in 2002. However, post-2004, a new sort of Islamic state feminism began to emerge. This Islamic state feminism can only be understood within the context of the divided feminist discourse of the early third period, which saw a division between secular and Islamic current feminism (Bouzghaya 2021).

The secular current is more international, inspired by UN charters and the 1979 implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (**CEDAW**), ratified by Morocco in 1993. The secular movement has increased participation by Moroccan feminists in international conferences, which opened up the movement to international conventions on women's rights and equality. Much of the feminist discourse during this period is recorded in “8 March” magazine. This publication is significant as

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¹ "Men are the caretakers of women, as men have been provisioned by Allah over women and tasked with supporting them financially. And righteous women are devoutly obedient and, when alone, protective of what Allah has entrusted them with. And if you sense ill-conduct from your women, advise them 'first', 'if they persist,' do not share their beds, 'but if they still persist,' then discipline them 'gently'; But if they change their ways, do not be unjust to them. Surely Allah is Most High, All-Great. If you anticipate a split between them, appoint a mediator from his family and another from hers. If they desire reconciliation, Allah will restore harmony between them. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”

(Surah An-Nisa 34-35)
it predominantly addressed women’s rights, issues, and events, and many of the prominent writers of the feminist movement were involved with this publication (Bouzghaya 2021).

The Islamist front, on the other hand, is characterized by political parties, institutions, and people that use Islamic considerations in order to shape their feminist demands. In terms of political parties, the Peace and Justice party (PJD) and the Justice and Charity group (Al-‘Adl wa-l-Ihsan) are especially important to Islamic feminism. The Justice and Charity movement is an Islamic group that is officially banned but tolerated, that has a focus on rereading religious texts (Haitami, 2016, p.83). Nadia Yassine, the founder's daughter, has been instrumental in shaping contemporary Islamic feminism. The activists of Al-‘Adl wa-l-Ihsan use public demonstrations to rebel against male domination and corrupt politicians, in an effort to redefine the roles of women in Muslim societies (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 4).

The PJD holds a more moderate position but also calls for the adoption of laws that reference Islamic values in women's daily lives. PJD deputy Bassima Hakkouia is one of the founding members of The Renewal of Women’s Awareness, a national advocacy association that focuses on the broad interpretation of feminist justice (Haitami, 2016, p. 80). PJD’s goal is not equality (Musawah) but is directed toward the principle of complementarity (takāmul) (Borillo, 2022). This debate of equality vs complementarity continues to be distinctive of the feminist discourse of Morocco. On March 12th, 2000, both the PJD and the Justice and Charity Group marched against the socialist government’s reform in the “Plan for the Inclusion of Women in Development," which had a liberal focus on expanding the human rights framework and international standards of equality (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 4).
Islamic State Feminism

Thus, Islamic state feminism was born from balancing international gender equality and Islamization (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p. 12). The state has acted as a mediator to shape ideology and minimize infighting. As was defined in Foucault’s, *Truth and Power*, power creates public discourse which creates domination. As such the state has a powerful incentive to control public opinion. Further, as the political leader and highest religious authority of the nation, the King’s influence is magnified across multiple sectors. Accordingly, the state worked to dominate the feminist landscape through four main strategies: *Feminizing the official religious institution*, *Leadership in serving women's rights*, *Arbitration and Balance in Contentious Issues*, and *Maintaining Ambiguity and Open Interpretations* (Bouzghaya, 2021). The ideology of the state is defined by an association with a third trend that transcends the Islamic and secular camps, also known as the *compromise current*. This third trend, upheld by the monarchy, espouses no difference between Islamic and universal human rights (Bouzghaya, 2021).

The incorporation of women in religious institutions is evidence of new Islamic state feminism. In 2001, Dr. Farisa Zomorod was hired to teach at Dar Al Hadith Al Hassaniyah, making her the first female professor to teach at the prestigious religious school (Bouzghaya, 2021). Then, in 2004 Fatima Kabbaj was appointed as the first woman on the higher religious council, the leading Muslim scholar body in Morocco (Bouzghaya, 2021). Also in 2004, the King appointed a new Minister of Religious Affairs who is Sufi, which greatly influenced doctrinal Islam. In 2006, the Ministry for Islamic Affairs selected 50 female preachers in the mosques (murshidat) and 36 female theologians (‘alimat) for ulema (teaching) councils (Eddouada and Pepicelli, 2010, p. 7). This created a new precedent of feminization of religious institutions.
Today, there are approximately two hundred preachers who are women in Morocco, in conjunction with thirty-six female theologians on national councils (Eddouada and Pepicelli, 2010, p. 8). The recruitment of female murshidat has multiple purposes, including honoring the King as the highest religious authority and curbing radicalism. These initiatives are part of the monarchy's activity towards a greater balance between Sunni Islam, Sufiism, the Maliki doctrine, and respect for women's civil liberty. In order to redefine the religious milieu as well as the institutionalization of Moroccan Islam, women have played a pivotal role in the state (Eddouada and Pepicelli, 2010, p. 7).

**Neoliberalism in Morocco**

By the year 1964, Morocco was receiving both funds and liberal economic advice from the International Monetary Fund (Davis, 2006, p. 90). Since the 1980s the political culture in Morocco has witnessed a significant shift away from socialist left-wing politics and a rise of neoliberal doctrine, coinciding with the breakup of the Soviet Union in the late 1990s and the rise of political figures such as Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the UK (M. Mkinsi, Personal Communication, November 14th, 2022). The implementation of neoliberalism in Morocco is a transnational phenomenon; as neoliberalism became the dominant ideology in Western Europe it traveled back to partner states such as Morocco (Ibid). As Dr. Mkinsi explained, “it's very clear that the dominant idea [of development] is a neoliberal one–i.e., that you need to open up markets, you need to focus on exporting goods that are produced in developing countries, and so on” (Ibid).

In Morocco, neoliberalism has resulted in economic shifts towards capitalism, as well as an ideological shift towards the individual citizen as opposed to the collective common. This has resulted in the makhzen, or the ruling class consisting of royals, landowners, and military
officials, gaining almost complete control over economic decision-making. These choices expanded through the enactment of the structural adjustment program in the 1980s, the privatization law in 1989, as well as the implementation of the Ministry of Economy and privatization (Moustakbal, 2017). Additionally, neoliberalism through transnationalization in Morocco is realized through international superpowers such as the IMF and the World Bank. Both organizations were involved in free trade agreements signed by Morocco in the 1990s, which resulted in privatizing public institutions, embracing export-oriented economics, importation of foreign products, and reducing subsidies for products including wheat, sugar, and oil (Moustakbal, 2017). Further, the second bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) in the Arab world was signed between the United States of America and Morocco in 2004 (Davis, 2006, p. 90). These changes have caused a shift towards export-oriented development, privatization, and dispersed pockets of ideological neoliberalism principally among the ruling class (M. Mkinsi, Personal Communication, November 14th, 2022).

Market Basis

Little research has been conducted on the extent to which the maturation of neoliberalism in Morocco has affected feminism in the country. As Squires and Kantola describe in *From State Feminism to Market Feminism*, market feminism can be used to explain “gender equality machinery in nation states becoming ever more embedded in neoliberal market reform” (Kantola and Squires, 2012, p. 383). Market-based feminism explains how the adoption of neoliberal policies not only affects economic motivations for the actions of the state regarding political and social change but also women's empowerment agencies as they undergo transnationalization and professionalization to meet changing standards. To evaluate this, I will discuss the associations within both the state and women’s NGOs.
**State**

Although the state under Mohammed VI has made significant reforms toward Islamic state feminism, it is important to consider both the intent and the impact of these reforms. The feminization of the religious institution in Morocco came primarily after the War on Terror was launched in the United States post-2001 and the suicide attacks in Casablanca in 2003, the deadliest terrorist attacks in the country's history (M. Mkinsi, Personal Communication, November 14th, 2022). Post 9/11 in the United States, Morocco was one of the first Islamic states to declare solidarity with the American people, and subsequent security cooperation between the two countries developed. In January 2004, Morocco was designated as a major NON-Nato ally as a reward for the collaboration (Kasraoui 2022).

Additionally, in 2004, The US and Morocco signed the Free Trade Agreement. According to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development data, US Foreign Direct Investments in Morocco have increased from MAD 1.5 billion in 2007 to MAD 6.3 billion in the first half of 2022 (Rahhou, 2022). In other terms, direct U.S. investment in Morocco rose from 7% in 2008 to 21% this year. Further, in 2021, the US State Department published the 2020 Country Report on Terrorism, which highlighted the extent of the United States’s history of “robust counterterrorism collaboration” with Morocco (Kasraoui, 2022). Recently, the deputy Assistant Secretary General of NATO for Political Affairs and Security Policy, Javier Colomina Piriz, visited authorities in Morocco in October 2022 to intensify cooperation with Morocco’s counter-terrorism unit, the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations (BCIJ) (Ibid). Thus, the Moroccan state has motives in terms of protections under NATO and American direct investments to implement the “war on terror” ideology and action. In such a way, feminization within the religious sphere can be understood as part of this counter-terrorism movement, which
provided Morocco with greater political and economic stability. The 200 female preachers appointed by the King were meant to revive more moderate Sufi Islam and mitigate radical Islamic movements linked with the Casablanca bombings in 2003. After the attacks, political relationships with other nations were strained, and the United States Department of Homeland security raised the terror threat of Morocco. Therefore there would be geo-political and economic benefits to using women’s policy as a means to curb extremism (Eddouada and Pepicelli, 2010, p. 8).

Themes of both professionalization and transnationalization emerge within these reforms. Both male and female preachers were professionalized in order for the state to tighten its control on containing discourses that are inconsistent with the third trend of Islamic feminism upheld by the monarchy (Borillo, 2022). These reforms can therefore be seen under the umbrella of domestic policy (Ibid). This also led to censorship and co-optation of individual religious liberty. According to Ilyas Bouzghaya in The Kings Feminists, “Muslim scholars who are not linked to the palace have been stripped of legitimacy and have been alerted not to venture to speak in the name of Islam because that is the realm of the King as Commander of the Faithful.” This can be interpreted under the concept of securitization of ideology, as part of Morocco’s balancing efforts of Islamic and secular forces, both domestic and international. In terms of foreign policy, Morocco has pioneered a new sort of international religious diplomacy. This has been both intra- and inter-continental. According to Sara Borillo in Between Gender Equality and Islam: Feminisms in Morocco, “Morocco is a special partner for many African countries looking to Rabat as their guide to a pan-African modernization.”

These changes have not been without criticism, from both the Islamic and the secular ends of the spectrum. In fact, although Nadia Yassine has advocated for changes in the family
code, she marched against changes to the muddawanah in the 2000s as she believed they were part of “cultural domination of the south by the north” (Haitami, 2016, p. 85). Even in terms of state-sponsored feminism, the inclusion of feminists previously viewed as problematic into Moroccan institutions can be seen as a technique to tighten control, while simultaneously reflecting the influence of institutions such as the World Bank, the European Union, and the United Nations (Borillo 2022). According to Dr. Souad Eddouada in *Towards an Islamic State Feminism*, “the reform of 2004-2006 also represented a process of appropriation on the part of the government of the feminist and Islamist challenges” (p. 13).

A relevant recent example of neoliberal appropriation is the 2019 land reforms in the Moroccan Gharb. Project grants traced from the early 2000s have attempted to liberalize the Moroccan Gharb, which still operates on a system of collective lands. The National Initiative for Human Development was launched in 2005 as a government program that’s mission is to minimize poverty through projects that encourage participatory democracy, self-entrepreneurship, and capitalism (Eddouada, 2022, p. 8). The NDH has been involved in many projects in the region, including a loan program. According to Dr. Eddouada, the NDH is run by the Ministry of Interior and has a history of co-opting local NGOs in order to exert greater control of changes made (S. Eddouada, Personal Communication, November 25th, 2022).

However, governmental attempts to “maximize land productivity” have been accelerated with the *Melekenization de terres collectives* gender inclusion program, which is organized by the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Millenium Challenge, a United States foreign aid agency (Eddouada, 2022, p. 8). The Millennium Challenge and the Moroccan state have partnered on a $460.5 million dollar initiative in order to address employability and land productivity, with a focus on women’s involvement. The program was inaugurated in a
certain ceremony of *Melekinization de terres* in 2019 in Sidi Kacem, which was attended by Moroccan government officials, media channels, local female beneficiaries, American donors, and MCA officials including Ivanka Trump. According to Dr. Eddouada, the project has utilized very specific rhetoric to sell the vision to local women such as “democratization, modernization, and development” (S. Eddouada, Personal Communication, November 25th, 2022). The Al-Gharb region was chosen as it created the opportunity to design a private property land titling pilot which was equal for local men and women. The program has a neoliberal ethos, holding that paid work is necessary for both the liberation of women and the accumulation of capital (S. Eddouada, Personal Communication, November 25th, 2022). Additionally, American involvement is legitimized by the U.S. women’s rights movement which has been characteristic of the marketing of Capitalism globally (Eddouada, 2022, p. 8).

**NGOs**

NGOs in Morocco are part of the state feminism framework. The transnationalization and professionalization of women’s empowerment organizations provide evidence of market-based feminism. In Morocco, NGOs are a more recent phenomenon, emerging in the last 30-35 years (M. Mkinsi, Personal Communication, November 14th, 2022). In fact, the “NGO-ization” of women’s activism is part of the third wave of feminism in Morocco focused on in this project. My analysis regarding NGOs is based on three site visits or presentations attended: Tawaza in Tetouan, Chaml in Kenitra, and 100% Mamans in Tangier. This overlaps with my formal interview with Dr. Soumaya Belhabib, who is both a professor and works administratively for Chaml.

Tawaza in Tetouan, Morocco is a women’s empowerment organization that is 100% run by women (Al-Zahra Aloush 9/22/22). They focus on both political activism as well as
individual support for women in need and were instrumental in mobilizing protest during the February 20th springs. Much of their work revolves around lobbying for legislative change. For example, they continue to fight to reform the family code, as articles 20, 21, and 22 of family law allow for loopholes in the code that allow judges discretion to approve the marriage of girls under the age of 18 (Al-Zahra Aloush 9/22/22).

Thus Tawaza is a secular organization, which adheres to international standards of equality and human rights, representing policy convergence as part of transnationalization. Interestingly, the head of the Tawaza Association for Women, Fatima Al-Zahra Aloush, remarked that the PJD marginalized Tawaza when they came to power in 2011, as they believe marriage is appropriate at 16. Although Tawaza is a non-political organization, it supports more initiatives of the socialist party. However, according to Al-Zahra Aloush, they have received more support from the monarchy than from political parties. In this way, Tawaza occupies a liminal space as part of the monarch’s Islamic state feminism machinery. Although they are a secular, progressive organization that receives funding, they are not directly bound to the monarchy. Fatima Al-Zahra Aloush noted there is another set of NGOs which are directly tied to the monarchy and do not act in line with international law, and their concern is more political (Al-Zahra Aloush 9/22/22). Thus the monarchy's support of both organizations such as Tawaza and their direct partners can be seen as further evidence of the aforementioned balancing act of Islamic state feminism in Morocco.

100% Mamans, is a non-profit Moroccan association in Tangier, Morocco which promotes the social and civic inclusion of single mothers and their children. This is a particularly salient issue, given that Law 419 of the civil code outlaws sex before marriage, so single mothers are one of the most marginalized groups in Moroccan society. Within the organization, there are
three sectors including social work, job training and integration, and communication and advocacy (Penot 9/20/22). The beneficiaries are primarily between the ages of 13-45, and 20-30% are migrants who travel from Sub-Saharan Africa. Funding for the organization is principally through international organizations such as the EU, UNICEF, and many Spanish institutions including the Common of Valencia (Penot 9/20/22). This is a particularly interesting dynamic, as the Spanish government has the incentive to fund organizations in northern Morocco that “reintegrate” migrants to Morocco, in order to curb illicit migration to Spain. This is a well-known secret; according to an American journalist, Ari Shapiro’s NPR article *Life Is Hard For Migrants On Both Sides Of The Border Between Africa And Europe* “The European Union wants to keep African migrants out. So the EU has paid the Moroccan government billions to take a hard line” (Shapiro 2022). Therefore, the transnationalization of funding to 100% Mammans represented the economic motives of the EU in order to limit migration, while also receiving good publicity for funding an egalitarian association. In this way, feminism can be tied to neoliberal policies of international migration.

Chaml Association for Family and Women in Kenitra started in 1998 as a research platform for women’s issues associated with Ibn Tofail University. However, they have transitioned to more grassroots work focused on improving conditions for families and women, fighting the struggle against poverty, and advocating for women's rights and freedom from domestic violence (Soumaya Belhabib 10/19/22). They provide classes that provide women with skills that encourage economic autonomy of women, as well as legal aid to women in dangerous situations. According to Dr. Belhabib, they seek to make use of the information and empowerment women center within the NHD context (National Initiative for Human Development), as well as the World Bank, UN, and partner countries like France, Spain, and the
Dr. Belhabib described receiving foreign funding as both a gratifying and intensive process. Although, she described foreign funding as requiring compilation of data and continued reporting to the organization; “It helped us to move forward, but at the same time, it's very demanding in terms of administrative tasks. They would come and audit… I remember they would ask you about every single penny” (S. Belhabib, Personal Communication, November 14th, 2022). Thus, although foreign funding was exciting, Dr. Belhabib described that it created a more stressful environment in the NGO. Further, she mentioned that smaller organizations with fewer resources are excluded from receiving any foreign funding because they don't have the resources or expertise to meet international administrative standards. In fact, in the Gender Studies Masters Program she designed at Ibn Toffail University, Dr. Belhabib described that she created a class relating to fundraising and statistics in order to prepare students who will work at NGOs for applying for both domestic and international funding, as well as maintaining that funding by creating progress reports. Further, she described that the majority of the program features professors from sociology, religion, and cultural studies programs but for this class, she had to bring in a professor from the economics department (S. Belhabib, Personal Communication, November 14th, 2022). The need for this class demonstrates the shift towards evidence-based incentives within NGOs in Morocco.

Dr. Belhabib did say that the majority of NGOs in Morocco receive funding from the government or government agencies. However, she remarked that some domestic funding can be traced back to international sources. Dr. Belhabib remarked: “[Before the pandemic] we managed to have a grant from the Ministry [of Solidarity], but we all know that the funding is
coming from international [sources] like the World Bank or the United Nations, big
stakeholders” (S. Belhabib, Personal Communication, November 14th, 2022). In her case, the
ministry asked NGOs to submit projects and provide short-term 2-year grants, but once the two
years were up Dr. Belhabib described feeling “stuck,” and looking towards more long-term
funding (S. Belhabib, Personal Communication, November 14th, 2022).

It is important to acknowledge that Dr. Belhabib remarked that women’s NGOs fall
within a spectrum, such as how organized they are or how political they are. Some have focused
on empowerment in economic terms, some political, and some just aim to meet the basic needs
of vulnerable women. The three NGOs highlighted in this paper combine multiple focuses. In
terms of the market, my research at Tawaza clarified how the balance of Islamic state feminism
can be achieved by the monarchy distributing funding to organizations with different political
goals. I argue in this paper that Islamic state feminism is a mechanism the government has used
to keep its cultural and religious identity, while also appealing to the neoliberal political
hegemony such as the United States. The state enjoys a strong hold over these organizations; for
Moroccan NGOs to legally exist they must submit an application to the Ministry of the Interior,
which is overseen directly by the monarchy (S. Eddouada, Personal Communication, November
25th, 2022).

My research at 100% Mamans revealed how the transnationalization of NGO networks
can represent broader geopolitical goals. I hypothesize that the funding of 100% Mamans by
Spain and the European Union may be part of a broader strategy for curbing migration to
Europe. This is an instance of feminist goals being appropriated in order to achieve ulterior
political or economic objectives. My research at Chaml shows how these processes can result in
changes to the internal structure of NGOs, such as the professionalization of the structure of
NGOs. I do not argue on the merits of professionalization of NGO operations, but instead, provide professionalization as a symptom of transition to a system that is reminiscent of market based feminism described by Kantola and Squires. In short, NGO action can be understood as market-based through two avenues. Firstly, the cooptation of NGOs by the state is part of the balancing act of Islamic state feminism, which has international economic motives. Secondly, NGOs that have attempted to remain autonomous are forced to professionalize and transnationalize, hallmarks of market-basis, to receive international funding.

Interpretation

State feminism in Morocco has been utilized by the state under King Mohammed VI to create a balance between a positive international image and control of cultural and religious Islamic identity. It is conducted through multiple avenues, including the feminization of religious institutions and the co-optation of women's empowerment NGOs. As the above analysis shows, Morocco is a particularly interesting case scenario considering that the relationship between Islamic state feminism and neoliberalism is a fairly new area of research. Exploration of Islamic state feminism, international privatization initiatives, and the professionalization and transnationalization of NGOs in Morocco reveals the deepening impact of neoliberalism on feminist action. In this way, priorities as well as practices of feminist actors are conforming to meet market-based demands.

This response is to be expected according to Kantola and Squires's definition of market based feminism. However, there are some discrepancies within the universal concept of market feminism. Kantola and Squires wrote, “We argue that market feminism seeks to promote gender equality by turning to the channels and mechanisms offered by the market” (Kantola and Squires,
2012, p. 390). In the Moroccan context, not all feminists seek gender equality as the ultimate goal but instead understand empowerment as a complementarian, and thus definitions of empowerment are varied. Further, it is important to mention that market feminists may not be aware of the role they play within the market, as international relationships with Morocco are in a constant state of change. An example of this would be NGO employees applying for domestic grants unaware that funds can be traced back to international sources.

Additionally, the co-optation of NGOs in Morocco by the state does not allow for a “free market” within the domestic NGO network. As Dr. Eddouada remarked, “The government needs actors, local people to implement policy. An effective way to do that is to provide grants and use NGOs to reach objectives” (S. Eddouada, Personal Communication, November 25th, 2022). Although NGOs in Morocco serve a purpose in an international neoliberal market, in Morocco they do not exist in a free non-governmental market and are heavily controlled by the state. Therefore, Kantola and Squires’s definition of market based feminism may need to be altered to fit into the Nationalist framework present in a state such as Morocco. This would be to account for the discrepancy in free market economics exerted on the state's foreign policy and its respective domestic policy.

As debates amongst feminists in Morocco within the secular and Islamist camps make clear, there is no universally agreed-upon definition of female empowerment. Neoliberalism is relevant to the bounds of the debate as well. Questions remain such as *Do you empower a community or do you empower individuals?* and *Who’s to say what giving power means?* Nonetheless, these different definitions hold meaning. As Foucault wrote in *Truth and Power*, “Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power” (Foucault 1980, 131). The differing definitions of what
empowerment means are in turn a form of individual truth. In this line of reasoning, the state can be seen as the political, economic, and institutional creator of the production of truth (Foucault, 1980, 133). As is shown in this paper, both within NGO and state apparatus there are signs of a transition to market-based feminism. The implications of this change require further research. However, in Foucauldian logic, this transition then becomes part of the production of truth, in turn affecting the definitions of female empowerment used in the broader conversation.

![Diagram: Market Feminism in Morocco](image)

**Figure 1: Manifestations of Market Feminism in Morocco**

**Conclusion**

Analysis of this kind is important as the current dynamic between the state and other actors could allow for predictions of further change. Although discussed technically in this project, these relationships have very real implications in the lives of women, in terms of economic and political opportunities as well as emotional health and self-image. This project suggests low rankings on international evaluations of Moroccan gender equality, such as the aforementioned WEF report from 2022 or the *Women Peace and Security Index* ranking of 138th
out of 170 countries surveyed can be better explained when considering the following lenses. Firstly, international evaluations do not necessarily consider cultural relativism, such as the complementarian principle of Islamic feminism. Secondly, the extreme control the Moroccan state holds over feminist action in order to maintain a specific balance that allows for economic and cultural goals to be met limits the freedom of movements and organizations, potentially hindering their success.

This paper followed a topical approach of the following progression: introduction of the topic and methods, review of important literature on the concepts of power, state, and state and market feminism, and analysis. The analysis focused on how the concepts reviewed in the literature review pertaining to the actions of state and non-state actors within the lens of Islamic state feminism in Morocco, which theorizes neoliberal economic incentives within the state and amongst NGOs. The analysis also reveals how the lines between state and non-state actors have blurred, such as NGO co-optation, feminizing of the religious institution, and market behavior where international funds are funneled through the state. Additionally, even amongst more autonomous NGOs in Morocco, there is evidence of neoliberal market interference. An example is the direct international support of women NGOs as strategic activity. In the case of 100% Mamans, the intervention of the EU in immigration policy in Morocco through the NGO partnership as immigration is an economic matter to the European Union. A pessimistic view of a transition to market-based feminism would suggest it compartmentalizes feminist activism as a strictly economic problem that could limit progress and make feminism less accessible to citizens as it becomes the jurisdiction of “gender experts” and increasingly bureaucratic. It also could lead to increasingly performative action of states in order to appear more attractive to the international market. In Morocco changes to the family code following political events have been
criticized as being “practically symbolic” (Al-Zahra Aloush 9/22/22). Additionally, regardless of where economic funding comes from, a pessimistic view of market feminism would understand the hyperfocus on economics under market feminism as compromising the freedom of actors. As Dr. Mkinisi explained, “The cynical view is that contingent funding always brings with it a certain kind of dependence on the agenda of the entity that provides the funding” (M. Mkinsi, Personal Communication, November 14th, 2022).

Market basis evaluations are very important to consider because of these potential drawbacks. However, it is impossible to view feminism in Morocco in a vacuum without considering other political, economic, and social forces. This project concentrates on the importance of market forces, which is necessary for the consideration of best practices in feminist activism moving forwards. However, the full picture requires an even broader scope of which market forces are only one, albeit important, element.

**Further Research**

Further research is necessary to provide more satisfactory data on the effectiveness of market-based feminism and on the relationship between neoliberal “efficiency” and women's empowerment. This data is necessary for consideration of best practices of women's activism in the Moroccan context. Additionally, I had difficulty finding literature defining the metrics of success for both agencies and policy reform. Further research that defines the term success to women’s activism while considering different religious and cultural contexts would be beneficial to the field. Lastly, in my personal research, I discovered literature discussing the compatibility of religious Islam and neoliberalism, which could be an interesting intersection of religious philosophy and political/economic policy changes.
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