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WOMEN AND MODERNITY: THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL IN MOROCCAN WOMEN'S NGOS' ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC AWARENESS WORK

by

Aura Lounasmaa

A thesis submitted to the Department of Political Science and Sociology
In conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis examines the referential and linguistic strategies used by Moroccan women’s NGOs in their advocacy and public awareness work. The study is based on interviews with 24 NGO directors from geographically and ideologically wide ranging women’s groups across Morocco. Sally Engle Merry’s (2009) work on translating between the global and the local in women’s rights activism is used to make sense of the referential used by NGOs and how language is constructed to signify the concept of modernity that each NGO supports. The findings of this thesis point to a complex relationship between right-based and faith-based NGOs. Although presenting themselves in binary opposition to each other, the goals, referential and narratives of the groups are often parallel. An important consideration for this thesis is the strategies NGOs use to negotiate the narratives of activism and advocacy between the local and the global. The referential women’s NGOs in Morocco are using include human rights, religion, Moroccan traditions, democracy and science. All of these are used dynamically depending on the issue at hand and the changing political context of Morocco. This thesis provides a wealth of empirical evidence on the complexities of linguistic strategies in women’s activism in Morocco and places them in the political and social context of the country. It also examines the ways in which concepts such as modernity and democracy are constantly constructed and renegotiated in the changing context NGOs operate in.
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First of all, I wish to thank all my participants for the time and knowledge they contributed to my research. They all did this with the promise of feedback only, and each one made an important contribution to the knowledge this thesis has gathered and presents. Others who helped me in Morocco are Prof. Fatima Sadiqi, Dr. Souad Slaoui, Stephanie Willman-Bordat, Ambassador Antti Rytovuori and all my colleagues at the Embassy. Secondly, I need to thank all the staff and students in NUI Galway who provided constant support, advice and encouragement to my project. I owe a special gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Nata Duvvury, who provided both academic and personal guidance throughout the five years of my journey to this research. The rest of my advisory panel, Dr. Niamh Reilly, Dr. Su-Ming Khoo and Dr. Kate Kenny shared their expertise and lead me to new insights. I also owe special gratitude to Dr. Mary Clancy and Dr. Anne Byrne, who acted as mentors in my teaching activities. My colleagues in the Global Women’s Studies Programme and in the College of Arts were a constant source of moral support and laughter and I will cherish their friendship as I leave Galway behind. I couldn’t have finished this thesis without the support of Emma, Emily, Marja, Tanja, Carol, Caroline, Clionadh, Ciara B., Ciara G., Tanya, Barbara and the rest of the writing group. I also wish to thank all my friends in Morocco, especially my friend, assistant and companion through my research, Houda Berdaa. Finally I need to thank my family and friends who have endured my moods, my stress and despair and continued to love me and support me regardless.
Statement of Originality

(Required only for Division IV Ph.D.)

I hereby certify that all of the work described within this thesis is the original work of the author. Any published (or unpublished) ideas and/or techniques from the work of others are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices.

Aura Lounasmaa

August, 2013
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List of Abbreviations

ADFM…………………………………Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc
AMDF…………………………………Association Marocaine des Droits des Femmes
AMDH…………………………………Association Marocaine des Droits de l’Homme
CCDH………………………………….Conseil Consultatif des Droits de l’Homme
CEDAW……………….Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
FAR……………………………………………..Forces Armées Royales
INDH……………………………………….Initiative National de Développement Humain
INGO……………………………………..International non-governmental organisation
IPDF……………………………………….Initiatives pour la protection des droits des femmes
LDDF……………………………………..Ligue Démocratique des Droits des Femmes
MP……………………………………………..Movement Populaire
MENA……………………………………….Middle East and North-Africa
OMDH………………………………..Organisation Marocain des Droits de l’Homme
PAM………………………………………..Parti Authenticité et Modernité
PADS…………………………………Parti de l’Avant Garde Démocratique Socialiste
PANIFD……………………Plan National d’Action d’Inclusion des Femmes au Développement
PJD…………………………………………….Parti Justice et Développement
PPS…………………………………………….Parti du progres et du socialism
UAF………………………………………………….Union de l’Action Féminine
UNFP………………………………………Union National des Forces Populaires
USFP……………………………………………Union Sociale des Forces Populaire
Chapter 1

Introduction: “Why are you studying African women, why not study women in Finland?”

I became interested in women’s activism in Morocco when I lived Rabat from 2007 to 2008. I was working as a coordinator in the Finnish Embassy, and one of my duties was running the Embassy’s development programme. A wide societal discussion about the new family law was on-going in the media, in the cinema and in dinner tables. I was introduced to the Moroccan women’s NGOs through the NGO cooperation in the embassy, which gave direct support to some women’s groups. During the year spent in Morocco I travelled, studied the local Arabic dialect and made lasting friendships, so the decision to return for further research trips was easy. Five months altogether were spent in Morocco during the research process in three different occasions between 2009 and 2011. During this time Morocco has changed greatly: infrastructural projects have brought greater mobility of people and improved the channels of communication; political and legislative changes are constantly made and popular culture keeps changing the notions of what modern Morocco is or should be. I have been lucky to have been able to witness such an exciting period in Morocco and to give a humble, but hopefully useful outsider view into the political and social debates. Brief periods spent in Egypt and Jordan helped me put into perspective the uniqueness of Morocco in relation to the rest of the Arab Middle-East and North-Africa. Although I maintain a critical view of narratives employed by women’s NGOs and the political and social structures I explore in the

1 Quote from one of my interviews held with two members of a faith-based group in a small coastal town in Morocco in November 2011.
course of this study, this thesis is nevertheless a homage to Morocco and the men and women dedicated to making it the modern, pluralist and open country it can be.

1.1 Research questions

This thesis researches women’s NGO activism in Morocco from the 1990s until present day. This study is based on social constructivist epistemology and as such requires a nuanced approach to considering social relationships. It does not seek to determine causal relations nor effectiveness of any given strategy in NGO activism. The main interest lies in looking at the strategies and linguistic tactics employed in activism and compare present and previous campaigns. Data for the research consists of semi-structured interviews with representatives of twenty-four Moroccan NGOs who work in the area of women’s rights or women’s participation in social and economic activities and materials from women’s rights campaigns and other supporting documentation from NGO activism in Morocco from the 1990s until present day. The primary research questions this thesis discusses are:

- What referential and discursive practices are employed by women’s NGOs in Morocco for their advocacy and activities?
- How are the referential and discursive practices reflected in the work of the NGOs?
- How are NGOs relating universal norms to local campaign and public awareness activities?

In the Moroccan women’s activist context referential is an important demarcation of the position and standpoint of each actor. It does not however equal ideology. It is the conjuncture between ideological position and the discourses used to describe the goals of the activism. It cannot be reduced to mere linguistic strategy, as that would erase the links it has to each actor’s ideological underpinnings and their understanding of the Moroccan social context. Referential can thus be described as
the intersection of ideology, the location each actor and organisation occupies in the Moroccan social context, and how this ideology and social location is realised in their activism. Referential is often understood to stand for women’s NGOs’ stance towards human rights and religion, but younger activists are increasingly rejecting this dichotomous view of referential. Referential may also be related to specific issues, which call for different linguistic and ideological considerations. For example, any discussion of inheritance law, which is embedded in Islamic jurisprudence, is tackled by rights-based organisations using a mixed referential. The main referential NGOs call upon are human rights, religion, or a mixture of the two. These are often fixed according to the NGO’s ideological stance. Other referential, such as science as a form of modernity, democracy, local traditions and transnational feminism are mixed in dynamically depending on the issue. Issues themselves do not constitute referential, but the ways in which they are discussed can create new, mixed referential through coalitions of different actors². Discursive strategies are choices made by NGOs regarding language, register and terminology, which often relate to, but are not determined by referential. NGOs can allow themselves some flexibility and inconsistency on the level of discursive strategies without their referential coming into question, but ultimately veering too far from referential with terminology and register can harm the public image of NGOs.

² Referential is not commonly discussed in the English language literature about Moroccan women’s NGOs. I have decided to use the word, however, and give it this definition based on my interviews with various women activists. The word “ideology” (idéologie) also exists in French language, but is not used in relation to what the actors call “référentiel”. Rhouni (2011) makes a clear distinction between religious discourse and ideology within activism, and thus I feel adopting the concept of referential respects this distinction and the emotional charge the word itself carries for the actors. For evidence of how actors use the term, please see chapter 7.
The thesis discusses the discursive strategies in relation to three key themes that have great theoretical and political importance in the context of women’s activism in Morocco. Firstly, after the Arab Spring democratisation theories have become newly important to all political activism in the region. The study traces the different conceptualisations of women’s NGOs from differing ideological stands to the interaction of state mechanism and democratic practices. Secondly the thesis looks at the competing modernities in Morocco and how women’s NGOs refer to them. Finally the interview and document data from Moroccan women’s NGOs is looked at through a prism of vernacularisation of the global in the local context: how are the NGOs using and translating global norms in regards to their own work (Merry 2006a). The process of vernacularisation is a complex one, where norms and narratives are translated from global to local, local to global and between local and national ones to transform messages to various audiences.

The first aim of the study is to understand the NGO’s engagement with cultural narratives and socially constructed concepts in their campaigns. The research aims to interrogate the constructed meanings of the keywords and categories that intersect the discussions taking place in theory, in the political context and in the data collected from women’s NGOs, namely: democracy and modernity. Democracy and democratisation theories have been linked to women’s rights and role in societies from as early as the post-colonial period of nation-building in North-Africa (Hélie- Lucas, 1987). In Morocco the democracy discussion and women’s role in it was brought up again in 2011 due to the demonstrations that began from the revolution in Tunisia and ended in constitutional reform and parliamentary election during the same year. Similarly, the idea of modernity or competing conceptions of it has largely concentrated on women within the Arab Middle-East since the colonial times (Abu-Lughod 1998). Modernity in post-colonial Arab Muslim societies has often been polarised between imitation of the West and return to the golden past of Islamic nation (Rhouni, 2011). In reality, however, neither one of these descriptions of modernity are fitting; instead, modernity and its different
interpretations are built from a mixture of influences from the West, from the East, from the country’s past traditions and the changing preferences of the young population caught in between these. Applying the theory of translation from global to local to the language of both types of groups has the potential to disentangle the dichotomy of secular versus Islamist, global versus local and show the complexity that both types of groups must face in phrasing their aims and activities in the context of creating a modern Morocco.

Sally Engle Merry has developed a useful theory for analysing women’s NGO’s anti-violence campaigns around the world. The theory regards discursive strategies as a process used by activists around the world to translate human rights to a local context. The degree to which human rights are translated, and indeed the success of this strategy, depend on the political and social situation where the NGO finds itself (2003, 2009, 2006a). While Merry’s theory can be criticised for treating vernacularisation as a one-way process of translating only from global to local, it is a useful tool to begin seeing the process that NGOs use for defining their referential and putting together discursive strategies also in the local and national levels. The local and national levels are where this study concentrates on when looking at the ways in which norms and practices are adopted in activism. As a social constructionist study this research also places a great importance on the co-existing social and political contexts that shape the norms and meanings that NGOs need to negotiate. By looking at the processes of vernacularisation in women’s activism in Morocco this study aims to show the advantages and limitations of NGOs’ chosen referential. It also looks at the means the NGOs are deploying for challenging and expanding this chosen referential, moving in between different referential and creating alliances across them.

1.2 Background to the study

Democracy, modernity and human rights in the Arab world are an increasingly crowded area of research in the post-9/11 era (Saikal and Schnabel, 2003, Tessler, 2003). Muslim women in particular have become the centrepieces of liberalist dialogues as victims of
Islamic patriarchy in the war against terror (Stabile, 2005) and in the European context as forcefully veiled³. Both the invasion of Afghanistan and the law in France to ban the wearing of burqas and niqabs in public served this rhetoric, positioning Muslim women as being in need of salvation (by white men). Although postcolonial critique of this interpretation of Islam and Muslim women dates back fifty years (Spivak 1987, Said 1985, Fanon 1963), the public discourse remains unchanged. 2011 saw further interest in understanding Arab democracy, as after Tunisia also Egypt and Libya plunged into revolutions in the name of democracy and end to corrupt dictatorships. On the other hand, rather undemocratically the man identified by the US government as the world’s most dangerous terrorist was murdered in Pakistan by the US navy forces. The war on terror is reinforcing Huntington’s idea of “Clash of civilizations” (1993) while media coverage of the Arab Spring often aims to diminish this clash by showing the democratising intent of the Arab populations. As in many previous revolutions worldwide, Egyptian women are currently fighting exclusion from the nation formation project after their full participation in the revolution itself. The revolutionary wave also reached Morocco, where the king was fast to react and called for a reform of the constitution. Civil society, including women’s groups, was invited to participate in the consultative process. Only a few weeks later the Islamists responded to the process by a suicide attack which killed sixteen people in a touristic area of Marrakech. The events bear a close echo to long process of the family law reform in Morocco that began in the early 1990s and finally took place in 2003, after a suicide attack in Casablanca killing 45 people and turning the public opinion against the Islamist opposition to the law reform. The family law reform and the constitutional reform that was accepted by a majority vote in June 2011 resembled each other so far as they both mobilised different sections of the civil society who stand at different viewpoints regarding the issues of democracy and modernity. The supporters of political Islam speak of democracy based on values and norms of Islamic state, whereas

the civic movement linked most closely to leftist political agendas identifies their vision of democracy with secularisation and women’s rights and equality.

The interest in researching women’s rights NGOs in Morocco was first awakened due to discussion and academic literature published about the NGOs’ perceived role in changing the country’s family law. Campaign activities were widely publicised, and included displays of public support for the women’s cause, such as large demonstrations and the one million signatures campaign, whereby NGO activists walked from door to door with a petition to reform the family law. Women’s further inclusion in the public life through introduction of new legislation, such as a change in the employment law and the code of nationality, and policy initiatives has divided public opinion greatly. Women’s NGOs have multiplied since the 1990s when the family law campaigns – both for and against the reform – were launched. Little was written about women’s NGOs work in Morocco between the moudawana\(^4\) campaign and a current new interest in the work they are doing. While NGOs on both sides of the campaign may have needed a pause during which to consider their future after the family law reform, the pause is now over and advocacy has taken on new forms, strategies and goals. A great challenge to these campaigns is that many of them are invisible in much of the public as well as the academic discussions. Many women’s NGOs also face allegations of co-optation to political parties, government structures and to the Makhzen\(^5\), which is the name given to the monarchy and the powerful political forces governing the institution of monarchy in Morocco. The old NGOs that were at the forefront of the family law campaign are now struggling for credibility and relevance in the eyes of the public. On the other side political Islamist

\(^4\) Prior to the change in the law in 2003 its Arabic name was Moudawana al-ahwal al-shaksiyyah or personal status law. The new name after the reform was al moudawana al ousra, or family law. This thesis uses the terms family law and moudawana interchangeably.

\(^5\) The original work Makhzen refers to warehouse, where the kingdom’s revenues were stored. It is widely accepted in the media and public debate, that an informal power structure closely linked to the monarch is still largely in charge of economic resources of the state, and that this economic power also gives the Makhzen considerable political influence outside of the official governance structures (Cubertafond, 1997).
groups are continuously increasing their membership. The country’s only legal Islamist party Parti Justice et Developpement (PJD) won the general elections in November 2011. Other Islamist groups, both legal and illegal operate in all corners of the country but especially in the poor urban areas providing social assistance and much needed education.

Morocco began its political opening in the 1990s with civil society forming in the late 1980s and becoming more active from 1990s onwards. Informal civil society groups were active prior to this, but without official status they often met with state repression. At first, the attention of academic researchers in Morocco was on the human rights NGOs, whose campaigns were largely concentrated on political rights and freedoms (Rollinde 2002, Sater 2007, Slyomovics 2005). Literature on civil rights activism and its heroes also includes mentions of women activists, but the emphasis was not on women’s rights; rather, women were active as part of the human rights and democratisation struggles of leftist and Islamist political groups (El Bouih 2002). Women’s activism for feminist causes only really began in the late 1980s and became a powerful movement in the 1990s, when many female party members realised that in order to speak about women’s right a separate space was required6. The first women’s organisations were founded by these same female party members, and in the beginning the NGOs were closely linked to party politics.

The feminist movement has been active in Morocco since the 1980s, when the NGO linked to the socialist party Union National des Forces Populaires (UNFP) Union de l’Action Féminine started publishing their magazine 8 Mars. Academic interest in Moroccan women was first shown by sociologist Fatima Mernissi, who started publishing narrative research on the daily lives of Moroccan women in the early 1980s (Mernissi

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6 Many interviewees related this as the main reason for forming separate women’s organisations in the 1980s and 1990s. See chapter 7 for more details.
While women’s NGOs in Morocco campaigned for a change in legislation from the 1990s onwards and some work was published about the work of the NGOs at the time (Brand 1998), the NGOs became a real area of focus after the family law was finally changed in 2003 by the initiative of the king. A great deal of research, some more empirical and other more celebratory, was published in the aftermath of the adoption of the new law, including comparisons to other Muslim countries (Bourqia, Charrad and Gallagher 1996, Sadiqi and Ennaji 2006, Foblets and Carlier 2005, Lemrini El Quahabi 2005). Many analysts believe the women’s NGOs to have been instrumental in bringing about this legal reform, though many of the studies are lacking in empirical description of this activism. The analysis of the strength of the women’s movement has also fallen short on follow-up; on revealing how the NGOs have developed since their perceived victory on the reform of the family law. Laurie Brand has conducted a detailed study of women’s NGOs in Morocco, but her excellent contribution ends before the reform of the Moudawana in 1998 (Brand, 1998). Marguarite Rollinde’s contribution discusses the women’s movement in the context of the political developments of the country but without mapping the empirical (Rollinde 2002). This study aims to bring together the earlier analyses of Moroccan feminist movement by juxtaposing them with an empirical study of women’s NGOs and their actions with the politics and discourses available for such action. An important by-product of the analysis of the NGO narratives is creating a matrix of some of the main actors in women’s rights and development in Morocco and helping to understand where they stand in relation to each other as well as to the state and to the on-going rights and democracy discussion in Morocco.

Moroccan political system has been studied widely (Cubertafond 1997, Cubertafond 2001, Najem, 2003, Maghraoui, 2002, Saikal and Schnabel, 2003, Slater, 2007, Tozy, 2008). Although these studies include the role of the monarch and democratisation and the informal structures of the system, very little attention has been paid to the role of the civil society in the political system. Marguarite Rollinde (2002) has studied the human
rights movement in Morocco and its role in the political development and
democratisation of the country, and while a chapter is provided to the role of the women
activist, nearly ten years has passed since its publication and an update is required. The
reverse has also been addressed from the specific point of view of state feminism which
has been institutionalised by recent government initiatives (Slyomovics 2005). The
addition of the analysis of women’s NGOs’ strategies this study complements the
analysis by Slyomovics of the state structures that inhibit and make possible women’s
civil society activism.

This research will hence contribute to the existing research in two principal ways:

1. Although Moroccan women’s NGOs have been studied extensively, this thesis is one
of the rare ones including both rights-based and faith-based organisations. As has been
noted by other researchers (Guessus 2011) there is strong antagonism between faith-
based and rights-based women’s groups in Morocco. This thesis brings both faith-based
and rights-based groups into the same level of analysis and question the perceived
dichotomy between the two ideologies as evidenced
by strategies and linguistic practices of groups using different referential.

2. This research brings new understandings and focus to social and feminist research of
women’s NGOs in Morocco by combining the anthropological considerations of
strategies in relation to culture and universalism in women’s rights advocacy (Merry
2009), and the linguistic considerations at play in the specific context of Morocco and
Moroccan women’s NGOs (Sadiqi 2003). Merry’s research into activism around violence
against women considers strategies and language from the universal versus local

7 Young (2005) discusses this dichotomy in her thesis, but her research has been conducted with rights-
based organisations only. Pruza-Jorgensen (2010) has spoken to both rights-based activists and to
religious leaders involved in the moudawana reform, but her research does not discuss the dichotomies
between rights-based and faith-based women activists.
referential point of view. This study brings the concept of vernacularisation to the context of Morocco.

The main contribution to research this thesis makes remains is the empirical evidence it can bring to problematize the categories of faith-based and rights-based, or Islamist and secular NGOs, showing the similarities on one hand of language and strategies used by NGOs at the opposite ends of this perceived spectrum, and on the other hand the very different approaches adopted by NGOs cooperating in the same networks. This can help bridge gaps in women’s activism through strategic essentialism. More importantly however it shows the complexities of women’s activism between modernities, traditions and the ever changing political and social contexts they operate in.

1.3 Methodology

Data for this study consists of interviews with the NGO leaders or advocacy campaign managers and of campaign materials, press releases and other communications from women’s organisations that support their local and national activities. In order to begin to understand the strategies and discursive practices of the campaigns by the NGOs and their imagined and real audiences the analysis begins with the following inquiries:

- What are the strategies deployed for individual campaigns? What materials are used?
- Who are the documents aimed at?
- Which issues are NGOs campaigning or working for?
- How are alliances built? With whom?
- What is the referential of the NGOs in question? How is it present in campaign materials through key words and strategies?
- Where does resistance to the campaigns come from and how do NGOs deal with it?
Twenty-four interviews of NGOs activists from geographical and ideological spread of women’s NGOs in Morocco were conducted to provide some insight into these questions.

The study builds on narrative theories of social construction, taking on the understanding that cultural narratives both are shaped by and help reshape social reality. The discourses used by women’s rights NGOs draw on these cultural narratives and simultaneously try to influence the way in which the social and political landscape is constructed. Qualitative content analysis is used to map the discourses that emerge from the data and to show the grand narratives on which the referential stands. Both rights-based and faith-based NGOs pool together their referential from discourses of human rights, cultural traditions, religion and democratisation. Theory of narrative accrual (Bruner 1991) on the other hand shapes the way in which the ideological discourses come together both coherently and in contradicting ways between interviews and campaign materials. Morocco lends itself to narrative study due to high prevalence of orality in the linguistic and educational framework: the Moroccan dialect of Arabic, which is the furthest removed from Standard Arabic of any dialects and the daily language used in all oral communication has only very recently started to emerge in a written form. For most Moroccans the local dialect still does not constitute a language in its own right (Sadiqi, 2003). As Standard Arabic, or what is perceived as written Arabic is very different from the dialect, what is said in an oral form can be difficult to express in writing, as this would constitute a translation. High levels of illiteracy, especially among women, also contribute to the importance of oral histories in Moroccan social context. Many NGOs exploit this by using music, theatre and oral testimonies as part of their campaigns, firstly to reach the illiterate masses, but also to include their voices as part of the NGO’s legitimate constituency.

This thesis is also based on feminist theory and methodologies. As a feminist constructivist study this thesis recognises the claims of postcolonial and intersectional
feminism, where women are not researched as an essential category, but rather the object of study is the social construction of gender in the specific social and political context of women’s NGOs in Morocco. Feminist methodology refers to participatory and ethical principles of research, whereby research participants have access to the findings of the study and are invited to give feedback on it. The interviews are semi-structured and they are treated as discussions with the research participants, allowing the participants to lead the conversations whenever possible, and adopting narrative questions to interviews when appropriate.

1.4 Structure of thesis

This thesis follows the typical structure of a social sciences thesis, with chapters dedicated to literature review, methodology, socio-historical context, introduction of data and analysis. The second chapter introduces the relevant literature regarding theorising of Moroccan women and women’s activism, as well as women’s political activism in the wider context of the MENA area and in the postcolonial world order. The aim of the chapter is to draw together feminist and social theories to create a framework which will help to unpack the meanings of women’s activism in Morocco. The chapter begins by introducing the main feminist literary debates relevant to this study, namely postcolonial and intersectional feminist theories. The chapter brings together democratisation and post-democratisation theories as well as theories of women and modernity in the context of Arab Middle-East and together with post-colonial feminist theories constructs the meanings the study uses throughout of these important concepts. The discussion moves through the definitions of the important concepts in the context of Morocco and finally introduces the theoretical framework which has been adopted from Sadiqi and Merry and will be utilised to map and make sense of the women’s NGOs activism in campaigning and service provision in Morocco.
The third chapter discusses the epistemological positions of the research and the methodological choices that follow. Social constructionist theory is woven together with narrative epistemology to describe the ontological assumptions underlining the research project. Narratives are not merely understood to provide a useful analytical tool in the context of post-colonial Morocco, but a deeper ontological question that mirrors the process of constructing the self and the other. The choice of methods, the selection criteria and the limits to the methodology follow from weaving together the research questions and ontological and epistemological positions underlining the study. Finally the chapter considers ethical issues arising from the study and the means for meeting these challenges.

The fourth chapter of the thesis gives a socio-political background to Morocco as a backdrop to women’s rights activism. Time and space constraints limit the historical extent and depth the chapter can reach and the aim of the chapter is to understand the borders within which civil society and more importantly women’s rights advocacy can operate, what are the social and institutional supports and constraints for activism and who the main actors in the area are. The chapter begins with a brief exploration of the political system, with considerations of the constitution in the light of the current constitutional reform process, the role of the monarchy and the current king as a political and societal actor. The second section gives a brief history of Islamic resurgence in Morocco and the role of religion in the civil society and political space. The chapter also introduces the civil society field in Morocco. Finally the chapter discusses the Arab Spring and its effects in Morocco. A full historical timeline of independent Morocco is given in the appendix.

A separate chapter is given to discussing the history of the feminist movement in Morocco. The fifth chapter gives a brief historical account of women’s activism in Morocco, discusses the family law or moudawana campaign and the current political and
ideological context in which women’s NGOs in Morocco are situated. The chapter further aims to situate Moroccan women’s NGOs in the global and transnational civil society map by considering the links between Moroccan women’s groups and the transnational women’s rights movement, as well as the theoretical debate around naming women activists between secular, liberal, Islamic, Islamist and feminist.

The second half of the thesis discusses the findings of the study. Chapter six shows the main findings form the documents that were included in the analysis for this study. The documents range from the 1990s until 2011 and from approximately 20 different NGOs. The chapter shows the scope of women’s activism in Morocco during this time, the strategies employed in the activism and the changes that have taken place through time. Six documents from 2011 are explored in more detail to reveal the differences and similarities between groups that employ a different referential. Chapter 7 shows the categories that arise from the 24 interviews. Most of these categories, such as democracy and traditions intersect with the theoretical debates and are clearly present in the NGO’s campaign documents. The aim of these two chapters is to present these main categories that arise and introduce the wealth of data collected for this study to the reader. Chapter 8 gathers these findings back into the theoretical debates and discusses them in the light of the research questions. Its other important function is to show what parts of the findings do not fit in the theoretical debates discussed in the earlier chapters, and propose ways to approach these data in further discussions. The political and social context of Morocco, discussed in chapters 4 and 5 is brought into these discussions wherever appropriate.

The conclusion draws together the ways in which this thesis has discussed the research questions. It brings to end the journey of my research with the inspiring activists I met over the course of my various stays in Morocco. It also discusses some of the limitations of this study and the further research needs and questions that have been brought up by
this research. Finally it elaborates on some of the issues that are pertinent to women activists in Morocco, but fall outside of the scope of this study.
Chapter 2

Theorising women’s activism in Morocco: between modernity and democratisation

The aim of this chapter is to explore the theories and concepts that provide the tools for understanding women’s NGO activism in Morocco and the languages and strategies available to the NGOs. These theories and concepts are derived from earlier studies into women’s activism in both Morocco and elsewhere and from academic literature that explores the intersections of the different debates around women, activism, religion, democratisation, human rights and modernity. The chapter begins by tracing earlier studies into women’s activism in Morocco and the discussions that arise from these. It then gives brief insights into the main debates around the key themes that guide women’s activism in Morocco. This begins with a discussion on democracy and democratisation from the point of view of women’s rights and women’s rights and citizenship. The second cluster of theories explores the links between feminism, religion, post-colonialism and modernity. The main research question of this thesis traces the processes of translating between global and local norms in women’s activism in Morocco. This study is influenced by the ideas of Sally Engle Merry in its understanding of how these processes operate. The next part of this chapter discusses Merry’s theory of translation and how it relates to this particular study. Theory of intersectionality may provide ways in which to understand agency in and identity and thus break down the dichotomy between rights-based and faith-based women’s NGOs. Throughout this discussion this chapter shows the gaps in the literature and the contribution this study can make to both the theory of women’s activism and to the empirical evidence of it from Morocco.
2.1 Moroccan women’s activism in between the global and the local

Women’s activism in Morocco highlights the complex dynamics between religion, feminism and the state. Within the literature on Moroccan activism four themes have been the focus of discussion. The first on is the dynamics of religion and culture and how women are located in between them. The work of Fatima Mernissi has been pivotal in revealing women’s conditions in the every-day life as well as in Islamic jurisprudence. Her influence to both theory and activism on women in Morocco is foundational. The second theme is women’s activism and the state. This issue has been researched by Laurie Brand in the 1990s and continues to be of interest to PhD research currently taking place. The family law in Morocco has become so central to women and women’s activism, that it has become a distinct theme within literature about Moroccan women’s activism. It polarised the civil society and political actors before and after its reform, and is the focus of much theoretical attention, whether from point of view of women’s liberation, civil society activism or democratisation. This chapter introduces some of the academic literature on the topic. The events leading to the family law reform and its importance to women’s organisations will be further discussed in chapter 5. The family law is also discussed at length in relation to the empirical data for this study. The fourth theme in the literature on Moroccan women’s NGOs highlights is the existence of activists in a multi-lingual context and the difficulties of negotiating this.

2.1.1 Religion and Culture

“At the dawn of Moroccan independence, the nationalist leaders, who had undergone torture in prison so that equality and democracy could reign, decided the future of Moroccan family without consulting the central element of that family – women” (Mernissi, 1988:2). The same criticisms Helie-Lucas (Hélié-Lucas, 1987) made of Algerian nation-building, Mernissi was directing to the Moroccan political elites at the
same time. Sociologist Fatima Mernissi began researching and writing about women’s daily lives (Mernissi, 1983) in the early 1980s and still continues to publish on the topic. Mernissi adopts in much of her work what Rhouni (2011) calls a secular feminist position: she is open to using Islam as a source of empowerment for women, but does not rely on religious references alone for her views on equality and women’s role. Although Mernissi (1988) calls for re-reading of religious texts to separate the original equalitarian intent from local patriarchal cultural practices, Islam should not be used as a “return to the golden past” as an alternative for modernity (Mernissi, 1988). Her approach has been criticised as she chooses to emphasis some hadiths while ignoring others, depending on whether they suit her interpretation of equality within Islam (Rhouni, 2011). Mernissi also refers to social and economic justice and culture-historical references to women’s participation in the society. Especially in her early works Mernissi concentrates on showing the lives and the narratives of women as they are, rather than making academic arguments about their conditions. Each case is special, and she claims it is “necessary to avoid generalising” (Mernissi, 1988). *The Veil and the Male Elite* is a re-interpretation of Islam from the point of view of women and Mernissi shows her in-depth knowledge of Islamic teaching she gained through her education in the Fes Koranic school and university. Mernissi was among the first Moroccan academics to begin writing about women, and she was a member of a group of scholars pioneering gender studies in Morocco. In addition to her academic contribution, Mernissi has been involved in civil society activism to improve women’s position.

### 2.1.2 Activism and the state

The first large study into women’s activism in Morocco was by Laurie Brand in 1998. Brand observed and interviewed some of the main NGOs, including Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), Union de l’Action Féminie (UAF), Association Marocaine de Droits des Femmes (AMDF) and Ligue Démocratique des
Droits de la Femme (LDDF), who were at the time involved in campaigning for the change in the family law. She identifies each NGO’s role in the campaign; the networks, alliances and political oppositions within the NGOs; other political structures and changes facilitating the process and the actual events and actors within the campaigns. Brand’s study locates women’s activism firmly in the political structures and developments of the country. The study is a comprehensive introduction to the different rights-based actors in the women’s movement and reveals some of the political and personal tensions that still exist between some of the main actors. The study of Moroccan women’s NGOs is part of a larger comparative study into women and political liberalisation in the MENA region where she focusses on Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan. Similarly to other studies of Moroccan political liberalisation, Brand does not believe that democratisation automatically follows. Brand identifies some of the problems faced by the rights-based women’s NGO network in the 1990s - a lack of coordination, women who become celebrities and thus difficult to work with, poor quality of studies the NGOs were producing and selecting their campaigns on the basis of donor priorities (Brand, 1998). During the time of Brand’s study women’s NGOs in Morocco were trying to find the appropriate language and referential to support their activities. Islamist organisations were claiming authenticity through using religious referential and accusing human rights referential of being imported (ibid:67). Brand concludes, that at the time of her study women’s NGOs weren’t able to become a true democratising force due to the main problems of networking she has identified. In this study I identified less of the kind of practical questions of leadership which Brand refers to, and more fundamental questions regarding joint referential for campaigns and networks. This may be due to the increased number of actors now populating the field of women’s civil society in Morocco. To gain such force women’s NGOs should become “capable of mobilizing to achieve what may be oppositional demands and not just […] capable of channelling women’s energies into activities blessed by the state” (ibid:261). The success of the Moudawana reform seems to indicate that the NGOs did manage to overcome their internal authoritarianism and
exercise such pressure on the state. But a closer look at the political chances during the Moudawana reform is required before such development can be assumed. A great deal has happened in Morocco since Brand conducted her study, and this thesis builds on her work. Brand has conducted her research with large rights-based organisations only, and thus my inclusion of faith-based organisations and intersectional theory adds to what can be said about the strategies and the dynamics at play.

2.1.3 Family Law Reform Campaigns

By far the most studied area of women’s activism in Morocco is the successful campaign by rights-based NGOs to reform the family law in 2003. Over half a dozen studies were published between 2004 and 2012 analysing the Moudawana campaigns from different angles, including its effect on the democratisation and autocratic rule in Morocco (Pruzan-Jorgesen, 2010a; Cavatorta and Dalmasso, 2009), what were the factors contributing to its success (Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006) and the wider effects of the campaign on women’s role on the society (Amiti and Rhissassi, 2005). Rhouni (2011) and Salime (2011) discuss the complex relations that different women’s groups have in regards to the Moudawana and to each other.

Fatima Sadiqi sees the women’s NGOs’ campaigns that lead to changes in the family law, Moudawana in 2003 as central to feminist activism in the country. According to Sadiqi the Moudawana “constitutes the locus of the legal and civil discrimination against women” (Sadiqi, 2008). She accredits some of the active women’s NGOs with much of the influence in reforming the Moudawana, but perhaps more importantly finds that NGO activism has given Moroccan women the skills and resources in the public organization of their demands, given credibility to the women behind those demands and become an important tool of democratisation (Sadiqi, 2008). Support for the Moudawana reform was gained partly by the use of international norms, as the personal status code affected
women’s civil rights in all walks of life, and partly through religious and traditionalist rhetoric using Arabic language and references to family and children. The reform of the family law in Morocco has been used as an example by women’s groups in other MENA countries, and as a first reform of its kind, resulting largely from the campaigns of the women’s movement\(^8\), it has been widely published in academic journals and edited collections (Benradi et al, 2007, Ouali, 2008, Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006). As an example of using both religious and human rights based referential in national law reform campaign, the Moudawana reform provides an interesting case study. But the fact that much of the literature still focuses on the Moudawana takes attention away from the activities and campaigns Moroccan women’s NGOs have engaged in since. The Moudawana reform has helped shape women’s activism in Morocco and continues to divide and connect NGOs, but ten years after the reform it is time to look elsewhere to understand how women’s civil society activism works in Morocco.

2.1.4 Policy

Three distinct policy initiatives have also contributed to the construction of feminist narratives in Morocco. Firstly, the introduction of *Plan for the integration of women in development* (PANIFD), a government policy introduced in 1999 to include women in the public life divided the opinions of Moroccan civil society and gave rise to large scale public campaigns by both the opponents and the supporters of the plan. As a result the vocabularies of the feminist groupings have become more mixed and the dichotomies between the two categories less evident (Sadiqi, 2003). Secondly, the reform of the family law in 2003 by the new king Mohammed VI divided opinions at the time, but national metanarratives available to women’s groups since the law reform have shifted and further confused the division. Thirdly, the introduction of *National initiative of*

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\(^8\) See chapter five for full discussion on the family law reform.
human development (INDH), a policy aimed at increasing civil society participation in social development has given rise to a large number of new NGOs, of which significant number are concerned with women, due to new funding structures and eased processes of NGO formation (Berriane, 2010, Slyomovics, 2005). All of these policy initiatives introduced by the state have given rise to development as a referential for women’s NGOs. As development is introduced through national initiatives and policies, it is available to use by both faith-based and rights-based organisations as part of their strategies.

2.1.5 Current research into women and civil society in Morocco

There is a significant body of PhD research into women’s NGOs in Morocco in Moroccan, European and US universities. Recent PhD theses include those of Young (2005), Berriane (2010), and Guessus (2011). At the time of writing the researcher is aware of at least three other theses not yet submitted, researching violence against women and rights-based NGO responses to them and one more studying only faith-based organisations. Berriane (2010) provides an interesting analysis of the effects of the INDH to associational life in Morocco, the benefits of the state rhetoric on “participation”, “good governance” and “gender equality” and gives enlightening insights into the state-feminist construction of the policy as well as the democracy discourse that in reality masks a greater state control over associational life. This study cannot ignore the effect the INDH has had on Moroccan civil society either, but while Berriane concentrates on NGO formation, this study looks at existing NGOs and considers INDH as part of the complex funding structures the NGOs negotiate within their advocacy work.

Guessus’ (2011) excellent contribution discusses the antagonism she noted during her fieldwork of rights-based women’s groups towards faith-based groups and activists. She examines the subjectivities of rights-based activists who have historical links to leftist
politics and its discursive relationship to modernity. This modernity is historically and ideologically defined in opposition to faith-based women’s activism and poses difficulties when faced with new generation of women, whose subjectivities are differently constructed in relation to Islam. With her contextual analysis of wearing of the hijab by young Moroccan women she questions the idea put forward by her participants from rights-based organisations of religious subjectivity as non-modern. Much of the antagonism expressed by leftist-feminist activists described and discussed by Guessus was also witnessed during the research interviews for this study. As most researchers, including Guessus and Young, I also feel that the self-imposed dichotomy is limiting women’s activism in Morocco, and will give way when new generation of women activists take centre stage. The inclusion of faith-based activists in this study allows us to consider the voices that have often been excluded in previous studies and shows the similarities and contradictions across all women civil society activists. Intersectionality gives the opportunity to appreciate the multiple identities all NGOs possess. By showing the different voices side by side this thesis hopes to initiate a discussion about the antagonism that currently exists between rights-based and faith-based women’s organisation.

Young (2005) considers first of all the motivations of individual women to become involved in women’s activism. The second part of her thesis discusses women’s NGOs’ changing public narratives from the 1980s until early 2000s. According to Young, rights-based organisations began their activism in the 1980s with an equality discourse stemming directly from transnational feminist language, moving to a similarly inspired women’s rights discourse in the 1990s. She argues that a third narrative of women within families is emerging in the 2000s. While her thesis considers the interplay of global and local feminist ideals in Morocco and how these are used by women’s NGOs, her thesis differs from this one in two significant ways: firstly, like most studies into Moroccan women activists, it concentrates only on rights-based groups. Secondly, this study uses
Merry’s (2006) theory of translation in imagining the construction of women’s activism. Young discusses the idea of bringing together global and local norms as part of practice theory. Practice theory is vast and not specific to examining the interaction between local and global norms and values, and thus she offers few theorisable insights about how the local and global operate in women’s activism to research outside of her own area of focus. Her anthropological study gives detailed description of her observations and ends up making conclusions about the interaction between global and local in Morocco, comparing the way activists use global and local references as a market place (Young, 2005). While this idea warrants a further exploration, in its current state it doesn’t account to a theory. I will return to her idea in my discussion of translating the global to the local and vice versa in chapter 8. Thirdly, Young’s is an anthropological study of few NGOs, whom she has observed for a greater period of time, whereas this study is a cross-section of larger number of NGOs with the empirical emphasis on the discourses of the NGOs. Finally, Young’s thesis concentrates on the process of the Moudawana reform, whereas with the recent political developments in Morocco and its neighbouring countries this thesis has a timely connection to ideas of democratisation.

It is difficult to do justice to all the studies into Moroccan women and women’s activism that have influenced my thinking about my own research. To mention just a few more, I am indebted to studies by Cavatorta and Dalmasso (2009), Slater, (2011), Eddouada and Pepicelli (2010), Mateo Dieste (2009) and Sabir (2004) for informing my understanding of women’s activism in Morocco and directing me towards my own research questions. With a topic so widely studied I of course have the advantage of being able to build upon a body of existing research and literature. This study builds new insights into Moroccan women’s civil society activism as it looks beyond the Moudawana reform and presents a new empirical evidence from factions of the civil society that have not been included in previous studies. It also acknowledges the changed circumstances in Morocco due to the political uprising in 2011. My methods, sampling and use of theory that has previously
not been applied to Morocco also distinguishes this study from those that have informed it.

2.2 Democracy and theories of democratisation

Democratisation and the decentralisation of power have taken a long time in Morocco. Chapter 4 will discuss the exact path of political changes that have led to the current political organisation in Morocco. In this section of the thesis I wish to discuss the concept of democracy in a little more detail so far as it relates to the work of the women’s organisations in Morocco. Most of the women’s NGOs refer to democracy as the basis of their demands when asking for the extension of women’s rights. Democracy alone does not constitute a referential for women’s NGOs, but it is often mixed with both religious and human rights referential in campaigns. It is important to consider the different interpretations of democracy in order to show the strategic importance of the word in women’s advocacy.

At the time of the Moudawana reform the new law was seen by many as not only a step towards equality and political liberalisation but also towards democratisation (Benradi et al., 2007). Pruuzan-Jorgensen (2010b) and Cavatorta and Dalmasso (2009) both criticise the reform of the Moudawana as an act of legal liberalisation that works to reinforce the autocratic rule of the monarch in Morocco. Cavatorta and Dalmasso state: “while not underestimating the impact of the reform of the Moudawana in establishing a considerable degree equality between the sexes, and placing liberal rights at the centre of social relations, [this paper] argues that such a liberal outcome has been obtained through undemocratic mechanisms and processes and that, far from constituting a prelude to democratisation, the reform is a testament to the arbitrary nature of political authority in Morocco” (2009: 488). This view of the reform considers democratisation as a structural mechanism affecting the political institutions. Without rejecting the claim
that political liberalisation has indeed served to reinforce the powers of the monarch, this thesis investigates the concept of democracy from a feminist point of view. Feminist critique of democratisation theories is useful in examining the claims that equality and democracy aren’t necessarily linked, and that democracy only happens in the level of governance. Heng (1997) uses the example of feminist movement in Singapore to state “Rights historically granted to women by patriarchal authority in order to accomplish nationalist goals and agendas do not necessarily constitute as acts of feminism” although they may work in the advantage of women (p.45). To understand these statements, it is important to locate the specific meanings they accord to democratisation, democracy, equality and the relationship these have with each other.

This thesis uses the feminist critique of democracy, written by Alexander and Mohanty (1997) as a starting point to understand democratisation from the point of view of sexual citizenship. According to the authors, the currently reigning US-inspired understanding of Democracy is linked with imperialism and capitalism as a tool used for US commercial expansion in the world, and this Democracy with capital D does not work as a feminist concept of equal society. The neo-colonial idea of Democracy allows for exploitation of third world countries and assumes a white, heterosexual citizen at its core who is able to enjoy full citizenship rights. As Iris Marion Young (1990) puts it, universal citizenship at the basis of Democracy is defined as general, rather than made up of particular individuals with different needs, and laws in this Democracy are designed to apply to all in the same way despite individual differences. The model doesn’t allow understanding or critically examining power differentials between citizens or hierarchies between Democratic states. Citizenship rights belong to the individual who exercises his/her freedom to work and are granted via equality in the eyes of law only without regard to material and physical conditions that may limit one’s access to work or to law.
Dangino (1993) argues, that the way in which Democracy has been reduced to signify the formal mechanisms of representative democracy hides the lack of democratic practices and culture in the democratic or democratising nations. Democracy must be defined again in order for it to have true meaning for women and other disenfranchised citizens in Morocco and elsewhere.

To counteract this idea of Democracy, which ignores critique of citizenship and global inequalities, Alexander and Mohanty (1997:xxvii) wish to conceptualise an anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist feminist democratic practice. This feminist democracy lists five main criteria: firstly, sexual politics are at the centre of the processes and practices of governance and we need to examine the way the government treats women. Secondly, feminist democracy understands the hierarchies of rule, such as class, gender, race, sexuality and nation, their interconnectedness and their effect on people. The transformation of relationships and selves is required in order to have self-determination and autonomy for all people. Thirdly, in feminist democracy women are no longer victims or dependents of governing structures, but agents of their own lives. Here, “Agency is understood here as the conscious and on-going reproduction of the terms of one’s existence while taking responsibility for this process.” (ibid) A new political culture, where one is outside of the spaces of domination while always in the context of collective or communal process is required for the feminist democracy to operate. Decolonisation must take place through reflection as well as action (p.xxviii). Fourthly, the feminist democracy put forward by the authors is based on socialist practices and aims to break down global capitalist hierarchies. Finally feminist democracy must cross national and geographical borders and bring together of activism and scholarship beyond the nation (p.xxix).

For the purposes of this study the feminist critique of Democracy put forward by Alexander and Mohanty works as a good starting point. As the emphasis of the study is
on the processes and discourses on activism, instead of measuring whether a feminist notion of democracy is at play in Morocco I am using Alexander and Mohanty’s theory of feminist democracy as an entry-point to understanding how Moroccan women’s NGOs use the concept of democracy as part of their own strategic language. Firstly, the primacy of sexual citizenship and assessing democratisation on how the state treats women relates directly to the reform of the Moudawana as democratising practice. Although, as Cavatorta and Dalmasso and Pruzan-Jorgensen have noted, the family law reform did not bring about changes in governing structures and institutions, by affording women the enhanced space for private decisions, such as travelling, marrying and divorcing without the permission of a male guardian, and workforce participation improved women’s citizenship rights and possibilities of executing those rights. Alexander and Mohanty’s second point, which relates to the hierarchies of rule both within and without women’s groups may provide a point of self-reflection for Moroccan women activists. Morocco’s women’s NGOs, like women’s civil society groups elsewhere (Kuumba, 2001), are organised around elite activists. Most of the NGO activists in both faith-based and rights-based groups are educated middle- or upper-class women who have both the bureaucratic and financial capacity to engage in voluntary work. Thus intersections of gender, race and class are likely to be less visible in women’s activism in Morocco than sexual politics. The ways in which the activists discuss this apparent homogeneity of the voluntary sector and lack of representation of non-middle-class women in relation to their conceptualisation of democracy is interesting. The question of women’s agency is equally intriguing in the context of Morocco, as women’s NGOs often describe themselves as speaking for the regular women. Victim narratives are also a common tactic of demanding legal reforms, and may not fit easily with the idea of agency. They take individual stories that present women as victims of either direct male violence or of patriarchal societal structures. Through these stories advocates can make convincing arguments that as victims, women require assistance and (legal) protection (Roces, 2009). I do not expect Alexander and Mohanty’s feminist critique of democratisation to fit easily
in the context of Moroccan women’s activism, but importantly it brings the attention away from institutions to gendered citizens and thus provides a useful starting point to beginning to look at the way in which NGOs speak about democracy.

Democracy is often assumed to form part of the practice of feminist movements, but in reality organising decision-making structures in a transparent, participative and efficient way without falling into the pitfalls of institutional liberal Democracy is difficult. Ford-Smith (1997) recounts her experiences in the Jamaican feminist organisation Sistren in the 1980s. As feminist organisation they wished to refrain from reproducing the unbalanced power structures of national governance. With no clear model on which to base the internal structures, the collective came to equate democracy with collective decision making and ignored the informal relations of power that cannot be avoided in any human relations. Leadership was still in place, but not discussed, and thus not legitimised. Moroccan women’s NGOs, just like women’s NGOs elsewhere, are frequently accused of elitism and lack of democratic structures. How, the accusers ask, can they demand for democracy in the society, if they cannot apply democratic practices to their own activities? This is one of the questions I consider when discussing my participants’ views on democracy and the way democracy is used in women’s activism in Morocco. While asking this, I nevertheless keep in mind Ford-Smith’s findings: democracy, whether internal or external to feminist movements, does not mean lack of leadership, but accountability in decision making. As women’s NGOs in Morocco have adopted democracy as part of their permanent vocabulary, it is useful also to consider democracy from the point of view of internal organisation of the groups. While democracy is used as a concept in activism, we cannot assume it to be part of the processes, as Ford-Smith has shown.
Michelutti (2008) brings together the concept of vernacularisation, a term adopted by Merry in her theory of translating global norms to local practices, and new models of democratisation that are ignored by political scientist looking at democratisation processes in developing countries. Traditional studies have concentrated on institutions, ignoring the practices and understandings of democracy by the people. She suggests that in India democracy has become vernacular as it has intersected with caste, religions and community. Although institutions have failed especially the poor, people remain committed to the idea of democracy, as it has become part of the everyday organisation of life and has been retold through cultural and social stories that make it as much a product of the socio-cultural context as a force continuing to shape the political context. Liberal democracy is being replaced more and more by the principle of popular sovereignty (Michelutti, 2008). She suggests that “the moment democracy enters a particular historical and socio-cultural setting it becomes vernacularised, and through vernacularisation it produces new social relations and values which in turn shape the political” (p.3). For Michelutti, democracy is not a manifestation of modernity, but a process deeply embedded in local culture and meanings. Her view thus opposes modernity itself to “local culture”. What is useful in this view is the understanding of democracy or democratisation as not objectively measured on a scale based on certain institutional demarcations, but as a process made up of various practices. It also echoes with Tessler’s (2003:105) findings, which indicate that the motivations for democratisation in Morocco are not predominantly rooted in the desire to imitate the West, but rather in the wish to limit mismanagement and corruption. In order to discuss levels of democratisation one must look into the processes and different forms of participation that take place horizontally and in channels beyond the formal political order. In regards to the democracy referred to by women’s NGOs in Morocco, vernacular democracy, or the idea of participatory citizenship embedded in cultural forms of communication and interaction is fitting. As Young (2005) has shown, women’s NGOs, like any other civil society, business or government organisation, rely on networks and
contacts for their public legitimacy. Personal contacts create platforms for action and means for participation and communication across political and ideological divides. Seeing democracy that has been vernacularized in this manner as purely a product of culture and tradition, however, ignores the interaction between global and local; traditional and modern. The basis and structures for communication and networking is built upon cultural formats, but the ideas of democracy and citizenship are constantly constructed in debates between the global, the local, the modern and the authentic.

Suggesting that women’s NGOs and the liberalisation of laws governing women has contradicted democratisation in Morocco can only be done from an uncritical position towards what is Democracy and how it is lived by the people. Democracy was an important topic for the women’s NGOs interviewed for this study in 2011 and is discussed by most of the participants. Although Cavatorta and Dalmasso and Pruzan-Jorgensen recognise the need for political liberalisation and inclusion of women in public life, they see the moudawana reform as increasing autocracy and thus contradictory to democratisation. This study takes a more critical approach to the concept of democracy and investigates, whether women activists in Morocco have indeed constructed a vernacular, feminist idea of democracy that is more meaningful to them than the governing institutions claiming to represent Democracy. This thesis uses the feminist critique of Alexander and Mohanty (1997) as a starting point in exploring, what women’s NGOs might mean when they refer to democracy and how democracy is – or is not – present in the processes of activism and advocacy. Alexander and Mohanty’s use of post-colonial feminist theory in their critique of Democratisation as a global imperial ideology fits the context of this study, which is also guided by post-colonial feminist theory.

**2.3 Feminists? Womanists? Women activists?**

Western post-feminist debates have questioned the need for feminist labelling in recent years (Hemmings, 2011). This is related to identifying feminism with specific political
and historical forms of women’s activism that took place Europe and North-America in the 1970s around issues such as domestic and sexual violence and equal pay. More recent trends in Europe show young women and men reclaiming the term as their own while giving it new, more open definitions and goals (Redfern and Aune, 2010). Third-World women have criticised the idea of this feminism as universalising concept, as it didn’t take into consideration the intersectional positions women of colour found themselves. Some opted for a term of their own: womanism (Moraga and Anzaldua, 1983).

In Morocco women activists are divided by categories of language, class, region, political identity and religiosity. In order to better understand the different positions from which women experience the patriarchal power structures, intersectional feminist theory considers the intersections of power, identity and ideology and how they “obscure social injustice and maintain universal patterns of gendered and racialised inequality” (Mirza, 2009). The theory can be used as a tool for critical engagement with the complexity of women’s intersecting identities, and how these identities and categories construct and reinforce power differentials (Lykke, 2010). Intersectionality cannot be understood as a mere adding of one form of oppression on top of another, lest we wish to create the subjects of Intersectionality as victims in all areas of their life and deny them of agency (Nash, 2008). Instead of seeing each category as adding another layer of oppression, Intersectionality can be used to analyse how hierarchies are shaped by their intra-action with each other (Lykke, 2010) and “theorising the relationship between different axes of domination” (Bredstrom, 2006: 237). As all relationships are socially constructed, a person will always find herself in a more advantageous position in some situation than others (Irwin, 2006). The meaning of intersectionality could also be expanded to include “nuanced conception of identity that recognizes ways in which position of dominance and subordination work in complex and intersecting ways to constitute subjects’ experiences of personhood” (Nash, 2008). Thinking intersectionally about gender and women activists in Morocco means regarding the power structures created by the education
system, which highly prioritises urban centres and where middle classes favour private French and American schools; multilingualism, in which illiteracy and informal Moroccan dialect is reserved for women (Sadiqi, 2003); class and family ties; and the divide between rural and urban communities.

Studies on women’s activism in Arab Muslim countries have at times made divisions between liberal feminism, seen as good feminism as it used the UN mechanisms and transnational feminist language in defining its goals, and faith-based groups\(^9\). In these studies agency has been reduced to meaning women making specific choices about their lives. One of these criteria for agency is the philosophy of most Western domestic violence services, where the best option for a woman is to leave\(^{10}\). Faith-based organisations promoting family unity are in this light seen as anti-feminist by the rights-based activists\(^{11}\). This labelling is however promoting a Eurocentric idea of feminism and agency, and affords little regard to the context in which activism takes place. Norani Othman mixes the approaches: while not wishing to let the Islamists monopolise religion and impose their own view of it, she says human rights and women’s rights are to be found in the Koran with hermeneutic interpretation. Muslims can and must respect the universal notion of human rights as they search for the equivalent values within their own traditions (Othman, 1999)\(^{12}\). Other feminists, Muslims or otherwise, say the Koran can only ever be an interim solution to the inequalities created by the Islamic patriarchy; real equality can only be created on the basis of internationally recognised women’s rights for equal treatment (Barlas, 2005, Einhorn, 2003)\(^{13}\). Saba Mahmood argues that the meaning

\(^9\) This division to “good” and “bad” feminism has been done by both European and Arab writers, such as El Saadawi (2012). Reilly’s (2011) argument is more subtle but it nevertheless places human rights as central to women’s transnational activism. An important research by Mahmood (2005) questions this division and the understanding of women’s agency it promotes.


\(^{11}\) This statement was made by two participants of this study who represent rights-based organisations.

\(^{12}\) These points were further discussed with the author in private conversation in

\(^{13}\) See more detailed discussion on Muslim/secular/Islamic/Islamist feminism in chapter 5.
of agency in the context of Islam cannot be fixed in terms of Western feminist ideology; as a political project feminism needs to be continuously negotiated within the specific context where action takes place, and thus there is no one answer to the inclusion or exclusion of Islam from the feminist agenda or indeed any one recipe for feminist thought or equality in different societies (Mahmood, 2005b:139). If feminism is confined to meaning only the liberal Western-inspired forms that use the international human rights norms and ideas of universality of patriarchy oppressing all women in the same fashion, its powers to evoke change are severely limited.

But not all that is “good for women” can be understood as feminism either. Heng (1997) suggests that rights granted to women by patriarchal authorities to advance their own goals do not constitute as feminism, even if they are in fact beneficial to women. Rights seized and practices initiated by women on the other hand “in the pursuit of their imagined collective interest” are always feminist practices, even if they do not fit (Western liberal) feminist ideas of agency (p.45). This view allows labelling as feminists women who do not necessarily identify as such, but it places men entirely outside of feminist action. In Morocco many younger rights-based women’s organisations have incorporated men into their structures and simultaneously abandoned the feminist label. Their terms of reference still remain feminist in terms of the rights-based approach as well as in relation to Heng’s description as being “in the pursuit of their imagined collective interest”. In the course of my meetings with women and men activists across Morocco from both faith-based and rights-based groups, I never met a person or a group who did not feel they were acting in the collective interest of women. What that interest may have been varied greatly from having full economic and political equality to becoming the best mothers they can be, but it was always framed as being in the interest of the women the organisation worked for and with. Throughout this study I wish to try my best from making value-judgements on their activities as either more or less feminist.
While respecting the self-labelling of actors, we need to look at the specific conditions of feminism. Third-World feminisms take different forms, but all contend with three principal factors that condition their emergence and survival. Firstly, it is haunted by its historical origins, which almost without exception are embedded in national movements and secondly, often that nationalism and anti-imperialist struggle has made its gains at the expense of feminism, while subordinating the feminist language and goals to its own cause (Heng, 1997, p.30). Mernissi (1988) and Helie-Lucas (1987) have both criticised the omission of women from nation-building projects in Algeria and Morocco. How could the nations’ political system be built with only small elite of powerful men in mind, when those same men had undergone years of oppression and torture in the hands of the imperial powers prior to coming into power? Economic and political development is not possible if the views, demands and efforts of 50% of the population are ignored (Mernissi, 1983, Helie-Lucas, 1987). On one hand Mernissi paves way to her feminist colleagues in saying that patriarchy can play no part in a country trying to rid itself of colonial past, but the conversations reveals one of the greatest dilemmas of women’s rights activists: should nation not become before individual groups? And as ‘nation’ has already been defined in patriarchal terms (Heng, 1997), the criticism of the definition becomes criticism of the nation itself in the eyes of the defenders of this patriarchal view. The discussion is familiar with the feminists in Morocco who began their activism within leftist political parties. Many of the participants have explained that they founded independent women’s organisations as it became clear, that the woman issue continued to be side-lined even after many political priorities were achieved.

Thirdly, Heng argues, Third-World feminism is affected by the ambivalence of Third World nations and nationalism to modernity (ibid:33). While nationalism and nation states are themselves a product of modernity and states may wish to follow a modernisation plan in economic and social organisation, Heng argues, “a resistance to the
totalizing implications of modernization is invariably set at some juncture of the modernization process” (Heng, 1997:33). Modernity is accepted selectively, embracing the technological and economic advancement it represent while guarding against the social effects of it which may be conflated with Western (ibid:33). The modernity represented by feminists represents social modernisation and must thus answer to accusations of importing Western values and contaminating the traditional culture. In their efforts to respond to these criticisms, feminists in Third-World countries have at times adopted nationalism as part of their strategy to legitimise their actions and finding support for their activities in national or religious history and mythology (ibid:34). In light of this type of Third World nationalism and its inconsistent relationship with modernity and the West, Leela Gandhi reminds us that the process of decolonisation does not erase the colonial past. Suppressing the colonial memories makes it impossible to move on; objecting to everything associated with the colonisers brings the society back to the pre-colonial past and leads to postcolonial schizophrenia whereby hating and admiring the colonisers is not separated from the different actions (Gandhi, 1998). When modernity is seen only in the dichotomy between the golden past and imported values, local culture and tradition become imaginings of few. This uncritical adaptation of the past works to undermine any developments of the society and creates an image of culture as ahistorical and stagnant.

In contrast to many other colonised countries, where traditions became the more or less undisputed symbols of national identity (Said, 1978, Helie-Lucas, 1987), in Morocco a colonial policy of respect for local traditions imposed a dualist definition of modernity and nationalism. General Lyautey, in response to the Algerian resistance to French colonialism insisted on Moroccan people’s right to preserve traditions. The nationalist movement reacted to this policy by representing traditions as both obstacle to modernisation and the emancipation of women as well as the site for fighting against colonialism (Salime, 2011). Traditions were seen simultaneously as a French imposition
aiming to maintain backwardness in Morocco, and as a resistance to the French cultural and political colonisation of the country. This creates a complex understanding between “good” and “bad” traditions and local and imported modernities, all existing in the backdrop of postcolonialism and Islam. Women activists, whether coming from faith-based groups that often present themselves as bearers of “good traditions” and locality, or from leftist groups who have embraced international feminist language and strategies constantly struggle to position themselves in this debate on modernity and to shift the understandings of global and local.

2.4 Translating norms between global and local

This study looks at the linguistic strategies of women’s NGOs in Morocco in relation to the theory of Sally Engle Merry on activism being done on the basis of translating global norms into local contexts. According to Merry, human rights “need to be translated into local terms and situated within local contexts of power and meaning” or “remade in the vernacular” (2006:1). Furthermore, “understanding the practice of human rights requires attention to the people who translate documents into social situations and social situations into human rights violations” (Goodale and Merry, 2007:41). Merry has applied this theory especially to looking at how gender violence is conceptualised around the globe, regarding gender violence embedded within its cultural and social contexts (2009). As a cultural construct gender violence becomes subject to change and understood within wider contexts of power and meaning (2009) and thus the response must take these criteria into consideration. Developing a framework for action begins with naming the problem, which is “essential to organizing politically to do something about it and creating a social movement” (2009:28) and cannot occur in the abstract, but must be contextualised (Merry, 2007:42). This process of naming is essentially what this study aims to trace within different forms of women’s activism in Morocco by asking what is the referential different organisations base their activism on and how is it visible in their
public narratives. Merry’s anthropological view of gender violence also suggests a comparative approach, as she has adopted in her own work. Although this study looks beyond gender violence as a scope of activism for women’s NGOs in Morocco, Merry’s theorisation of gender and gender subordination as cultural and contextual lends itself to examining women’s responses to all forms of gender discrimination. Violence does also feature in the women’s NGOs’ campaigns, and as Morocco has not been included in Merry’s earlier comparative studies on gender violence and responses to it, this study can add the empirical evidence to complete Merry’s earlier studies across the globe. Furthermore, by including theories of intersectionality and strategic essentialism this study critiques the ideas of “global” and “local” put forward by Merry, suggesting instead a complex weaving together of local, national, global and personal narratives in women’s activism.

None of the naming or activism, although embedded in local culture and context, happens in isolation however. International fora, such as the Nairobi conference of 1985 and Beijing conference in 1995, have facilitated the creation of transnational networks that share their experiences and borrow ideas from one context to another (Merry, 2009:77). The ideas are rarely introduced as they are, but rather translated to the local language and context in order for them to be accepted by the population and decision-makers. Translation takes place simultaneously from global to local, making international norms understood in the vernacular, and from local to global, retelling local stories within the framework of international human rights (Merry, 2006:3). Cultural translations, or making global norms in the vernacular consists of creating “programs and institutions that are a blend of transnational, national, and local elements” through process of negotiating “the spaces between transnational ideas and local concerns” (ibid:134). While Merry suggest that the translation from local to global is mostly relevant to local NGOs narrating their grievances on a global arena, this study finds that Moroccan NGOs are continuously balancing their activism between multiple local and global constructs and
moving in between them. Translation from local to global happens, for example, during funding applications, which are addressed to foreign embassies and international funding bodies such as the Oxfam and different UN organisations. Between translations from local to global and back sits also the national. Individual women’s stories are used as evidence when lobbying the national government, and must be translated to the appropriate context and language. This language is not the same as the language used for funding applications for international institutions, as it must also show relevance in regards to the national legislation.

Vernacularisation as a concept originates from describing how national languages developed and changed in the nineteenth century Europe when Latin was gradually abandoned as the language of elite education and diplomacy (Wilson, 2007). The concept was adapted to imperial educational endeavours as the colonial rulers and missionary schools aimed to appeal to the colonised populations in a language and cultural understanding they would be able to access. White (2002) in her study of Islamist politics in Turkey takes it to mean “a value-centered [sic] political process rooted in local culture, interpersonal relations, and community networks, yet connected through civic organizations to national party politics” (p.27). Vernacular politics is about more than mere ideology or religiosity, but allows for personal relationship to the political goals pursued. Remaking global human rights norms in the vernacular, as Merry (2006:1) suggests, must in this light be inclusive of multiple meanings of both local and global. In addition to being multiple and dynamic, the global should only be used as a reference to “conceptually global categories like human rights” rather than political goals, moral ideas or theoretical possibilities, such as global justice or global institutions (Goodale, 2007:16). Tracing and describing such multiplicity is difficult however, as one can never be certain of having listen to and being able to represent everyone with a stake in the matter. Indeed White takes vernacular politics to apply only to the Islamist parties in
Turkey, and Merry’s studies on gender violence across dozens of countries tend to describe only one fraction of each country’s women activists.

The translation process is never straightforward, as activists need to balance the level of translation between resonating in the local contexts and being persuasive while also moving far enough from the local in order to challenge the existing power relations (2006:5). As Spivak (2012:312) states: “The task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency”. Translation itself must also be understood not as building bridges or bridging gaps (Baker, 2005), but as a new construct (Riessman). Merry (2006) distinguishes translating human rights as either replication or hybridity; implanting the discursive concept into the local as it is, or merging it with the local institutions and symbolic structures. Critical reading of translation itself as a new construct surpasses even the idea of hybridity, stating that what has been translated is a new emergent narrative rather than a replication or a hybrid construction of the global and the local merged together. These new narratives constructed by NGOs as a result of translating between global and local norms are then tested by the campaigns and keep changing with the social and political context of Morocco and the global communications that have now become an internal part of that context. As local and global norms are transcreated in this fashion, it becomes impossible to point to the original text. Tracing where each part of NGOs’ narratives originates would thus be impossible even for those fully embedded in both the Moroccan and the transnational feminist contexts. This thesis does not suggest it can do this. Instead it presents some of the differences and similarities between different women’s groups in Morocco as they engage with the local and global norms in their everyday activism.

Human rights as a point of reference are an important tool of women’s activism in Morocco. With little institutional power for enforcement, the idea of human rights as a tool for change depends on communication and the ability of NGOs to expose human
rights violations to wide public opinion (Merry, 2009:83). Hence the strategies and media NGOs employ in communicating their activism and the audiences they are able to reach is important in determining the scope of their activism. The strategies and media also have a bearing on the translation from global to local, or vernacularisation the NGOs engage in to get their message across. A campaign wishing to generate global awareness requires different language to one that is aimed at a local community. In addition to the afore mentioned criteria, local cultural and social context and the referential a particular NGO wishes to adopt, the process of translating between global and local norms must also take into consideration the intended audiences and the scope a particular campaign is aimed at. The questions of scope and language perplex NGOs continuously as the society changes and requires careful reconsideration at the beginning of every initiative. With an examination of NGOs’ past campaign documentation this study aims to reflect upon these changes, while the main focus is on the languages and referential employed at a specific point in time. 2011 brought great changes to the Moroccan political system. Capturing the ways in which women activists reflected upon these changes and focalised their own concerns in the new political order reveals empirically how the processes of activism operate and how activists construct the languages used in campaigning.

While Merry is careful to defend her position against the common pitfalls of cultural relativism often linked to anthropology, the case studies she presents of gender violence campaigns present singular interpretations of translation processes. If translation is to take place between “global” and “local”, the multiplicity of both may be come obscured. A contextual case study of Morocco allows for further exploration of multiple perspectives. The level of translation is a balancing act for the NGOs in Morocco, who try to negotiate local constituency in the intersectionalities of languages, orality, religion, tradition, competing meanings of modernity, geography and social and political class. When woven together with the competing categories of feminisms in Morocco, the translations process also receives a new dimension not accounted for by Merry; the
referential a particular NGO wishes to locate itself in the heterogeneous civil society space in Morocco, based on the level and form of challenge it wishes to put on the existing power structures and the metanarratives constructing and representing those structures. By mapping the differences and similarities in how NGOs remake international women’s human rights in the vernacular, this study investigates the spaces between faith-based and rights-based feminisms empirically.

Defining the local, to which global norms are translated, requires a look at what is described as the culture. Culture is often discussed in terms of tradition and backwardness and defined in opposition to civilisation in the Orientalist view (Merry, 2006:12). As this study is more comfortably sitting within the realms of sociology than anthropology, it prefers speaking of social and political context rather than culture, which in relation appears too reified and Orientalist as a concept. Of course, the risk of reifying does not disappear with a change of terminology, and political and social contexts must be understood as dynamic as well as territorially and ideologically diverse. Situated in the local are traditions. Despite the term that refers to traditions being historical and original to the culture or society, traditions may be created by and located within modernity, especially in post-colonial contexts (Menon, 2000). Indeed, the recognition by Salime (2011) that traditions in Morocco are formed of “good” and “bad” traditions, both shaped by the colonial past of the country, shows the complexity of the concept.

The most important point to note about human rights, religion and tradition and the idea of translating these or re-making universal rights in the vernacular is that none of these concepts should be understood as sitting neatly at the end of a spectrum, as could be understood from Merry’s descriptions of the process of translation. Human rights, as defined and used by Moroccan women’s activists are as local as any other ideas and Islam is universal at its core. Translating from one to another means weaving together what is simultaneously familiar to the listeners but can also challenge their view of the
normal enough to evoke change in the minds and in the society. How each NGO decides to do this is informed by their experiences of activism, by the ideologies they adhere to, by the issues at hand, by the present context within which action takes place and by the personal preferences of each activist. There are no clearly defined groups whose strategies of vernacularisation are identical. Instead what this study can trace are the patterns and changing practices that are deployed for different occasions. The empirical evidence presented in this thesis is showing on one hand how different the approaches within a cluster of NGOs defined as “secular” can be, and at the same time, how closely there strategies and wordings resemble those employed by groups traditionally labelled as antithetical to the secular women’s movement.

2.5 Women’s rights and relativism

Cultural relativism has created an entire body of literature in the discipline of human rights. Relativism is often associated with anthropology’s refusal to apply the same moral standards to other cultures and thus indirectly justifying harmful practices. The main arguments of this discussion point out to the Western origin of the concept of human rights and the universal declaration, as although it was signed by the vast majority of countries, many of these were still struggling with decolonising at the time (Clapham, 2007). Not having participated in the writing of the original documents does not have to mean that they are irrelevant, however. An’Naim (1999:152) states that human rights are necessary in order to create political space, where citizens can participate in the cultural mediation of the rights. He demonstrates the point by saying, that even the one refuting human rights as “Western” needs freedom of expression to be able to make his point. Whether all rights apply to all situations is questionable, but some rights are necessary so that the decision about which rights should be included can be taken.
A feminist study cannot adopt a relativist standpoint, as its aim is to show how women struggle and hold agency under manifold demonstrations of patriarchal structures. Nor should a feminist study aware of postcolonial theories value certain manifestations of women’s agency higher than others. Fox (1999) argues that cultural relativism sees cultures from the point of view of their context, but is not the same as ethical relativism, which makes no judgements on harmful cultural or other practices. A more useful approach than getting caught in the relativism versus universalism debate is to engage in cross-cultural dialogue with grassroots. These kind of dialogues “will provide an opportunity to identify cultural practices which support rights, as well as to explore how the hegemonic behaviour of states shapes women’s views of themselves, identifying the extent to which dominating knowledge has convinced women that they should suffer the burden of being the receptacles of ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’” (Fox, 1999). These dialogues can also help move beyond the dichotomies of the west as modern and the non-west as traditional and backward. Looking at human rights then in within the contours of this thesis means recognising the location from which each speaker comes from and how that may affect their ideas of culture and of human rights. As a study exploring strategies it also recognises the pragmatism behind some of the choices of referential and wording, whether pertaining to human rights or to religion.

Defining human rights as Western also contributes to the orientalist views of hegemonic Eastern culture oblivious to moral liberties of individuals (Tatsuo, 1999). In this view, both “Western” and “Oriental” cultures are monolithic and unchanging. Granzer (1999) found that human rights are often interpreted in the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria) not as particularly representing Western values, but as compatible with the values of Islam. This assertion was often expressed also by the participants of this study from both rights-based and faith-based organisations. If human rights are as much part of the local culture as they are of global norms, the idea of translation between the two must be queried. The values of human rights found in the campaign materials of NGOs cannot
be treated as evidence of translation. Ideas, such as equality, are shown to be truly universal, in that they are formed in the minds of people all over the world independently of the human rights documents. This makes it difficult to speak about translation or vernacularisation.

Instead of concentrating on a superficial rivalry between rights and culture, academic debate on culture and rights has moved on to discuss culture as rights or even rights as culture (Cowan et al. 2009). This assertion takes the notion of culture as a dynamic process of forming discourses and practices. Culture is not merely a set static and homogeneous rules and habits governing the activities of a certain people in a specific geographical location, but informs the relationships of both global and local communities. Human rights discourses and activism forms a culture of its own, followed and informed by the activists engaging with it all over the globe. This culture of human rights then interacts with and is translated to the locally produced competing cultures of different groups. The limits of these colliding and intersecting cultures are fluid and blurred, and defining where one begins and where another has been vernacularised is difficult. For the purpose of this thesis I will regard any links to the language or actual texts of the international human rights treaties as “the global”. This does not fully resolve the problem of defining local and global without resorting to cultural relativism. I will thus return to this discussion in chapter 8, where I re-examine these thoughts in relation to my data.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the main theoretical debates that relate to the research question put forward by this thesis. In doing so it has demonstrated the ways in which this thesis engages with these debates, and the empirical insights it can offer to them. Women’s NGOs in Morocco have been studied from various different points of view since their
foundation in the 1980s. Much of the literature has focussed on their successful campaigns to bring about the reform of the family law. Changing political circumstances in Morocco mean, that new empirical insights can be offered by this study.

Theoretically this thesis has two main contributions to make to the literature on women’s activism in Morocco. First one is working with Merry’s (2006) theory on vernacularisation in the context of Moroccan women’s NGOs. In fact, Merry’s theory has not in general been used in the context of Arab Muslim countries, and new insights on the use of Islam in vernacularisation of women’s rights may reveal ways in which this can help understand women’s activism in other Islamic contexts. This study also takes on post-colonial and intersectional feminist theories, which help unravel the complexity of the referential used by women’s NGOs in Morocco and the modernities they portray through their referential and everyday activism. Young (2005) has written about the ways in which global narratives become remade from the parts of local and global discourses that are available. Looking at this process from the point of view of the theory of translation and vernacularisation makes comparisons to other contexts more feasible.

Secondly, the empirical evidence of this study contributes to the discussions of democratisation in relation to women’s rights in Morocco, initiated in the aftermath of the moudawana reform. Some early studies credited the moudawana reform for preceding a genuine democratisation of the country’s governing structures (Benradi et al 2007). This study, as well as the critiques of it that followed (Sater 2007; Cavatorta and Dalmasso, 2009) understood democracy purely as “political pluralism with elected and accountable decision-makers” (Cavatorta and Dalmasso, 2009:489). An understanding of democracy such as this fails to pose the important questions, such as: accountability to whom? A feminist critique of the accepted neo-liberal model of democracy helps to ask exactly those questions in relation to women’s rights and democracy in Morocco. Applying a feminist critique of
democratisation places the emphasis on democratisation on its intersectional subjects and how democracy is lived by them and influences their lives. The interview data begins to show a model of feminist democracy imagined by women activists in Morocco, which can help us think about rights, representation and democracy in the post-Arab Spring world without judging countries as either having it or not. This study shows feminist democracy in Morocco in all its multiplicity and complexity, putting emphasis on how it affects citizens rather than on the structures of the governing institutions.
Chapter 3
Methodology

This chapter discusses the epistemological and methodological questions relevant to this PhD: the methods of collection and analysis of the data, the rationale for choosing them and ethical considerations relevant to the study. The theories introduced in the last chapter inform the methodological preferences. The study is based on social constructionist epistemology, which belongs in the interpretive theories of existence. The epistemology has an obvious relation to the types of questions the research can aim to respond to and the ways in which these questions can be posed. Constructivism places its emphasis on the human relations and understanding of material and discursive relations in their social contexts. In constructivist study the political and social context of Morocco is also important in understanding the data. This will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5. As a qualitative study, this thesis is not aiming for representativeness, but rather a thick description of the struggles faced by women’s NGOs in Morocco. The main question the thesis poses is how NGOs organise their work and their objectives. This study does not aim to reveal the best – or indeed most effective strategies, as an impact analysis is beyond its scope and epistemological underpinnings. Instead, it shows some examples of women’s activism from different points of view and different geographical locations in Morocco. Both theorists and activists alike can use this empirical evidence to think about different ways of doing and phrasing issues in specific contexts.

The chapter begins by discussing the theoretical perspectives brought up in the last chapter that have a direct bearing to how the research is conducted. The second section of the chapter brings forward the epistemological considerations regarding the choice of methodology. The latter part of this chapter gives a more detailed account of the methods used for data collection and analysis. Selection criteria for the interviews and the
documents for this study are slightly different and will each be discussed in turn. The following part describes the steps that have been taken in the process of analysis and gives justifications in light of theoretical considerations to the choice of the methods of analyses. Finally the chapter addresses any ethical questions and other limitations regarding the research methods and the study design and discusses the researcher’s positioning within the project and how this has affected the outcomes.

3.1 Theory informing the research

The study is informed by feminist postcolonial and intersectional theories. It also introduces narrative inquiry as an epistemological and methodological tool. Feminist theory demands research to be equal and do its best to eliminate power structures between the researcher and research participants (Huisman, 2008). A constructionist study places importance on the social context in shaping understandings. Hence two chapters of this thesis are dedicated to discussing the social and political context in which Moroccan women’s NGOs operate. While the main role of methodology is explaining how research questions can be answered, these theoretical considerations guide the planning of the methodology and the process of data collection and analysis at every step.

As well as informing the methodology for the thesis and guiding the choice of methods for data collection and analysis, the theoretical framework adopted poses some important methodological questions of its own. Feminist theory and postcolonial theory affect the ethical guidelines the study adopts, and these are discussed in the last section of the chapter. The particular chosen framework for this study brings together theories from different academic disciplines. How these theories fit together relies largely on the wider ontological and epistemological considerations on which the thesis is based. It is also important to note any possible difficulties and theoretical clashes that may arise from mixing disciplines. Most of the feminist, postcolonial and narrative theories informing
this thesis come from sociology and political science. Some feminist struggles, such as violence against women as a global phenomenon can be difficult to translate to the discipline specific ideas of anthropology (Zuckerhut, 2011). Adopting Merry’s (2009) anthropological interpretation of gender violence however allows this study to understand it as taking place “in virtually all societies around the world” (Merry, 2009:1). As a theory of social organisation in Morocco the adaption of Sadiqi’s sociolinguistic gender theory fits in well to the epistemological and theoretical considerations of this study regarding the social construction of gender and narratives in constructing and contesting stereotypes. The main problem of mixing theory from various disciplines is not that the particular theory might in itself not be fitting, but rather that it may be impossible to pay sufficient attention to the particular vocabulary and culture each discipline employs along with the criticisms and histories of each discipline.

3.2 Epistemology

This study is based on social constructionist epistemology. Understandings of all theories, concepts, ideas and terminology must then follow constructionist understanding of the empirical world. Constructionist epistemology frames the central research question, and it determines the use of methods and methodologies for the study. Constructionist worldview dictates that human existence cannot be measured accurately, but is the sum of complex networks of incidents, accidents, perceptions and relationships. Social reality consists of ways in which social phenomena are created, institutionalised and turned into tradition; reality then gets reproduced by people as they act on their interpretations and their knowledge of the social world around them. The social world is constructed through our knowledge of it, and thus amounts to contextualised subjective experience of it (Burr, 1995). Although experience is subjective, people do not act in isolation: they interact with each other with the understanding that their respective perceptions of reality are related, and thus social reality becomes reinforced and indeed
socially constructed. Knowledge itself is constructed through our interactions and experiences and doesn’t exist independently of the knower. A piece of research is always a final product constructed by the subjective experience of the researcher, but with good research practices it can access and refer to the coproduced knowledge of the research participant. Constructionism has been criticised on one hand of being too relativist (Ratner, 2006) and affording meaning making only to those who have access to it, usually the elites. On the other hand it has been criticised for concentrating on social problems and conditions only as far as they are observable, thus linking social conditions to observable material conditions when deemed suitable (Miller, 1993). These ontological arguments are more manifestations of the commentators’ own standpoints than methodological inconsistencies as such, and the best reply to them is to adhere to a careful internal coherence within the research project (Madill et al, 2000). Internal coherence here means that the findings sit together logically without contradictions. This can be achieved, according to the authors, by showing as much of the data to the readers and allowing them to interpret it directly. In this thesis the data is shown first in chapters 6 and 7 where readers can access verbatim quotations from the documents and interviews, before I introduce my analysis in chapter 8.

This study follows the feminist theorist, such as Butler (1990), who have adopted a view of the concept of gender, whereby it is not based on any existing biological differences, but on socially constructed and reinforced ideas of what roles people of different genders are performing in the society. This is not to say that biological and material differences do not exist, but rather that the social understanding of what it means to be a woman or a man in a given society has little to do with the biological facts. Rather, gender roles have been constructed and reinforced by people acting upon their understandings of what is expected and acceptable. Gender is not, however the endpoint of the analysis, but rather an “entry point into complex systems of meaning and power” (Visvesvaran, 1997:616). As a social constructionist piece of research, this thesis engages with the concept of
gender in Moroccan society: whether (and how) women’s NGOs are challenging the social construction of women, or whether the campaigns aim to expand women’s rights within the existing limits of the socially-defined norms of womanhood.

This research also understands the construction of identities and concepts, such as culture, nation and religion to have a direct relationship to the narratability of those identities and concepts. This narratability cannot be reduced to the content of the story told (Cavarero, 2000), but reflects the structure and process of the narration (Tamboukou, 2008) and the internal consistency of the story (Tullis Owen et al., 2009). People construct themselves and their surroundings through interaction with others and through narrativising their experiences and understandings of these interactions. Theories of narrative go beyond discourse analysis, as they are concerned with the actual storying of the social constructs in question (Polkinghorne, 1988). Narratives and stories can be seen as access to a voice. Spivak (1987) discusses the idea of the subaltern and her ability to access agency, and concludes that for that access she needs the words and the language, and once she has them, she ceases to be a subaltern. The aim of development and rights work is then to give words and language to subalterns. Although for Spivak the subaltern can never actually access the language, the constructionist viewpoint adopted in this thesis criticised this extreme subjectivity of poststructuralist theory. In this critical view the concept of subaltern becomes inhibiting and redundant. As intersectional categories do exist, people can be accessed through language and especially through listening, and “subalterns” are never simply victims in all areas of their lives.

It is useful to contrast the concept of agency with that of subalternity. A worthwhile theory of agency has been put forward by Bourdieu (1990). Instead of subalternity Bourdieu speaks of habitus: habitus is formed of the material and discursive limits put on people by themselves and others. In order to change their habitus people need to realise the assumed limits of it and connect with others who wish to challenge these boundaries.
McNay (2000) sees the very instability of gender norms as a source of subversion and emancipatory remodelling of identity as creative forms of subjectivity and agency. Narrative theory can help show us how these connections can be made. When individual stories get shared and heard, others may begin to relate their own stories to them. Put together all the narratives of contestation can help demonstrate the gaps between the individual stories and the accepted, existing cultural stories, like that of Foucault’s Asylum (Rabinow, 1984) and create new narratives of how the society works.

Constructionism provides a platform for understanding collective action. Constructionism is suited to researching groups and communities, as unlike some other interpretivist theories it places the importance of the making of social reality on dialogue and joint construction, rather than individual interpretation of the existing social conditions (Gergen, 1999). In constructionist theory these understandings are never fixed and never formed outside of human interaction. Social interaction always creates new understandings and interpretations and thus other humans are vital for our understandings of ourselves and the society around us. Although none of us understand the world exactly the same as the others and none of us share all aims and ideas about how the world should be, shared goals become possible through and beyond Spivak’s (1987) idea of “strategic essentialism”. Alliances can be built with others on certain subjects in order to achieve a common goal, although other goals may not be shared. Important to Spivak’s “strategic essentialism” is however the need for critical engagement with the differences and similarities in our positions (Danius et al., 1993). Although it is a useful concept for understanding the link between identity and agency, this thesis accepts consensus

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14 Gergen explains the difference between constructivism and constructionism to be exactly this: in constructivism an individual mind constructs reality while in contact with the external world; social constructivism or collectivism means that the mind constructs reality and is influenced by social conventions, history and interaction with others in doing so; finally constructionism refers to meaning making primarily through interaction with others. See also Talja, S., Tuominen, K. & Savolainen, R. (2005) "Isms" in information science: constrivism, collectivism and constructionism. Journal of Documentation, 61, 79-101. for the discussion on the differences between the three.
building beyond strategic essentialism. Through interaction people can change their understandings, and thus, although interpretation plays a role, dialogue is possible. Through dialogue and social interaction alliances are built, consensus reached and norms created, reinforced and contested. Strategic cooperation is also possible without consensus, where actors decide to collaborate on single issues despite their different positions. Although Mohanty criticises the Western Feminist view of global patriarchy affecting all women everywhere similarly, she also sees the possibility of solidarity and sisterhood in “recognition of common interests” rather than assuming common oppression (Mohanty, 2003:28)

The social constructionist epistemology adopted for this study recognises the usefulness of postcolonial feminist critique of essentialising categories, but as feminist research it does not abandon the idea of categories fully. Intersectionality is a way of bridging the critique of essentialising and the poststructuralist inhibitions for agency and co-operation. The theory was first named by Crenshaw (1991) as a tool to address the gaps that are formed between different identity politics groups such as feminist and anti-racist actions, where black women were forced to choose their allegiances between “women” and “black”. Crenshaw hoped to introduce new models of action, where the relationships between different sources of oppression could be analysed and combatted in their context instead of dealing with each source as a separate oppression unrelated to one another. As Davis (2008) argues, due to its openness to interpretation and lack of clear definition the theory was quickly adopted by theorists arguing for intersectional relationships between all types of discrimination, including those based on dis/ability, class, language and sexuality. This opened up feminism to groups that were previously locked into identity politics based on single discriminations and, in theory at least, made wider cooperation between differently oppressed people possible. Categories do exist, but no one person can essentially be placed in one category only, nor are the categories fixed, but rather socially constructed, reinforced and contested through dialogue and narratives. A feminist
researcher must believe in the possibility of transformation of power relations, and in order for power to be contested, it must first be named. This does not mean that power is a fixed, material category; material conditions exist and are real, but their meaning is socially constructed. Power and patriarchy, like other intersecting categories, are contextualised and ever shifting.

### 3.3 Feminist epistemology in support of constructionist research

Some feminist researchers have put forward the idea that all traditional epistemologies and methodologies prevent women’s access to knowledge production as “knowers” (Harding, 1987:3). Feminist epistemologies take on different interpretations as to how gender influences knowledge production. None of the different interpretations of what gendered knowledge means can escape the underlying ontological assumptions about the world, but instead add another lens to how we see the world as working and what we believe can be known about it. Standpoint feminism assumes that women’s point of view can penetrate deeper into the layers of what can be known, and that women can best be known by other women. This viewpoint has been criticised by postcolonial feminists as essentialising, as have some other notions of second wave feminism and its claims of universal patriarchy. Poststructuralist feminism has put forward its own claims on feminist epistemology, and efforts have also been made to write constructionist feminist epistemology (Lykke, 2010).

Whatever the ontological position of a feminist researcher, some form of feminist epistemology is needed to “explain what it is for a scientific theory or practice to be sexist and androcentric” and to “defend feminist scientific practices, which incorporate a commitment to the liberation of women and the social and political equality of all persons” (Anderson, 1995:51). A feminist researcher needs to recognise historical bias not only in the social world, but also in academia and simultaneously stand behind the
quality of their research without abandoning their commitment to the feminist social project. Patriarchy then becomes integrated into the researcher’s ontology, and women’s liberation is reflected in research interests, questions, methods and ethics.

Feminist research has contributed a great deal to research methods and theory without always being named as feminist. One example is the idea of reflexive research, whereby the researcher is placed under the same scrutiny regarding bias and situated knowledge as the research participant (Harding, 1987). Constructionism as it is presented in a great deal of past and current research projects also leaves out the gender lens and analysis of gendered power relations in society, and is thus criticised by feminist researchers. I argue however, that constructionism does present an epistemology which is compatible with feminist research, as long as other parts of the research project follow feminist principles of ethics and reflexivity. Constructionism allows the research to start unpacking gender constructs in society, such as the different interpretations put forward by different women’s organisations in Morocco for what it means to be a Moroccan woman. Because of the attention the constructionist epistemology puts on the social and cultural context and human interaction it is a useful tool for unpacking the different constructs of both woman and feminism in Morocco.

3.4 Study Design

This thesis takes the form of a qualitative case study of politically active women’s NGOs in Morocco. Data for the study consists of twenty-four in-depth interviews carried out with women’s NGO leaders or advocacy campaign managers. The question may arise, how interviews can reveal everyday practices of NGOs, which are at the core of this research. Hitchings (2012) has found that asking participants to question their taken-for-granted practices has the potential to give critical insights into how practices are performed and how they come about. Triangulation of data is nevertheless a good idea.
The second source of data for this study are campaign materials from as wide a range of NGOs as could be accessed, including any available materials from earlier campaigns and sources currently available in the internet.

I spent altogether 17 months in Morocco between 2007 and 2011\(^{15}\). Interviews and document collection was conducted over one month in January 2011 and again from September until December 2011. The time spent in Morocco outside of the fieldwork periods has allowed me to study the Moroccan dialect for several months, travel extensively in the country and make lasting relationships with people from all walks of Moroccan society. Due to the exceptional Moroccan hospitality I was well placed to conduct general ethnographic observations and conversations as for the most part of the research period I was staying with Moroccan families. I have a basic understanding of the Arabic language, and was thus able to follow some of the conversations that took place on a daily basis in the Moroccan families I was staying with. All of this was possible due to a friend, who provided research assistance throughout the period. My friend also occasionally translated the casual conversations and was willing to discuss the different meanings and points of view these provided. Other ethnographic conversations took place in public transport, in cafes and restaurants and on the street. Throughout the stay in Morocco I was able to approach a great number of Moroccans in their daily lives, especially women, and deepen my knowledge of the country and its people. These ethnographic encounters were mostly noted in a diary that I kept during the entire period.

Key informant interviews were less formal than participant interviews and none were recorded. The key informant interviews\(^{16}\) provided an important source of information.

\(^{15}\) Prior to commencing my research I worked in the Finnish Embassy from 2007 to 2008. The knowledge I gained of Moroccan political structures, infrastructure and civil society at that time was important in designing my research questions and a great help in planning my fieldwork, which itself took place January and February 2011 and again September to December 2011.

\(^{16}\) See full list of key informants in the appendices. Some wished to appear anonymous, and for them a description of their activities/position is explained instead.
about the work of women’s NGOs viewed by an outsider, as well as information on the situation and the main problems women face in Moroccan society. Although the lives of women are not the topic of the research as such, understanding their circumstances allows me to estimate the value of the work women’s NGOs do in their constituencies. The key informants included several Moroccan and foreign researchers, a gynaecologist, foreign diplomats and INGO workers, local development workers and a member of the revolutionary group M20. The key informants who have contributed to my general knowledge of the political situation and current political mood have been extremely helpful in shaping the context in which the NGOs are working currently. The gynaecologist I talked to provided important insights into Moroccan women’s sexuality. Although it is rarely discussed even among family, as has become evident in the ethnographic observations of family situations, sexuality is a pertinent question in the women’s rights debate.

3.5 Selection criteria

The selection criteria for the NGOs included in the study took on considerations of the theoretical framework. Sadiqi (2003) puts women’s NGOs that have existed from the 1980s onwards in Morocco into two main categories: liberal or secular feminism that originates in the political rights discourse of 1960s and 1970s and religious conservative feminism. Both of these groups, according to Sadiqi, have their own keywords and interpretations of the shared ones. However, she notes that this division has been significantly blurred since the adoption of the Plan for the Integration of Women in Development in 1999[^17] (ibid:33). In order to map where women’s NGOs now stand in

[^17]: The government policy of integration of women into development shared the opinions of Moroccans at the time of its introduction by Hassan II and mobilised large civil society action from both the supporters and objectors of the plan. The policy is an important part of Moroccan women’s socialisation into the public sphere and will be discussed in more detail in chapter IV.
terms of their referential the study included NGOs from both ends of the spectrum, as far as they can be identified, as well as from the spaces in between. As identifying the referential of the NGO can be difficult in the present time according to Sadiqi, the selection criteria for the included NGOs remained wide enough for it to not exclude NGOs from either end of this imagined continuum. Some NGOs can be loosely identified to inhabit a certain referential: for example the term “development organisation” in the context of Morocco often refers to an organisation with close links to religious associations\(^\text{18}\). Many organisations that do not carry a direct reference to women in their name are nevertheless actively involved in women’s rights campaigning. Organisations whose main concerns are human rights, citizenship, local development or other social issues often have equality agendas running alongside their main sphere of activity.

The referential of rights-based women’s organisations is rather fluid from strictly international conventions to more localised accounts of what is meant by rights; organisations wishing to curtail criticisms of importing Occidental value systems are more likely to refer to national legislation as the referential to the rights they are defending and to include also references to Islam and to what they would regard as cultural traditions and values to their communications. There is, however, a perceived dichotomy between rights-based and faith-based organisations. Even those rights-based organisations that use Islam as one of their linguistic strategies are likely to maintain the view that the objects and strategies of faith-based organisations are too far removed from

\(^{18}\) Not all development organisations are faith-based, but many faith-based organisations use the word development in their work and support women’s economic development as opposed to women’s rights in their activities. The term development organisation is often used by rights-based organisations however to refer to faith-based organisations and in that meaning has negative connotations. See the doctoral thesis of GUESSUS, N. 2011. *Genealogies of Feminism: Leftist Feminist Subjectivity in the Wake of the Islamic Revival in Contemporary Morocco*. Doctor of Philosophy, Columbia University. for full discussion on the animosity between faith-based and rights-based women’s organisations.
their own ones to allow cooperation or discussions to take place. To better understand this dichotomy and to begin unravelling the real differences between the narratives of the two groupings, both faith-based and right-based organisations were included in the study. Going beyond this dichotomy also allows the differences on both sides of this perceived divide to be shown; differences that can in some instances be greater than the ones across the perceived dichotomy. Only small village-level organisations remain outside of this division. These organisations call themselves associations, and perceive themselves to be at a lower level of bureaucratic organisation than the larger organisations, which they call NGOs. The village associations often concentrate on immediate development objectives and they have rarely thought out any referential or framework within which to locate themselves, unless the founder of the association is a current or an ex-member of a larger organisation. Three such associations were included in this study, one of which is a member of an Islamic network of associations.

The interviews concentrated on organisations that define themselves as women’s organisations; whether these were women’s rights organisations or women’s development and social service organisations with clear advocacy goals. The selection criteria for organisations whose members were interviewed are based on literature on Moroccan feminism, snowball sampling and access to organisations. Information about and contacts details of rights-based organisations were easier to come by than those of faith-based organisations, but meetings with faith-based organisations often easier to organise, as they are less researched than the large well-known rights-based organisations. Most organisations involved in active campaigning in women’s rights are based in cities and thus it was impossible to guarantee a balance of rural and urban locations. Some organisations from outside of the large urban centres of Rabat, Casablanca, Fes and Marrakech are included, for example an organisation from Meknes.

19 See the doctoral thesis Nadia Guessus, Geneologies of feminism: leftist feminist subjectivity in the wake of the Islamic revival in contemporary Morocco, 2011, University of Columbia for a detailed discussion on leftist feminist antagonism towards faith-based organisations in Morocco.
and another one from Martil in the north of Morocco. The organisations that were included in interviews are:

- Actively involved in work with women and communication with the members and the public or political decision makers
- Have women as their main area of focus
- Based in and originate from Morocco

Generic human rights organisations were not included in the interviews, however Islamist organisations with a separate women’s wing were included to ensure representation of groups with various ideologies. In order to unravel the categories of rights-based and faith-based organisations it was also necessary to move beyond advocacy NGOs, who are mostly rights-based and somewhat political and include some service-provision organisations which are more locally situated and less fixed in terms of ideologies and referential. Only one group that hasn’t been formally registered was included. This is a group of university students who began their activism online in 2011. They represent a new type of women’s activism, and although ideologically they may fall closer to rights-based groups, they are also more open to dialogue and new forms of discourse and represent generational change. Some formal NGOs have younger members too, but the online group included shows the different form young people’s activism takes.
The following table shows the selection of NGOs for interviews according to these considerations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-identify as political</th>
<th>Others identify as political</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Islamist (political)</th>
<th>Islamic (independent)</th>
<th>Village associations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rabat</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casablanca</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller towns on Atlantic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fez</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meknes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrakech and central</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South - Souss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 The definitions between perceived as political and independent are fluid and changed according to conversations with informants.
The full list of NGOs interviewed for the study is:

- Initiatives pour la Protection Des Droits des Femmes (IPDF), Fez: rights-based large NGO in a large city. Collaborate in national campaigning through the Anaruz-network.
- Tawaza, Martil: Small rights-based NGO situated in small town in the North of Morocco. The organisation and its president are younger than most of the larger NGOs. Collaborates nationally and internationally through the network of Global Rights.
- Union de l’Action Féminine (UAF), Rabat: One of the oldest rights-based NGOs in Morocco. Links to the socialist party Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires.

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21 This is a summary of the information regarding each NGO. Full details of the NGOs’ histories, main activities and structures are included in the appendices.
- Association Marocaine des Droits des Femmes (AMDF), Casablanca: Born out of the Association Marocaine des Droits de l’Homme, which in turn has strong links to the Marxist movement Annahj Addimocrati.

- Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), Casablanca: feminist rights-based organisation based in Casablanca with offices also in Rabat and Marrakech. NGO members have accessed political positions through the Parti du Progres et du Socialisme.

- Mountada Azzahrae, Rabat: faith-based national network of associations linked to the Party Justice et Développement (PJD) the Islamic government party.

- Al Adl wal Ihsan, Justice et Spiritualité, women’s section, Rabat and women’s Association al Amal, Kenitra: faith based political movement with separate women’s section and a small neighbourhood association in a small town near the capital linked to the political movement.

- Association Ennakhil, Marrakech: rights-based large NGO in a large city in central Morocco. No fixed national collaboration.


- Assanaa Annissaya, El Jadida: independent rights-based feminist organisation, in Oyoune Nissaiya network


- Comité de soutien de scolarisation des filles rurales: a national coordinating body of local organisations working on girls’ schooling. No joint referential.

- Alliance des femmes du Maroc pour le développement et la formation, Tetouan: independent rights-based organisation, member of Anaruz.

- Association Marocaine de lutte contre la violence à l’égard des femmes (AMVEF), Casablanca: independent national organisation concentrating on services and advocacy for victims of violence. Member of Anaruz.
- Association Amal Tagoudicht/Dar al Oumouma, Tagoudicht: rural village association providing economic assistance, cooperative and maternity services.
- Association et coopérative féminines de Taznakht, village development association and women’s health, education and tapisserie cooperative in a small town in the South of Morocco
- Association de la femme pour le développement et la culture, Agadir: small independent NGO in a large town in the south of Morocco providing training.
- Association des femmes du quartier Assalam pour le développement et la communication, Agadir: independent faith-based organisation providing training and social services.
- Association femmes pour égalité et la démocratie, Rabat: small NGO connected to a Marxist trade union.

The selection criteria for documents were deliberately left loose. Materials produced by advocacy NGOs are widely available from all time periods selected for the scope of the document analysis. As most advocacy NGOs base themselves in the human rights referential however, an effort was made to ensure a variety of sources and referential also in the documentation. Social development and human rights NGOs’ campaign materials are relevant in mapping the actors in women’s NGO work and developing the framework that helps to understand the construction of meanings for the concepts and keywords available for women’s NGOs and their communications about women’s religious and social roles in the society. The selection criteria were as much dependent on the availability of documents, especially those from the earlier periods the study aims to capture. A more confined selection was made out of the collected printed and audio-visual documentation, and this was then supplemented with on-line sources to ensure a wide representation of ideologies, geographies and NGO structures. While NGOs’ own
productions were prioritised, some media coverage and donor reports were included for economic development associations, faith-based organisations and other non-advocacy NGOs who aren’t actively producing campaign documentation. While the selection of documentation does not adhere strictly to the selection of interviewed NGOs, it aims to have similar representation across ideological spread of NGOs included. The document analysis also allows widening the scope of actual NGOs included in the study. The documents include printed reports, open letters, DVDs, online press coverage, blog sites and documentation referring to seminars and round-tables organised by the NGOs.

The purpose of the document analysis was to provide a method of triangulation and connect the interview data to NGO activities. The documents provide a direct insight into how language is used by NGOs in their work and what kinds of references to both local and global norms are made. Finally the documents are used for looking into the past activities of NGOs and tracing changes in strategies and linguistic practices. The documents can point towards the strategic measures NGOs have taken in their campaigns and communications with members of public and the authorities alike. The media of the documents is not limited, and includes audio, video, images and other media where available.

Some of the documents that were available from online sources were preliminarily analysed prior to the commencement of the interviews. The interviews do not then only constitute an important part of the data for the research, but also act as a vital opportunity to verify any of the emerging insights from the documents accessed prior to field work. The interviews followed a thematic structure with some prewritten questions and open ended discussions on issues that follow from those questions. Open ended questions allowed the participants to elaborate on themes either by straightforward answers, or in a

22 Where possible, the researcher has attended these seminars and can also refer to her observations of the seminars in question.
narrative format, which may be a more natural manner of expression. A narrative form was not specifically sought through questioning, but was encouraged through good listening practices and by limiting interruptions to the interviewees’ speaking.

NGOs were contacted by email and phone in order to inform them about the research, ask for campaign materials for the use of the study and request meetings and interviews. Interviews were mostly conducted by the principal researcher in French and recorded using digital audio-recorder. An interpreter from Arabic to French was used in two interviews and one interview was conducted in English as requested by the participant. Five interviews were not recorded due to either a request by the participant or an interview situation and location that wasn’t suited to audio-recording; too many interruptions and background noise, as well as the difficulty of receiving adequate consent from everyone present in the room at the time of the interview. The researcher took notes during these five interviews and typed them up after the interview situation. During the interviews that were taped for this study, no uneasy reactions or inhibitions in sharing information were noted towards the audio-recorder, as has been reported by other researchers. This is most likely due to the fact, that most of the interviewees have had previous exposure to social research, either through their own university education, or through participation in some of the numerous studies conducted in the past years on women’s NGOs in Morocco. One of the interviewees in fact set up her own audio-recorder and also recorded the interview. The same participant noted, that participating in research forms a part of the NGO’s advocacy activities.

The interviews were mostly conducted in the premises of the NGOs at a time assigned by them. Most interview situations were interrupted at some stage by introductions of other NGO members, arrival of teas and coffees, incoming phone calls or other occurrences.

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23 See the doctoral thesis of Julie Pruzan-Jorgesen for a discussion on the matter. The issue was also discussed at a doctoral seminar in Centre Jacques Berque in November in relation to research on Moroccan women.
The tape was kept running during the interruptions and the interruptions were understood as normal parts of the conversation, ensuring that the interview situation was as comfortable and natural as it could be. There were some obvious limits to the choice of language, as some participants were uncomfortable in expressing themselves in French but may have felt compelled to take part in French nevertheless. Unfortunately budgetary limits did not allow for a hiring of a full-time translator. The presence of a translator or even an offer of one would not in itself resolve the unease caused by the linguistic landscape the NGOs find themselves in, as on the one hand multilingualism in Morocco carries with itself a certain prestige (Ennaji and SAdiqi, 2011) and the participant might have found it offensive for her multilingualism to be questioned. On the other hand NGO activism is closely linked to the capacities that are demanded by international funders, including language capacities (Merry, 2006), and thus the suggestion that the NGO cannot conduct its business in French may be interpreted as a wider criticism of the NGO’s capacities. A translator was used in two of the interviews: in the first one the translator was a member of the NGO himself and allocated by the interviewee; in the second interview the translator was my friend and travel companion, but also native to the village where the interview took place. The findings from the second interview were limited, as the translator became a third participant in the interview rather than an impartial messenger. In the first interview too some discrepancies between what the interviewee said and how it was translated were noted, but as the translator was an activist member of the NGO, his interpretation was considered valid as a report on the NGO activities and strategies. In both cases the interviewee had basic understanding of French and could often follow the conversation between me and the interpreter, and indeed in both instances the interviewee at times interrupted when they felt the need to add or change something in the interpreter’s answers. The interviews were transcribed in French. Analysis was conducted directly from the French transcripts and only quotations were translated to English.
3.6 Transcribing – translating

Transcribing research interviews is already an act of translation and involves an important choice regarding representation and power (Ross, 2010). Transcription must always be done in accordance to the requirements of the particular study and the research questions it aims to respond to. For linguistic and psycho-social studies greater details of pauses, tones and utterances may be required, whereas for a political science or a sociology study that places emphasis on the content of what is being said, transcribing verbatim is usually adequate. This study uses the verbatim transcribing for all interviews.

Narrative methodology and constructionist epistemology both recognise the importance the researcher plays in constructing the research data, and transcribing is part of the process through which the study affirms its theoretical position (Mishler, 2003). I transcribed nine out of the total 19 recorded interviews. Due to time constraints a native French speaker was hired to transcribe the rest of them. The transcriber wasn’t familiar with Moroccan culture or Arabic language and was transcribing verbatim according to her hearing. I then checked the transcripts against the original audio-files. On reflection and after reviewing the quality of the different transcripts, having a native French speaker transcribe the audio-files had definite benefits for the linguistic quality of the transcripts. As I checked them afterwards and also applied my local knowledge to the parts the French transcriber had not understood, these transcripts present the most reliable representations of the original speech. Comparing the quality and depth of the interviews I transcribed to those the native French speaker transcribed may provide an interesting study into methodologies and transcribing as part of data construction, to be taken up at a later date.

A further conundrum is posed by the necessity to translate data: both documents and interview transcripts from Standard Arabic, Moroccan Arabic and French to English.
Mona Baker (2006) has questioned translation as a neutral position of conveying a message and points to the intricate power held by the translator instead. Translation also becomes relevant in the research questions; when considering Merry’s (2009) theory, whereby ideas get translated, not just between languages, but also between cultures. In translation studies this idea is well documented: domestication refers to assimilating terms to the values of the target culture whereas foreignisation implies highlighting the foreign, strange origin of the text and thus othering it (Venuti, 1998). This study then struggles with the triple effect of the power of representation that is given when words said by one person, implying a translation of norms or ideas from global and local references to a new narrative about a concept, are written and translated by another. As Spivak has put forward, merely recognising that it is impossible to represent the speech of another person through transcription or translation, we should not give up, “not because it’s possible, but because one must try” (Spivak, 2001:14). Thus it is not enough to say for the purposes of this study that the researcher is part of the construction of the data and ignore the implications of the choices made during transcription and translation. Reflexivity and genuine efforts to represent the original speech must guide the practices of writing.

3.7 Analysis

The starting point for the analytical approach that has been chosen to use for this research is qualitative content analysis (QCA). QCA derives from quantitative content analysis, where a text is coded according to frequently emerging patterns and all the instances are counted to provide statistical data from the text under analysis. QCA goes further than its quantitative counterpart, and while statistical data can be drawn, what interests the qualitative analyst are the contexts in which each of the codes emerge and the multiple latent meanings alongside the explicit meanings in the text. Computer software can be used in aid of coding the text for QCA, but intense reading and rereading of the text is
vital for understanding and correctly capturing the latent meanings in the coding process. Codes and patterns should emerge inductively through reading the selected sampling texts, while aided by theoretical background reading. The process of analysis starts with the sampling of texts. The sampling texts are examined in full, and from these instances are selected for more detailed analysis. These units of analysis are then re-examined and coded. The analysis itself involves describing and interpreting the relationship between the codes, the explicit and latent meanings and the contexts they appear in and exploring the multiple meanings the data has for different audiences.

The advantages of the QCA as an analytical tool include its various applications. While traditionally conventional QCA requires coding to emerge inductively from the data itself, a version of QCA often referred to as directed content analysis can also be used deductively drawing codes and themes from theory or previous research. While conventional QCA is useful in describing phenomena, the directed QCA can be used for validating or extending previous research. A summative content analysis resembles more closely quantitative method as it counts instances of words or expressions in a given text, but instead of focussing only on direct expressions it seeks to analyse how words are used in a given context and includes euphemistic terms within the coding and the latent meanings hidden in the language (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Another way in which QCA shows its versatility is in its possible uses for analysing images or other media. Analysis of images can support textual analysis or be used as the sole data. Some software applications, such as NVivo, which was used in this study, can aid in coding images as well. Computer software will not decide themes or interpret the data, but can be extremely useful for storage and organising the themes and their contextual settings. In analytical terms QCA can capture the context and multiple meanings of themes emerging from the data. QCA does not intend to find one truth from the data it analyses, but rather to interpret the meanings certain word or themes have to the different intended or unintended audiences and the author of the data. One of the limitations of the method lies
in this very effort to capture multiple meanings. Although QCA recognises the subjectivity of its interpretations of the data, it can often lack in reflexivity in regards the coding process. Claiming to find multiple meanings in the units of analysis as well may undermine the fact that all these meanings are meanings to the researcher and do not necessarily reflect real meanings to any audience of the text. Hsiu-Fang Shieh and Shannon (2005:1280) also identify the researcher’s contextual knowledge as a challenge to the method. QCA can be used as an unobtrusive method whereby the researcher can analyse materials collected without any immersion into the research context. Failure to connect all the data into its original context may result in failing to identify key categories or indeed attaching importance to themes that may not be related to the research question.

Qualitative content analysis was used to begin the analysis of both the interview transcripts and the printed NGO materials. Analysing interview transcripts began with word searches and identifying the most prominent words and themes. After this all the transcripts we re-read in-depth to reveal more implicit meanings and patterns. For documents the analysis began by listing all relevant materials according to the year of production, the organisation, type of material, language(s) used, who the material was aimed at, main message, the funder and the key words. Materials were read in-depth before determining whether they meet the selection criteria and should be included in the list. Key words were identified according to the theoretical debates, the knowledge of Moroccan political and social context and most importantly according to prevalence and the place words occupied in the material. For printed materials, this included analysing the wordings, language used, images and content of the materials, and placing it in the context of Moroccan political situation of the time of publication. Close attention was paid to the intended audience of the materials. The qualitative content analysis of the NGO publications informed a presentation of the main key words and themes visible in the documents and a short history of women’s activism shown by the documents.
Comparing the dates when the documents were produced, I was able to discuss changes in strategies and themes across different NGOs in the past 20 years.

A more detailed thematic analysis of six documents from 2011 was conducted in order to be able to refer the interview data back to textual evidence from NGOs. Two documents from a leftist political rights-based NGO, new non-aligned NGO and from an Islamist women’s group were analysed for the key themes, and discussions of global and local norms. While the bulk of the documents play an important role in giving the empirical evidence historical scope, comparing the interviews with recent documents allows for greater synchrony in discussing the key themes of democracy, modernity and translation of the global to the local.

Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis; identifying key themes and words and considering their location and importance within the interview. The themes and key words were partially informed by the literature, the theoretical debates and the knowledge I had of Moroccan political debates, and partially allowed to emerge from the data through careful reading of the interview transcripts. Initial findings were recorded based on the emerging patterns, before any of them were filtered according to the research questions. Principals of grounded theory were used as a means of keeping the outcome of the data analysis open to new theories emerging from it. Considerations of the NGOs’ referential and strategic language use between religious and human rights was an important consideration for most NGOs, and key themes of tradition, exported ideas, religion and democracy are discussed in most interviews. Most interviewees also raised points about funding, difficulties dealing with authorities that haven’t institutionalised their practices and in recruiting enough volunteers to guarantee the work of the NGOs. Practical problems faced by NGOs were as similar as the more theoretical ones across ideological lines, and as prevalent in the interviews. Although many of these practical problems underline the chosen strategies, the findings presented in chapter 7 have for
most part left out these discussions, as they have little to contribute to discussing the research questions of this study.

3.8 Ethical dilemmas fieldwork challenges

For this research one important denominator of power relations is language use. Most NGO members and especially directors are fluent in French and able to, and happy to express themselves in French. French is the second official language in Morocco and often used for state affairs alongside Standard Arabic. French is the most common language used in Morocco by international funding bodies and organisations. Most of the university education in Morocco is also through French. The prestige given to French language and the important position it has in state, funder and transnational organisation communications means that NGOs feel compelled to have access to French language. Lack of that access can also bring up questions of competency. I speak fluent French, but as French is my third language it is not at native level of fluency. Many of the NGO leaders had a linguistic advantage over me, which helped equal the power relations in the interview situations: the research participants were often in the position to lead the conversation and decide its direction. Those participants, who were not confident French speakers, may also have felt more comfortable upon realising that the researcher was not a native speaker either.

Consent for using NGOs’ printed materials for the study purposes was acquired by email when NGOs were first contacted, although it is understood that this is not a strict requirement for existing materials, but rather a question of respect. Written consent for interviews poses some problems in the context of Morocco. As Ennaji and Sadiqi (2011) note, orality bears a greater importance in the everyday life in Morocco, and writing is often seen as imposing power relations to relationships and can be alienating especially for women, who inhabit the complex location orality and multilinguality create in
Moroccan socio-linguistic landscape. Requesting written consent often seemed intrusive to participants, and put a noticeable barrier between the researcher and the participant. This may also have its roots in Morocco’s political past, where police harassment of political activists was common. Andrews (2003) found the same to be true in East Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, where many were happy to participate in the research but none of the participants wished to sign their names on a consent form. Asking for the consent of participants during the interviews was found to have a more favourable effect, as it placed more trust on the participant’s spoken word and allowed the consent also to be recorded. Consent for using the interview material and the name of the organisation, which was initially received orally on the interview recording, was further verified by sending a French language summary of the findings from each interview to the NGO by email.

The main benefit this research can have for the participating NGOs is publicity\(^\text{24}\), and thus sharing the results with the NGOs is mostly useful for them to able to preserve public image. This also means that I must take any contribution made by NGOs as part of their public discourse rather than personal confessions. This is especially relevant when considering conversations around criticisms of the regime and political structures. Most of the participants have limited access to the final written text in English, making feedback and verification difficult. All of the interviews included a conversation regarding the other NGOs that were interviewed, findings so far and the dissemination plans for the study, formulated for example as such:

\[ HZ: \text{“So we’ll have a copy of it?”} \]

\(^{24}\) In interview with Union de l’Action Féminine in Rabat, January 26\(^\text{th}\) the director in reply to the researcher thanking her for taking the time to give the interview said “Oh, not at all, participating in research is part of our advocacy.”
NGOs participating in the study have also indicated that they wish to learn from the results of the study, and thus a summary of findings with recommendations will be made available to all the participating NGOs.

Challenges faced during fieldwork mirrored some of the documented problems by other researchers. Morocco is a rather large country, and ensuring geographical scope of NGOs in the selection while keeping the field research within a manageable time limit was a difficult task. The eastern part of the country is mostly missing from the interview data. It is evident from listing the active NGOs and from discussions in the field however, that there are also fewer women’s NGOs operating in that area, with most of the organisations concentrated in the Rabat-Casablanca region. Some efforts were made to include document data from NGOs in the Eastern parts of the country in order to have a window into the region and the particularities of women’s social roles there. As a qualitative study this research does not pretend to give a representative sample of all women’s NGOs in Morocco, but being aware of the scope and the regional differences strengthens the analysis nevertheless. The research was able to access a wide scope of different organisational structures and ideological stands within the NGOs that were interviewed.

Another problem faced by most researchers conducting research with authorities or organisations in Morocco is gaining access and organising interviews, as was the case for this research. Securing a meeting is time consuming and requires several phone calls and emails as well as a great deal of persuasion. Finding up-to-date contact information is difficult as websites are not always maintained actively and the telephone numbers and

25 See for example the doctoral thesis of Julie Pruzan-Jorgesen PRUZAN-JØRGENSEN, J. E. 2010. Liberalizing Autocracy at work: Intra-oppositional dynamics and regime legitimation during the Moroccan moudawana reform process. Ph.d. afhandling, Københavns Universitet. Conversations with other researchers during fieldwork often touched upon gaining access to participants, the time it took to arrange meetings and changing contact details of NGOs and their members.
email addresses are commonly members’ personal ones. The most difficult organisations and researchers on a weekly basis. Some small rural NGOs were also difficult to meet to secure meetings with were the large politically linked NGOs. This is due to their busy working schedules on one hand, but also due to the fact that some of these NGOs are widely researched; or even over-researched and receive interview requests from students due to suspicion towards the research project or the researcher. The issue was resolved by mere persuasion in contacting and re-contacting the NGOs. Towards the end of the field research period this became easier as I learned the language that was most convincing to NGOs, and was able to cite the list of other NGOs who had already taken part.

The difficulties in securing interviews with large politically linked NGOs also led to widening of the selection criteria. Originally the selection criteria only included advocacy NGOs, which in the Moroccan context refers mainly to very politically linked, Casablanca-based organisations. The difficulty in gaining access on one hand, and the homogeneity of these NGOs on the other led to the conclusion that including smaller, independent NGOs as well as faith-based organisations that are not traditionally included in the category of advocacy NGOs is important in mapping out the different referential and discursive strategies that exist in the field of women’s NGO activity in Morocco. Such a varied scope of ideologically and geographically situated women’s organisations rarely makes it to other research projects either: many of the on-going ones that I learned about during the research seminars and conferences in Morocco are situated in the Rabat-Casablanca area and have chosen either faith-based or politically linked NGOs as the research site. Only two NGOs I contacted refused interviews directly, one of them suggesting an email questionnaire instead. Both referred to time restrictions as the reason for not taking part. Some of the other NGOs contacted merely promised to get back to me but never did.

Faith-based organisations, even Justice and Spirituality, which is still considered illegal
due to their criticism of the monarchy, were surprisingly easy to contact and secure interviews with. Part of the reason was that they are far less researched than the well-known leftist political rights-based organisations in Casablanca. In a research seminar in Rabat in November 2011 I spoke to three other PhD researchers who had interviewed some of the same Casablanca-based organisations I had. Another reason for Justice and Spirituality’s openness towards Western researchers may their wish to present themselves as open and with having nothing to hide. This openness is also used as evidence to the legitimacy of their activities, as I discovered when watching a DVD of highlights of the association’s activities. On the DVD I recognised pictures of a fellow European researcher. During my visit to the association I was also filmed and photographed, and watching a researcher I recognised from the DVD I felt like I was in fact watching myself. This brought back very clearly to me the phrase by an interviewee from a rights-based organisation: participating in research is part of our advocacy. Many participants expressed a wish to learn from my research and to be allowed access to it. I had always considered this, and the publicity through publications and conferences as well as informal conversations I would be able to give back to my participants. For some I also became a tool in legitimising their activities in front of domestic and international audiences.

Only one participant commented upon my outsidersness as a negative issue, asking why I had come to Africa to study women instead of staying in Finland. As he became more aware of the fact that I was familiar with the country and its political situation, he also became less critical of my will to conduct research in Morocco. One of the participants from a faith-based group on the other hand saw my otherness as a positive trait for a researcher, as I wasn’t personally involved in the dichotomising debate around religion and modernity. She said:

BX: “I never stop reading to see how the other sees us; how the other sees us and how he – you are from the outside: how did you see the other associations; see us; to improve; to be informed and to improve.”
My background was often discussed and some of the francophone participants noted with surprise my level of French, my third language. In most of my interviews I felt welcome and respected. Participants often asked who I had spoken to and what I had found. Sometimes this led to interesting follow-up conversations that unfortunately weren’t always taped, but nevertheless informed my analysis of the conversations I was lucky to have and materials I was generously given.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has reflected the methodological choices and considerations for this thesis. The methodology of the research relies on the epistemological and ontological assumptions and must be clearly tailored to answer the research questions. As listed in the introduction, the research questions this thesis aims to discuss are:

- What referential and discursive practices are employed by women’s NGOs in Morocco for their advocacy and activities?
- How are the referential and discursive practices reflected in the work of the NGOs?
- How are NGOs relating universal norms to local campaign and public awareness activities?

As outlined in this chapter, these qualitative questions, concentrating on the how are aimed at giving a thick description of women’s NGO activism and the strategies used in it in Morocco. Instead of concentrating on impact or other quantitative measures, the study aims to show examples of how women’s activism is organised in the specific context of Morocco. As a feminist study it places the participants as experts in their own field and presents their work through empirical evidence. The first research question was directly adopted as an interview question to allow participants’ own analysis of the relationship between activism and referential to be presented. The discussion of this question is also informed by Sadiqi’s (2003, 2006) work, which places NGO referential
into the Moroccan political and social context. The second question uses the NGO documents as well as stories from NGO campaigns related to me in interviews to compare to the referential NGOs are using. The third research question engages with the empirical evidence from both the interviews and the documents and uses the theory of Merry (Mahmood, 2005) as a basis from which to approach the relationship between the global and the local. Thematic analysis is best able to provide the kind of understanding from the empirical data that allows engaging with such a large amount of data and drawing links to the literature, the political context and the research questions.

Ethical questions relating to this research include considerations of language use, access for participants to research findings and to giving feedback and written and oral consent. Reflexivity is an important tool in ethical research and ethics and considerations of power must be alive throughout the planning, data collection and writing of the research. Guidelines can help in the research process, but ultimately ethical research can only be achieved through respecting the wishes of the participants throughout. Analysis and writing cannot be forgotten in the ethical considerations; biased assumptions and misrepresentation of participants are possibly the biggest harm social research with adult participants can cause.

This study is outlined throughout by constructionist epistemology which has informed the research questions, the theories it engages with and the methodologies employed. The study relies greatly on the dearth of empirical evidence it was able to bring together and presenting and analysing this empirical data holds the main focus of the thesis. However, as constructionism places a great importance on the social context in which events take place and within which they must be understood. The following chapter traces the major political developments in Morocco that have preceded and instructed women’s political and social activism. It gives a brief historical outline and discusses in-depth those events that have had the greatest importance to shaping women’s political activism and women’s civil society in Morocco.
Chapter 4

History of Moroccan political structures and civil society

As this study follows constructionist epistemology and post-colonial feminist theory, it is important to situate the women’s activism in its political and historical context. Any lessons that this study can contribute to theory and to feminist practice rely on recognising the particular within the general. “Sisterhood” can then be “forged in concrete historical and political practice and analysis” (Mohanty, 2003:24). This chapter traces some of the most important events in Moroccan political history shaping the playing field where women’s NGOs are currently located and the modernities that are presented by NGOs in their activism. In recent years some excellent and thorough research into Moroccan women’s NGOs has taken place, for example Amy Young’s (2005) doctoral thesis on women’s NGOs advocacy strategies and choices between global and local references, and Nadia Guessus’ (2011) doctoral thesis on Leftist-Feminist NGOs in Morocco. What is common to these, and many other insightful studies into Moroccan women’s civil society activism, is the anthropological approach of the studies, which concentrates on giving a detailed look of the inside of the chosen groups. From a political science point of view this study bridges the gap between these ethnographies of women’s NGOs and the political studies, such as that of Slater (2007) that ground civil society activism to the political context without adding the specific category of women. This thesis aims to locate women’s right organisations’ political advocacy into the political context of Morocco and show the links between the political developments and the actions taken and discourses adapted. The recent political developments in North-Africa and Morocco add an important layer to the position of women and women’s NGOs in Morocco at this time.

Firstly, it is important to understand how the political system in Morocco works; who are the main actors and how initiatives can become part of legislation. To understand the
present political climate it is necessary to take some back steps and explore the constitutional development and the meaning of plurality in Moroccan political history. Some terminology drawn from the past such as “les années de plomb” (years of lead), “alternance” (alternation) will be explained. The chapter also explores the meaning and forms of civil society and civic engagement and the development of the constitutional monarchy and democracy by looking at the history of Moroccan political system. This section does not purport to give full details of historical developments but identifies some of the key moments in independent Morocco’s history, through which key concepts can be explained.

While the outline of the developments of the constitutional monarchy is discussed briefly in the first section, the current king, Mohammed VI requires a separate section. After the repressive years of his father, Mohammed VI has been viewed as a true moderniser and the defender of the weak and the poor. He has had an important influence in the work of the women’s NGOs, and in the changes to Moroccan legislation regarding the status of women. With the developments of the Arab spring in all of North Africa and the rise of the Islamist parties to power in all post-revolutionary Arab states, including Morocco, the king is hailed as an important ally and a benevolent dictator, who alone can guarantee the rights of the people against the tyranny of the majority. In the following section, the monarchy is discussed as its own institution. Some of its principles and structures transcend the personality of the king and are important for understanding the political structures of Morocco.

Leftist and secular women’s NGOs in Morocco view political Islam as their biggest challenge. The general elections of 2011, the first ones after a new constitution was passed, guaranteed for the first time that government be formed directly from the winning party. The Islamist party Parti Justice et Développement (PJD) gained a majority and formed a coalition government with the Istiqlal, leftist parties MP and PPS and some close allies of the king. Islamist organisations are also becoming more
and more popular amongst women looking for training and support around the country. Rise of political Islamist movements is a rather recent, but a prevalent phenomenon in Moroccan society and brings with it complex challenges to identity building between competing modernities, occidental influences and religion. The chapter discusses rise of political Islam firstly as a historical occurrence and then in terms of its effect on Moroccan women’s multifaceted identities.

The following section discusses briefly the development of civil society and human rights activism in Morocco and the current composition of different civil society groups. A more detailed history of women’s activism and the feminist movement in Morocco will be presented in the next chapter. The women’s rights activism was born out of party politics and human rights organisations and still interlinks with other groups in society, and thus it is important to explore how these links were formed and what form they take today.

The next part of the chapter discusses the recent developments in North Africa, referred to as the Arab spring. Although Morocco did not go through a full scale revolution like Egypt and Tunisia, these revolutions have had important bearings to Moroccan political situation and more importantly to the interpretations of democracy and what it means to be Arab or Muslim woman. During fieldwork in 2011 the importance of the political development and the gendered impact of it in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya to both women’s rights activists and members of the public was evident: news from Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were followed closely and Moroccan identity was often redefined in comparison to other Arab countries during the events of the Arab spring. The second section will briefly outline the main events of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt, but concentrate on the political turmoil and its resolutions in Morocco.

26 Full timeline of Moroccan history is available in the appendix
The concluding part of this chapter offers some questions that are brought into the analysis of women’s NGOs’ strategies and linguistic approaches in their advocacy work. Through the discussion of the key moments in history and some of the main concepts and meta-narratives of Moroccan society that are born out of them, this chapter provides an account of what it means to be Moroccan at this moment in history. This chapter cannot bring about a comprehensive account of the context of Morocco as a breeding ground for women’s activism, nor can it explain in full details what forms Moroccan women’s identities. It is, however important in providing some contextual evidence to the social construction of the ideas and strategies employed by these activists. The NGOs do not act in a vacuum, but all of their work is deeply grounded in the social and political context of Morocco, and more widely of feminist activism and of the Arab world. This chapter will ground the study into some of the main questions that dominate these contexts.

4.1 Brief history

Official sources cite Moroccan Alaouite monarchy as one of the oldest monarchies in the history. The Alaouite dynasty has been in power for nearly 400 years, but the area it initially ruled is approximately one fifth of the current area known as Morocco. Before the Arab invasions the area was inhabited by disparate and often rival Berber tribes. At the arrival of the Arabs in around 670 AD some of the Berber tribes began collaboration with the Arabs, while others remained independent from the Arab rule. Only the French protectorate in the 1930s created a unified economic and legal entity known as Morocco and encompassing the area now known as the Moroccan state, notwithstanding West-Sahara. Berber tribes resisted both French and Spanish rule of their areas, and even to this date some Berber tribes in the area around the Rif-mountains are practicing a form of self-governance and often escaping the rule of law governing the rest of the state. In Morocco’s modern genealogy it is nigh impossible to make a clear separation between Arab and Berber populations. Berber languages, of which the most widely spoken ones are Tashelith and Tamazight, are only spoken by a part of the population with Berber roots. In
cities Berber jokes are popular and traditionally the Arab population could be intolerant of Berbers. The political Berber movement has been along with the women’s rights movement one of the strong lobby-groups in the Moroccan civil society and Berber cultural rights were recognised when?2011?and the main Berber languages made official in the 2011 constitution.

Morocco escaped the Ottoman rule that took over most of Middle-East and North-Africa, and even the French rule was never officially called colonial, but went by the name of protectorate. In practice the French rule left little autonomy for Morocco. Typical of colonial rule the education and legal systems were partly modelled on the French systems, while patriarchal structures were reinforced through creation of separate civil laws based on religion and reinstating women’s position in the home, much like in the European bourgeois tradition. French settlers enjoyed privileged positions and were governed by French laws. French protectorate practiced the common colonial divide and rule principle by creating separate legal provisions for Berber and Arab populations: the Dahir Berber afforded secular legislation to the Berbers while the Arab population was governed by religious civil laws (Owen, 2000:16). Moroccan civil rights and independence activists resisted the separation, as it was seen to use the pretext of secularity in order to later convert the Berber populations to Catholicism after claiming them as non-Muslims (Rollinde, 2002). The Dahir Berber was one of the examples of how the French protectorate in Morocco aimed to divide the population and is linked to General Lyaté’s policy of reinforcing some traditional values in order to appease the local population. This simultaneous reinforcing and banning of local customs has encouraged an analysis of post-colonial schizophrenia and the division of traditions into “good” and “bad” (Salime, 2011). The Dahir Berber together with continuous rebellions by the mountain Berber tribes led to the suspension of Berber cultural rights during the first decade of independence in the name of unity. Simultaneously the monarchy however kept the most influential Berber tribes satisfied by including them into political structures and royal marriages.
In the 1950s France was forced to give most of its attention to the armed struggles in its only formal North-African colony Algeria. For fear of similar struggles taking place in the neighbouring countries, that were supporting Algeria in its independence war, France was forced to end the protectorates and grant independence to both Tunisia and Morocco in 1956. While many local rulers of colonies faced difficulties in gaining the trust of the citizens of the independent nations after balancing their role as colonial ally and a national leader, Mohammed V was aided in regaining his legitimacy after independence by France’s decision to exile the king to Mauritius a few years before the independence was granted. It was his son and the ruler of Morocco from 1961 until 1999, Hassan II who at the age of 20 travelled to France to request France to grant independence to Morocco. The constitution and the tradition of the Alaouite monarchy provided further source of legitimacy: Morocco has created its own kind of constitutional monarchy, where the constitution’s principal role is to legitimise the supremacy of the monarch’s powers within the political system. One of these traditions is that of Bei’a: allegiance sworn to the Sultan by all the tribal leaders every year was re-introduced, and is symbolised by every Moroccan kissing the hand of the king when meeting him. Hassan II also used his many constitutional reforms as a way of re-enforcing the Bei’a: during his rule the constitution went through 5 referenda, each achieving an approval rate of over 95%. Not only interpreted as approval to the constitutional reform, these figures were seen to represent the Bei’a of the whole population to their king (Cubertafond, 1997). Religion is the final source of legitimacy for the king. Being a Sharif, a direct descendent of the prophet, the religious authority in the state was also vested in him personally as the “Commander of the Faithful”

27 Article 19 of the Moroccan constitution states that the king, Amir al-Mu’minin (commander of the faithful) is the supreme representative of the nation surveying the respect of Islam and of the constitution.
The independence movement was divided to two groups. Istiqlal party was looking for independence immediately, the return of the Sultan and setting up of the country’s political system under him. Union Nationale des Forces Populaires (UNFP), which broke out from the original Istiqlal under the leadership of Mehdi Ben Barka, was hoping to set up the political system first and with it the democratic structures that a real constitutional monarchy would require. The Sultan could then return to his place as the leader of the country under the new political regime. The communists on the other hand were not as concerned with independence as they were with breaking down the class system based on racial discrimination (Rollinde, 2002). Morocco has been officially defined as a multi-party pluralistic system since independence, but in reality political parties are only allowed to operate within the system if they accept the fundamental authority of the monarch and his vetoing power over any legislative issue (Najem, 2003). Istiqlal won the battle for Moroccan political construction, but soon lost the favoured position to Mouvement Populaire (MP), which remained the king’s party, and thus the ruling party from which some of the government ministers were appointed throughout the rule of Hassan II and until the very last year of his rule. Until the constitutional change in 2011 the prime minister and the government have been appointed by the king and the election results have often had little bearing on their selection. All governments preceding the one elected in 2011 included several known technocrats close to the king, leaving only few places in it for party politicians.

After the death of the Sultan Mohammed V and the accession to power by his son Hassan II Morocco began a period of economic stabilisation. Political opposition to the new king and the government party closely affiliated to him was rising and civil liberties curbed.
Private entrepreneurship was encouraged, but competition remained limited to close allies of the Makhzen\textsuperscript{28}. The period was marked by two assassination attempts of the king in 1971 and 1972 and the increased political repression that followed. Political opposition and increased efforts for parliamentary debates on budget deficits and public assets were eventually silenced in 1975 when Spain withdrew from West-Sahara (Maghraoui, 2002). 300,000 volunteers were recruited to march unarmed into the ex-Spanish colony and recover it for Morocco in a campaign named the Green March. The question of West-Sahara has since been a taboo in both politics and public debate and still under the new constitution is listed as one of the topics outside the realm of liberty of expression, along with Islam and the king (TelQuel, 2 March 2012).

4.2 Pluralism and democracy in Morocco

Morocco’s political opening begun in the 1990s. A period named as “les annees de plomb” (years of lead), lasted, depending on the speaker, either from the independence and the repression that ended the Berber rising in the Rif mountains in 1956 or the disappearance of Mehdi Ben Barka, a prominent opposition leader from the UNFP in Paris in 1965 until the end of the cold war (Slyomovics, 2005:50). The reasons for the end of the repression are manifold and complex. Some credit must be given to increasing transnational human rights activism and particular publications exposing the regime’s human rights abuses and political oppression. Both Amnesty International and Moroccan publication called National Charter on Human Rights denounced publicly grave human rights violations such as torture and arbitrary detention of political

\textsuperscript{28} Makhzen is Arabic and literally translated means warehouse. In Moroccan dialect the word has come to mean the ruling elite loyal to the king. Initially the word is thought to have referred to the warehouses of the court where agricultural produce was collected in taxes. The members of the Makhzen are often not members of political parties, but personal friends, relatives and other trusted allies of the king, exercising undue economic and political control.
opposition in 1990, and during the same year the king founded Conseil Consultatif des Droits de l’Homme (CCDH) (Brand, 1998). Outside support for Moroccan political opposition and human rights activists was however already available from the Spanish and French left from the time of colonial struggle and independence, and thus the transnational activism alone cannot account for the regime changes (Rollinde 2002). Another theory places the end of the cold war itself as the turning point for Moroccan political plurality: the west and especially the United States, no longer preoccupied by the threat of communism turned its gaze in the east and to the Muslim world, trying to find allies within the politically most stable Muslim countries. The years of active international campaigning by human rights groups was finally noticed by the international press and could not be ignored by the Western states seeking to recruit Morocco as an ally (Mohamed Karam, quoted in Slyomovics, 2005:21).

Hassan II, who ruled Morocco at the time, was indeed known for his desire for Western allies; during the first Gulf War he showed his overt support for the government of George Bush by sending troops to support him. While the causes of political opening in Morocco have often been simplified giving an exact year is also problematic. The latest mass repression of a demonstration leading to hundreds of deaths took place in 1981 in Casablanca. This does not mean political repression has ceased in Morocco, but rather it has found new enemies and strategies. The student organisations and leftist political opposition are no longer the main target of the state machine; new disappeared and those facing garde a vue – imprisonment without trial – are the Saharan independence activists and the members of Islamist movements in Morocco, largely without discrimination between non-violent and confessed wahhabist

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29 Patricia Campbell credits the end of the repression all but solely on a book published in France in 1991 by a journalist on the reign of Hassan II and the revelations - whether all truthful or not - the book makes about the king’s human rights violations and political repression: Gilles Perrault, Notre Ami le Roi (Campbell, 1998).

30 Garde a vue was directly adopted from the French penal code that was in place during the French protectorate. It allows the police to detain a suspect up to 12 days without prosecution or court order. Strict provisions as to how the detention is to be organised exist but are still frequently broken DAKWAR, J. 2004. Morocco: human rights at a crossroads. New York: Human Rights Watch.
movements. Disappearances of democratisation activists were reported even in 2011, but never confirmed. Most place the end of les années de plomb at 1990 when Hassan II founded the Conseil Consultatif des Droits de l’Homme (CCDH), whose duty is to research and report on human rights abuses in Morocco, but who is nevertheless greatly self-regulating as it is reporting to and partly financed by the monarch (Binaifer, 2001).

Despite the ongoing human rights violations, restrictions on freedom of the press and persecution of Sahrawies and Islamists, the political system itself has seen a move towards real pluralism from the 1990s onwards. Since its independence Morocco’s constitution sets the governance system up as a pluralist constitutional Monarchy and the civil society, including student movements and trade unions, has been active since the 1950s.

All political and civil society actors have effectively been controlled by the monarch and the forces of the Makhzen, however (Saikal and Schnabel, 2003:187). The first opposition government was formed in 1998 when the leader of the leftist party Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (from now on USFP) Abderrahman Youssufi was appointed prime minister. Government of “alterance” was designed by Hassan II to bring the opposition party into the government and to appease the political opposition and international pressure for democratisation. Real influence of the “alternance” government was curbed by Hassan II retaining the most influential ministries, including the ministry of interior, to technocrats loyal to the monarch (Saikal and Schnabel, 2003). Long term ally of the king, ex general of the Forces Armees Royals (FAR) and a rumoured chief torturer of the state throughout the 1980s Driss Basri was named the minister of interior, a position in the Moroccan government more powerful than that of prime minister.

31 Alternance is the French word used by Hassan II to describe the government formed in coalition with opposition (USFP, Istiqal) and the so called king’s party (PM) and technocrats loyal to him, for the first time in 1994 and again in 1998 when a coalition was eventually formed.
Along with opening the civil society and liberalising the registration of NGOs Hassan II had been planning a pluralist government for several years, but negotiations with the opposition parties in 1994 resulted in rejection of any such plans by the opposition due to the reserving of the portfolios of defence and interior ministers to non-opposition party members (Saaf, 2001). In 1998 the opposition parties had learned from the earlier experience that ‘le roi ne “negocie” pas avec ses sujets’ (Ibid:102) and the first pluralist government of Morocco came to force only a year before the death of Hassan II. The opposition’s main objection to the form of the government was overcome after the death of Hassan II as his son and heritor Mohammed VI as his first act as king was to excuse Driss Basri from his duties as minister of interior, setting a tone of political liberation for his reign.

Opinions are divided on whether the opening of the political system in the 1990s was merely a performance aimed at silencing foreign criticism of the political life in Morocco, or whether Hassan II was genuinely interested in democratisation of Morocco. Despite his reputation as a fearsome and ruthless ruler, and denial by most analysts of the claim that Hassan II may not have been aware of the human rights violations and political oppression by his armed forces (Smith, 1999, Perrault, 1990, Campbell, 2003), Risse and Ropp (1999:252-254) estimate the motivations for the development of human rights and the end of political prisoners being the monarch’s self-image as a benign ruler and the will to develop true dialogue with domestic political opposition and international human rights organisations.

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32 Saaf’s book recounts three months in 1994-1995 when alternance was negotiated for the first time between Hassan II and the Koutla, the coalition between the opposition parties formed in 1992. Saaf lists four reasons for the failure of the first “alternance”, but the proposed appointment of Driss Basri as the minister of interior seems like the most unacceptable part of the deal (Saaf, 2001, pp.104-105).

33 “the king does not negotiate with his subjects” (my translation).
From the early forms of pluralism Morocco has experienced further democratisation of some of its institutes since the first government of “alternance”. The first transparent general elections were organised in Morocco in 2002. The election legislation was also amended prior to the election to increase transparency and a 10% quota was set for women parliamentarians. Transparency did not lead to increase in democracy however, and the king appointed a technocrat government from loyal courtiers outside the political parties. Leftist party USFP won the election with just over 15% of the votes, followed narrowly by Istiqlal. Morocco’s only legitimate Islamist party Parti Justice et Développement (PJD) received nearly 13% of the votes. PJD was feared to receive a majority in the 2007 election regardless of their self-restriction on representation: the Islamist party agreed not to stand for election in several constituencies “for reasons of security”. As these fears did not materialise, but Istiqlal topped the polls, the prime minister was for the first time in the history of Morocco appointed as a direct result of popular vote. Next general election was due to take place in 2012 but was brought forward to November 2011 in order to precipitate the application of the new constitution, which came into force in July of the same year. The changes that took place in the political system in 2011 are discussed further in conjunction with the Arab spring.

4.3 Mohammed VI – the cool king

In 2000, soon after the death of the old king Hassan II atmosphere in Morocco and abroad was expectant. Mohammed VI, the new king, was feted as a reformer, a democrat, the king of the poor and the representative of women after his first speeches and the political analysis of the day. He is most often photographed in sunglasses doing sports or opening one of several hundreds of social service centres around the country financed by the Mohammed V foundation or the INDH, both founded and supported by the king. The beginning of Mohammed VI’s reign was indeed promising. His speeches referred to
universal human rights; he released political prisoners, welcomed home all of those exiled by his father and he fired some of Hassan II loyal political allies, including the minister of interior, Driss Basri. He also set up a truth commission and a generous compensation scheme to the victims of les années de plomb and their families in 2004. From the beginning, however, it was evident that Morocco was still a country ruled by a monarch, and human rights and democratisation could only go as far as he and his allies were prepared to let it go. Although demoted from their high ranking positions in the government and the army, none of the army officials and police officers accused of torture during the “years of lead” were ever brought to trial. In 2009 Mohammed VI celebrated his first decade in power, but ten years after his enthronement both the international and the national press were less reluctant to celebrate the king as the democratiser of Morocco and the champion of human rights he was initially perceived to be.

One of Mohammed VI’s first and most visible policies was the inclusion of women in the development, which included a reform of the Moudawana. After the reform of the family law eventually in 2003 through a commission set up by the king, he also went on to suggest and put through further legislation to benefit the position of women in the society, such as the 2007 reform of the nationality law to allow Moroccan women to pass the nationality to their children and the 2011 lifting of all the reservations by Morocco for the CEDAW. The king’s wife Lalla Salma is another example of the monarch’s attitudes towards women. Lalla Salma is from a Sharifan family, but a poor one. She was 24 at the time of the nuptials, beautiful, intelligent, educated and working in IT. Contrary to her predecessors who were never introduced in public, Lalla Salma’s pictures are frequently displayed in magazines. She was recently voted as the fashion icon of Africa, mixing traditional Moroccan djellaba and kaftans with western haut couture, putting forward her own interpretation of modernity, never covering her hair. The princess runs her own charity organisations battling cancer and helping disadvantaged children, and frequently takes part in
official dinners and other diplomatic events either representing Morocco or in her role as the ambassador of good will in the WHO.

The first elections during Mohammed VI’s reign took place in 2002. The opposition party who participated in the “alternance” government of Hassan II won the elections, but the king, like his father before him, opted for nomination of the prime minister from outside the political parties. The constitution grants the prime minister the right to suggest a government, but in practice the king is required to nominate it until it can take on its work, and hence has the final say on the appointment of the entire government. The parliamentary elections of 2007 were the first transparent and free elections in the country’s history where the victorious party formed the government. This might not have been the case, however, had the worst fears of many observers materialised, and the Islamist party PJD won the election. According to Kraetzschmar and Cavatorta (2010) the risk was never great, as the fragmentation in the Moroccan electoral system means that no party is able to receive absolute majority. As Storm (2008) notes, no party has been able to receive more than 15% of the votes since 1963. Even as PJD did win the parliamentary elections in 2011, a coalition government was the only option. Whereas Hassan II had his own Hassanian party PM, who represented the wishes of the king throughout his reign without questioning his rule, Mohammed VI only got his Mohammedian party in 2008. A few months before the local elections in 2009 a friend and a personal adviser of Mohammed VI, Fouad Ali Himma set up the Parti Autenticité et Modernité, which quickly got renamed the party of the friends of the king (Vermeren, 2009). PAM won the municipal elections in 2009 but failed to compete with the Islamist PJD in the 2011 general elections.

Julie Pruzan-Jorgensen (2010) has analysed in her PhD thesis the process of the moudawana reform of 2003 through the different actors that took part. She concludes that the reform did not initiate a process to have increased plurality and rights in the Moroccan political system, but sees this rather as reinforcing the autocracy and the rule
of the monarch than as a further democratisation step. Belhaj (2006) agrees, assigning the Moudawana reform to an opening by the king to western modernity, which instead of decreasing his political power through further democratisation increased his legitimacy in front of his people. When this modernisation is coupled with adherence to religious sentiment, it can enhance the legitimacy of the monarch’s increasing political authority. Maghraoui (2001) argues further that without significant institutional reform, which still hasn’t taken place in the electoral or judicial systems, the reforms remain symbolic reproducing the image of the benevolent despot (p.14). Instead of merely increasing his own power, Maghraoui argues, the king is relying on and thus also enhancing the power of the political elites and the Makhzen. The constitutional reform of 2011 can be viewed through the same lens: the reform was called for by the king, drafted by a commission named by the king and finally put to vote by the parliament and the general public by the king. Reports on the referendum revealed that voters in many areas were urged to vote “for their king”, making the constitutional referendum once more an act of bei’a. While Mohammed VI has put forward many pieces of legislation improving the human rights situation in Morocco and has set up institutions supporting inquiries into human rights abuses, social development assistance, gender equality and political pluralism, the political power and the established institution of the monarchy remains unchanged, or even reinforced.

4.4 Monarchy as a political institution

Moroccan constitutional monarchy and the role of the monarch within it have often been compared to Gaullist France, where the president of the republic took similarly strong role in all management of the state affairs. The difference is of course, that the king in Morocco cannot be ousted through popular vote. Comparisons to the British constitutional monarchy are difficult, as in contrast to the Moroccan constitutional system which was set up at the time of independence, in Britain there is no constitutional document or one source of legitimisation where the rules or the
mechanisms of enforcement would be spelled out (Peele, 2004:33). The set-up of Moroccan constitutional monarchy could be compared to the change of regime in Spain after the death of Franco, whereby a new constitution was written to determine the powers vested on the monarch and the different state institutions. Much like the young Hassan II, who served in the Moroccan armed forces and was named their director in the 1950s (Smith 2000), Franco, who instituted Juan Carlos as his successor provided the young Spanish prince with a military training, followed by a university education in jurisprudence and philosophy (Bernecker, 1998). Both throne princes could base their legitimacy to the throne on both family tradition and to the loyalty of the armed forces to the future leader of the country. While Franco had already split the dictatorial power he himself had held to be shared after his death between Juan Carlos and the prime minister, Juan Carlos nevertheless became the most powerful leader in Europe after his enthronement.

The powers invested in Juan Carlos when he took office in 1975 were parallel to those held by the Moroccan king to present day (Cubertafond 1997): the king was responsible for maintaining public order and appointing and removing the prime minister, he had the right to veto and sanction national laws; he personified the Spanish sovereignty, and finally no reform of the Spanish constitution was possible without the approval of the monarch (Bernecker 1998:72). Both countries had undergone long periods of repression prior to setting up a constitutional monarchy with comparable powers invested in the king in person, but while Morocco continued, and still continues on the path of concentrated power, Spain under Juan Carlos went through steady transformation to pluralist democracy, where the monarch’s constitutional and legislative powers were significantly curbed and transferred to the government. Both also suffered attempted coups d’état, Morocco reacting to these with further political oppression and violation of judicial and human rights of suspects, Spain with further efforts to legitimise the democratic rule of law and the position of the monarch within it.
The constitution of Morocco still bans any criticism of the monarch or denial of his supreme legislative and moral power (Cubertafond 1997:88), and despite all the democratisation measures, equality laws and human rights protections Mohammed VI has introduced since his enthronement, he has made no move to limit the absolute power of the king (Saikal and Schnabel 2003:190) or to increase democratic pluralism (Beau and Graciet, 2006:16). Hassan II used the constitution itself to prevent him from reducing the powers of the monarch, stating that as the powers are spiritual rather than merely legal, he did not “have the right” to reduce them (Hassan II quoted in Campbell, 2003, p.40). Hassan II advised his son regarding his future role as the monarch “the most important thing is to last” (Time magazine, 26.6.2000). Moussa Hormat-Allah (2005) suggests that in the 1990s the king decided to begin democratisation, not because he was forced to do so by foreign pressure, but because Morocco was eventually ready for such a liberalisation. The preceding oppression was necessary in a country in turmoil, and once the turmoil had passed Hassan II was able to follow the liberal policies he always wished to (Hormat-Allah, 2005). This, of course, is not sufficient to explain the difference between the development of democracy in Spain and in Morocco. The difference, according to Saikal and Schnabel is Islam: “the most likely beneficiaries of economic and political collapse would be the Islamists” (Saikal and Schnabel 2003:190). Hammoudi (1997) goes further and contends that the political system is in fact modelled on Moroccan Islamic traditions. He claims that the mystical Sufi traditions central to Moroccan Islamic worship are at the centre of political organisation. In the Sufi brotherhoods the relationship between master and disciple follows a pattern of absolute submission and feminisation of the disciple before he can surpass his master and accede to power. Hammoudi says this pattern in evident in political parties and trade unions, and states that it is the only explanation why economically and socially diverse groups in Morocco all accept the authoritarian rule of the monarch. Waterbury (1970) sees the explanation to the success in Moroccan monarchy in politics of division and segmentary competition in situations of material scarcity (Vinogradov and Waterbury, 1971:32). He
explains Moroccan society to be made up of competing “security groups” who compete for power within a system that regards power a “zero-sum constant pie” (ibid. p.34). The monarchy keeps all security groups under its control by holding monopoly in coercion and force in a system reigned by suspicion, ambivalence regarding friends and enemies and reliance upon defensive alliances and multiple memberships. A further technique of weakening the political parties and strengthening the makhzen is recruiting the best educated people directly and thus ensuring that elected officials remain underskilled (Tozy, 2008). None of these explanations are likely the sole explanation for the Morccan monarchy’s ability to maintain autocratic power while appeasing the population with limited modernising reforms, but all give us clues to understanding the complexities of the political system.

One aspect of the monarchy that all commentators agree upon is the importance of religion as its legitimicing source: the monarch must have “Baraka” – religious charisma (Vinogradov and Waterbury, 1971; Hammoudi, 1997; Tozy, 2009; Cubertafond, 1997). This religious legitimacy is embedded in the constitution, and continuously reaffirmed by increasing state control of religion. While Hassan II encouraged Islamic movements in the universities in the 1960s in order to divide his opposition and thus decrease the influence of the socialists, the state has always claimed authority on religion. Ulemas, the learned men authorised to teach and interpret Islam, are appointed by the king. In the wake of Casablanca and Marrakech terrorist attacks the state reserved the right to write sermon itself, and Friday sermon is now pre-recorded and broadcast all over Morocco. In an effort to modernise, or perhaps more accurately deradicalise Moroccan Islam, the state has also began to appoint female religious teachers. Despite all these efforts to maintain ultimate authority over religion, due to greater communication it is becoming impossible to contain unified religion within state borders (Tozy, 2008). The monarchy continues to hold on to power, increasing its public legitimacy by introducing further reforms, making public appearances and publicly adhering to religious traditions. This continues to be coupled with use of coercion, co-optation and force in an effort to divide and control its critics.
4.5 The rise of political Islam in Morocco

Morocco is officially a Muslim state, and this is still embedded in the constitution. As citizenship is only given to children born to Moroccan parents and conversion is still illegal, legally Moroccan population is Muslim. Only a small Jewish minority hold Moroccan citizenship. Although Islam as faith is highly personal, culturally Islam has become an important part of Moroccan identity (Sadiqi, 2003:41) This is due to its long history as the main religion in Morocco, and was greatly reinforced when the nationalist movement adopted Islamic language and symbolism in mobilising the masses against France (Tozy, 2009:64). Discursively a great divide exists between Muslims, seen as a category encompassing all Moroccans, and Islamists, defined as radical and conservative forces mobilising Islam as their main source of political ideology. Although the rights-based participants of this study do not differentiate the movements, it is important to see nuances in the definition of different types of Islamisms.

The greatest challenge to the women’s rights movement in Morocco has always come from the Islamist movements, who claim that women’s equality, as defined by the women’s rights NGOs, is an imitation of the West and anti-Islam. The origins of Islamisation in Morocco extend to the French colonial policy of dividing the Arabs and the Berbers in the country through means of separate legislation and through reifying legislative and policy decisions differentiating the Muslim population of Morocco from the seemingly secular French settlers. During the early years of Hassan II’s rule Islamist organisations hardly existed, and were never seen as posing a threat to the throne nor the political system in Morocco. Hassan II’s biggest adversaries were the communists and the leftists, who were widely recruiting in the universities in the 1950s and 1960s. To minimise the influence of the leftist opposition, Hassan II supported the formation of Islamist movements in universities; he closed down departments of philosophy and sociology to the advantage of studies in Islam and
theology (Lamchichi, 1997). From these movements grew today’s political adversaries to the regime, such as the Adl wa-al Ihsan, Justice and Spirituality movement founded by Abdessalam Yassine, and also to more violent Wahabist movements involved in the terrorist attacks in Casablanca in 2003 and 2007 and Marrakech in 2011 (TelQuel, 26.12.2009).

Justice and Spirituality has also attacked the monarchy’s religious authority. After the failed military coup attempts Abdessalam Yassine published his direct address to the King Hassan II, questioning his authority on the basis of un-Islamic practices and pointing out one by one what he saw as the monarch’s failures. Yassine, who also claims descendancy from the prophet, made his address from one Sherif to another. In his address Yassine also points out the power the Moroccan people have in questioning this authority (Zeghal, 2005:115). Justice and Spirituality still operates as unregistered movement whose membership is kept secret. Although many of the members are known to the state, even working as civil servants, the movement’s activities are under police surveillance. The Islamist movements were first noticed in the early 1990s, although at the time the French Directory of External Security estimated them to be divided and unorganised (Beau and Graciet, 2007:35).

Islamists movements became known to the women’s rights movement early on in the campaign to change the family law. In 2000 the Islamists were able to draw a larger group of supporters out to the street to oppose the proposed changes than the women’s rights movement was to do to support them. The Islamist movement was interpreted as being representative of the Moroccan people, and no law reform was advanced. The

34 Justice and Spirituality is the organisation’s own translation of the Arabic name. The name in Arabic could also be translated to Justice and Charity.
35 Yassine attests that his association aims at a peaceful Islamisation of the society and has no part in terrorism. Moroccan state observes Justice and Spirituality closely, but known terrorists have so far been linked to smaller groups often funded or organised from abroad.
36 La Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure DGSE, operates under the defence ministry
2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca managed to tilt the support for the women’s movement, who took advantage of the anti-Islamist mood of the Muslim Morocco, and joined the family law campaign with anti-terrorist sentiment. Terrorist attacks happened in Morocco again in 2007, when police crackdown and citizen vigilance was able to detain the attacks somewhat, and again in the middle of the constitutional reform process in April 2011, when 17 people died. In 2003 the king saw the family law as an opportunity to detach state religion from the Islamist movements, and the Moudawana was reformed in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks. Fear of terrorism has also allowed the king to increase surveillance of all Islamist groups, including those sworn to non-violence, many of whom (including Justice and Spirituality) are adamant critics of the monarchy, its ever growing power and the corruption of the state. Tighter control of Islamist groups is also on the wish list of foreign governments involved in aid, trade and diplomacy in Morocco (Beau and Graciet, 2007:11).

Despite the anti-terrorist sentiment and the severe crackdown by the army and the police on Islamist movements, they continue to attract followers. The Islamist associations are not relying only on the promise of more spirituality, correct interpretation of the Qur’an and a return to moral values. Yassine for example is an adamant critic of the lack of democratisation, increasing powers of the king, police control and human rights violations – only those human rights fitting to his view of Islam, of course – and the corruption and cooptation among the state officials and politicians. The Justice and Spirituality, while advocating political Islam, are also advocating the Turkish model of

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37 Prior to the Casablanca terrorist attacks the Islamists managed to draw more people on the streets for their rallies opposing the introduction of PANIFD and the reform of the family law. After the terrorist attacks, which killed 45, the public mood turned anti-Islamists and when the feminist network marched again they drew a larger crowd than ever. Islamist organisations did not organise counter-protests at this time, and soon after Mohammed VI called together a family law reform committee to draft the new legislation.

38 Eight people died, seven of whom were suicide bombers, in three separate bombings in March and April 2007. Only one of the bombings took place in the planned site, outside the US consulate in Casablanca, other two were intercepted by public and by the police before the bombers were fully prepared.
secular state. This may be because support for Islamic state structures at this stage might in fact end up reinforcing the power of the monarch as the commander of the faithful (Belhaj, 2006) Associations like Justice and Spirituality can also offer opportunities for young educated people, for whom the state has little to offer. Islamist ideology can also offer security in the middle of political change, where it offers an identity in the middle of ac lash between authenticity and modernity (Zartman, 1995:54). Although the association must work underground, it has developed complex career structures in managing and representing different interest sections and geographical areas, teaching the Qur’an and Yassine’s philosophy, maintaining the website and producing publications, and requires educated, dynamic people to run them (Beau and Graciet, 2007:61). Great deal of the Islamist organisations’ work involves education and charity work, through which the popularity of the movements is sure to grow (Ibid. 67). The network of Islamist movements and groups operating throughout Morocco is as complex in terms of political affiliations and funding structures as the human rights and development organisation field. Both Justice and Spirituality and the PJD have their own charity organisations, and many independent, privately funded associations work alongside these. Many Islamist organisations include the term development in their name or objectives in order to legitimise their work and draw support and members from the communities. A large number of the Islamist associations either have a women’s section, or are entirely dedicated to working with women and children. Islamist associations outside of the Justice and Spirituality movement and the more violent wahabbist organisations can work legitimately, and even receive state funding.

39 http://www.aljamaa.net/ar/index/index.shtml in Arabic and http://www.aljamaa.net/fr/index/ in French (accessed on the)
40 In an interview with Beau and Graciet a representative of Justice et Spiritualité attests that the charity organisations are not aimed at recruiting members and the association’s doctrine is not taught at charity events (Beau and Graciet, 2007:67). Interview with a member organisation of Justice et Spiritualité for this research suggested that the teachings are discussed, but only with those who are already members and share the same values.
The leftist and other rights based women’s organisations in Morocco are vehemently opposed to the work Islamist organisations do with women. Some of these views date back to the leftist feminist party political history, where Islamist movements were encouraged by the regime in the 1970s and 1980s to divide the opposition to the governance system. Women’s rights activists have later come under fire by the Islamists during the family law campaign: the Islamist groups posed the strongest opposition to the moudawana reform, and managed to delay it by many years due to great public support to their opposition. Some women’s NGOs have started to change their rhetoric regarding women’s rights and equality in order to respond to the Islamist criticism of importing Western values to Morocco, adding more religious references to their claims (Sadiqi, 2003). Islamist movements in Morocco have complex relationships to the state and the reasons for opposing the moudawana reform can be traced to the Justice’s and Spirituality’s criticism of Moroccan political system as much as to more conservative Islamists’ opposition to women’s rights per se. Rather than the content of the reform, Justice and Spirituality opposed the way in which the reform was conducted; the process led by the monarch and bypassing democratic channels. Nevertheless, all rights-based NGOs refuse to engage with faith-based women’s organisations, displaying great deal of mistrust towards them. As many of the women’s rights movement activists belong to the 1970s and 1980s political movements, the historical opposition between both the political left and the Islamist, and the women’s rights movement and the Islamists is in the clear memory of these actors. This antagonism has been dividing Moroccan civil society since the independence.

4.6 Who is Civil Society?

The definition of civil society this study adapts is not showing civil society as inherently democratic or ‘good’ but “a buffer between state and citizen” (Norton, 1995) and thus includes rights-based, faith-based and economic development organisations, both legally registered and clandestine and unofficial groups. Although registration of civil
society groups only became possible for the first time in the 1990s, active civil society has existed in Morocco since the time of the French protectorate and many currently working NGOs stem from these civil society movements. Moroccans began meeting, writing and demonstrating in the name of human rights, leftist politics, Islam and independence and many of the groups were supported from France. Morocco maintained without changes many of the laws written under the French protectorate regarding political freedoms. The current penal code in Morocco for example is copied directly from French pre-WWII legislation. Protestors against the French military governance in Morocco continued their actions after the independence, this time protesting against the Moroccan ruler(s) (Rollinde 2002). Although the history of Moroccan civil society, of both leftist human rights and Islamist anti-monarchy activists, is written from prisons\footnote{Susan Slyomovics’ book and PhD dissertation demonstrate the range of oral and written narratives and testimonies of imprisonment and torture and the civil society action arranged around these narratives SLYOMOVICS, S. 2005. The performance of human rights in Morocco, Philadelphia, Pa., University of Pennsylvania Press; Bristol : University Presses Marketing [distributor].}, the continuous oppression, torture and disappearances of militants doesn’t seem to have diminished the enthusiasm for civil society action in Morocco: on the contrary, having spent time in prison is a sign of legitimacy as representative of the people against government oppression among human rights activists. Many of the women still active in women’s NGOs started their political activism during the ‘years of lead’ and are familiar with the threat of political oppression and prison. Until the 1990s, when the restrictions for registering NGOs became more lax, most of the civil society groups were clandestine. Today there are approximately 32,200 registered associations in Morocco and over 800,000 civil society activists (TelQuel, 14.2.2012).

In the 1990s many faith-based civil society groups, mostly involved in both social services and religious teaching were able to register their organisations and apply for government funding, but some faith-based groups still remain clandestine. Activists of any Saharian freedom groups are also still frequently harassed and imprisoned (Mundy,
Demonstrating is recurrent and largely tolerated, although small clashes with the police happen occasionally.

To bring about fast social development without the need to tackle the state budget and structures, Mohammed VI introduced in 2005 the Initiative National de Developpement Humaine (Berriane, 2010). The government has raised altogether 10 billion MAD to support vital social and infrastructural projects in all regions of Morocco, but all projects are entirely managed and run by the local NGOs. The NGOs can apply for funding for specific projects related to their line of work. The Moroccan government funds 60% of the projects, local authorities 20% and the rest of the funding comes from international organisations and foreign embassies. All the funds, including those from foreign embassies and INGOs are then distributed by the Moroccan government to local authorities, who have little guidelines or surveillance in the allocation of the funds (Berriane, 2010). In this way the government is seen to contribute to social development of the country without needing to reform the public sector or assume long-term responsibility over vital social services: once the project, often involving building of facilities, is finished, the NGO in charge of it resumes full responsibility of the continuing services. This unfortunately also leads to INDH funded projects failing once the funding is finished: many INDH projects are building projects for new services centres, but no continuity of funding is guaranteed or asked for in the funding application and thus a centre may close down quickly due to unpaid electricity, wages or other running costs. INDH also decreases the value of funding given directly to Moroccan civil society groups from foreign donors. This increases the influence the local and national authorities can assert on NGO activities (Berriane, 2010). The term “women

42 Arrests and harassment of West Sahara independence and human rights activists is continuously reported in Moroccan media, see for example TelQuel 13.5.2013 a report on clashes between demonstrators and the armed forces in Laayoune http://www.telquel-online.com/Actualite/Maroc/Sahara-Tension-maximale/570%20(accessed 5/7/2013).

43 For more information see the official website for the initiative http://www.indh.ma/fr/index.asp (accessed 09/04/2012).
in development” fits the INDH well, as many social services, such as maternity hospitals, training centres and agricultural cooperatives that benefit from the funding affect women directly without challenging the balance of political power or unequal gender relations.

Civil society and NGOs have also received their own share of criticism from the public in regards to corruption and bad governance. Few NGOs are internally governed by democratic structures and many are self-censoring their campaigns and communication in return for harassment-free working environment and continuous financial support. Civil society groups nevertheless play a large role in public debate and media. Civil society activism is still somewhat linked to the middle class in Morocco, as volunteering for an organisation requires a comfortable economic position. Many activists are involved in several groups, sometimes working in different areas of social development or rights. Due to multilingualism many groups are able to forge links with international NGOs and acquire foreign funding. This may have an effect on the projects they carry out. Funding from the Gulf States has become more readily available to organisations subscribing to certain religious provisions in the recent years.

4.7 The Arab Spring in Morocco

The events later named as the Arab Spring began from Tunisia in January 2011. Morocco experienced the Arab Spring as relatively peaceful and without major violent clashes. Large demonstrations began in February after the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, but as the king declared in the beginning of March the constitutional reform to begin during that same month, the majority of demonstrators ceased to attend the weekly marches. The revolutionary movement, named M20 after the 20th of February when it began, was upheld by only a small group of socialists, anarchists and Islamists. Soon after the first demonstrations the king appointed a
constitutional committee to draft a new constitution. Civil society groups were consulted despite the document being rushed through in the following three months. Women’s NGOs, who are perhaps the best organised factor of the civil society and easily able to put pressure on the political machinery, had according to themselves nearly all of their demands accepted to the new constitution44. Although the largest Islamist organisation in Morocco Justice and Spirituality boycotted the constitutional referenda, the percentage of voters taking part was according to official reports over 70. The new constitution was approved by nearly 100% of voters. Before the referendum Mohammed VI announced in a public address that he would be voting “yes”, making the “yes” vote a vote of support for the king himself rather than the actual text of the constitution, much like referenda was treated under Hassanian rule. Moroccan media reported soon after the referenda that voters, especially illiterate women, were threatened and bribed in particular in more remote regions45. The new constitution made universal human rights directly applicable, although leaving unclear who bares the responsibility for applying them, and changed the electoral law so that the prime minister is now for the first time selected directly from the party that wins a majority in the election. The king’s powers were curbed only slightly.

The general election was held in November and the new constitution tested for the first time. The percentage of the electorate voting in the election was higher than anticipated and Morocco’s only legal Islamist political party, the Islamist PJD party gained a predictable majority. Although the Arab Spring in Morocco did not follow the revolutionary model of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya but the democratisation and political opening were led by the king, the results of the elections followed the political

44 Rights-based NGOs and the only faith-based women’s group involved in the consultation all confirmed that most of what they wanted was adopted for the constitution. For more information see chapter 7.
development of those countries. After the results of the November general election were announced over 20 women’s NGOs took part in an emergency meeting where the effects of the new Islamist government’s policies on gender equality in Morocco were discussed. The NGOs told at the time, that the old line of not engaging with the Islamists would hold. As in Tunisia, in Morocco too the new government promised that no rights achieved to date would be withdrawn and the new constitution would be upheld and respected.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has given an outline of Moroccan political and social context; the environment in which women’s NGOs are acting in and the institutions and actors they interact with. Women’s NGOs in Morocco need to navigate the conceptions of what it means to be Moroccan and what a specific Moroccan modernity and state structure should look like. The political history of Morocco has greatly influenced the social platform in existence today. French colonial rule of Morocco has created a complicated linguistic structure activists must navigate. The colonial rule divided the Berber and Arab populations and by favouring some traditions and banning others, contributed to the current complexities of competing modernities in the society. The apparent antagonism between faith-based and rights-based groups, noted by Young (2005), also stems from political developments that predate the NGO activists of today. King Hassan II wished to fragment the strong leftist opposition he was faced with during the early years of the independence, and encouraged the formation of Islamist student and civil society groups. Although more recent political turmoil has increased the division between faith-based and rights-based women’s groups, it is important to note its origins in the competing political movements.

Monarchy has always played centre role in Moroccan politics, but the current king Mohammed VI has been an especially influential ally to women’s organisations.
Although his reign has not seen great institutional reforms leading to further democratisation, at least until 2011, he has lead the way for recognising women’s equal citizenship rights. The liberation that he has championed has made him extremely popular with the elites, and as critics argue, reinforced his autocratic rule (Pruzan-Jørgensen, 2010). As the champion of rights hew alone can protect his citizens, especially women, from the Islamist threat. This way, the state continues to divide faith-based and rights-based women.

Political oppression, imprisonment and struggle against authorities is in the fresh memory of many current NGO activists. Hence, the events of 2011, the Arab Spring, were important landmark to all NGO activists. From the repression of the years of lead Morocco has arrived at a political maturity that allows citizens to demand their rights on the streets and be heard. It isn’t possible to analyse the extent of the democratisation or institutional changes the constitutional reform brought about, but the fact of its taking place was an exciting development for all Moroccans. The events were constantly referred to in interviews and the developments speculated by participants and any other Moroccans I spoke to. This chapter has not given a full account of Moroccan political history, but a background to those events and institutions that are central to shaping the activities and identities of women’s NGOs. The next chapter will concentrate on the history of women’s activism in Morocco and the specific events in women’s political and civil society organising that predate the period of activism captured by this thesis.
Chapter 5
Women’s civil society in Morocco

Women’s NGOs with sole focus on women’s political and social rights have only existed in Morocco from the late 1980s onwards. They have developed directly from a long line of women’s activism in other areas of social and political participation, however. This chapter discusses the development of women’s NGOs in Morocco, the main activities they have engaged in and lists the different types of NGOs that are currently operating in Morocco. The chapter begins by outlining the early developments of women’s activism from the independence struggle to separate women’s organisations. These developments are closely linked to particular state policies and actions that have provided the setting for women’s activism. The second section of the chapter discusses the biggest and most influential campaign of the secular women’s NGOs: the family law campaign, which defined many NGOs and led to the formation of others. Much of the literature on women in Morocco concentrates on the reform of the family law and the effects this has had, and thus this is a key event in the history of women’s activism. The chapter also briefly outlines issues that women’s NGOs have campaigned for after the family law reform. A separate section discusses women’s political participation in Morocco and their current relationship with the political system. The next part of this chapter maps the relationship of the women’s NGOs to each other and shows the differing referential and ideologies that separate and unite different NGOs. This conversation interlinks with the theories of modernity and how women and modernity are conceptualised across ideologies in the Arab Middle-East. A full list of the NGOs included in the study with brief descriptions of their referential and activities can be found in the appendices.
5.1 History of women’s activism

As in many other postcolonial Muslim countries, women were first engaged in political activism in the nation’s struggle for independence. Middle class women, due to high levels of education given to elite families’ daughters, were an important asset to the independence movement. Some women’s organisations, linked to political parties, were born in this period concentrating on independence struggles and social work (Lopez Plaza 1999).

After independence, King Mohammed V initiated a women’s group Untional Nationle des Femmes Marocaines (UNFM), which was presided by women of the royal family. This group organised meetings and gave statements about women’s role in Islam and in the family and ran educational programmes to educate women in household management and some traditional forms of income generation, such as handicrafts, cooking, knitting, child care, hygiene and occasionally literacy and typing. Similar organisations had already existed under the French protectorate, and continue to exist today within the structures of some Islamist organisations. These associations rarely aim to question the assumed gender roles in society and within Islam, at least directly. High levels of illiteracy prevented women from acceding in great numbers to printed press, and few newspapers and magazines addressed women specific issues in their articles. In the 1960s and 1970s as civil liberties were curbed, and women found themselves in between the leftist political movement located in the National Union of Students, and state-feminist organisations, most importantly the UNFM (Brand 1998; Lopez Plaza 1999).

Outside of the state structure women continued to play a role in the left-wing human rights movements, the student movements and trade unions. As the struggle for civil liberties and political pluralism was violent, with members of civil movements widely persecuted, tortured and killed, the solidarity within the movement became a priority.
First the independence struggle and the subsequent fight for political freedom and democracy side-lined women’s own issues until the 1980s, as all the support was needed for what was seen as the common cause. During this time, women’s rights and equality did not feature on the agendas of any of the social movements: where Helie-Lucas (1987) has pointed out the side-lining of women in the post-civil war Algeria to make way for the national cause, Mernissi has commented on the same issue in post-independence Morocco, where independence fighters emerged from prisons after torture and repress only to write the future of Moroccan women into an oppressive patriarchal law (Mernissi, 1988:2). Women’s role in the political struggles of the country was still highly contested in the 1970s when the first female activists were imprisoned alongside with men: so much so, that the prison guards would give the female militants men’s names as they wanted to “enter the world of politics and to perform men’s jobs” (Widad Bouab, a political prisoner from 1977 to 1980, remembers prison guards explaining why the women would be called by men’s names46, quoted in Slymovic, 2005, p.133). The first women’s political organisations were non-structured protest movements by the mothers, sisters and wives of political prisoners who met at the prison gates and started protesting over the disappearance and maltreatment of their loved ones. Although the protest of mothers was tolerated more than political action of young women, the authorities still doubted the authenticity of the movement, suspecting the mothers would be unable to get organised without help from the political activists (men) (Slymovic, 2005, p.162).

The first feminist contribution to Moroccan society was by independent male and female journalists and intellectuals including Fatima Mernissi, who in 1966 began publishing a socially critical magazine Lamalif, which among other societal issues tackled women’s unequal role (Skalli 2006). In the 1980s, when more and more women began accessing higher education and became more aware of the societal inequalities, three women’s

46 Fatna El Bouih, a Marxist political prisoner from 1977 to 1982 wrote her memoir in Arabic, but instead of the literal translation “Talk of Darkness”, as was used for the English translation, the book was published in French as Une femme nommee Rachid, A woman called Rachid.
magazines appeared to discuss honestly and directly, like never before, the woman question. *Mars* was the first one; an Arabic language monthly magazine independently published and aimed at “informing, mobilizing, and organizing” Moroccan women to political action (Skalli 2006). The magazine also featured a page, “Let me speak”, where readers could send in their letters and talk of their personal experiences, many for the first time. This testimonial format has been adopted in many current publications by women’s NGOs and is an important feature of all NGO campaigns. A little after a French-language feminist magazine *Kalima* was launched, and despite the language choice indicating a limited elitist audience, the readership was reported to reach 17,000-20,000 (ibid:64).

The first women’s organisations sprung from the women’s sections of the political parties, where largely middle class women from political families were invited to take part in politics, but were unable to voice any of the woman specific concerns they felt needed to be brought forward. Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) was born from Parti du Progrès et du Socialisme (PPS) in 1985, Union de l’Action Féminine (UAF) from Parti de la Société Démocratique (PSD) in 1987, and the Ligue Démocratique des Droits des Femmes (LDDF) from Parti de l’Avant Garde Démocratique Socialiste (PADS) in 1993 (TelQuel). Non-political Solidarité Féminine was founded by a social worker Aicha Chenna in 1985 to cater specifically to unmarried mothers. Solidarité Féminine focuses on providing services for the women and their children. The publicity the organisation has received nationally and internationally for their work has also contributed to improving the situation of unwed mothers in Moroccan society more widely, as the individual stories of mothers and their children have become public. Many more women’s organisations were founded in early 1990s and most of

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47 The magazine’s editor came from the PSD and later went on to found the Union de l’Action Féminine.
them, if not directly affiliated to political parties like those mentioned, have enlisted members and activists bearing personal links to leftist politics nevertheless. While many of the organisations have now officially severed links to political parties and are claiming total autonomy in their work, outsiders often consider them as leftist sympathisers and are frequently looking to expose the compromising political liaisons of the organisations or their individual members.

A large number of smaller, politically independent women’s organisations have been set up since 2003. These groups were not involved in the dividing debates around the National Plan of Action to integrate women in development (PANIFD) or in the family law reform, but have needed to position themselves within the debates surrounding the PANIFD. Many of the newer groups are far less bound by a choice of referential than the NGOs who have been active from the 1990s or early 2000s. Neither have they experienced the same side-lining of women’s issues within larger organisations as the NGOs who split from political parties and large social movements. Whether due to their origins or the less restrictive referential they have adopted, the newer groups are more likely to include both male and female activists. The new generation of rights-based NGOs do not generally identify as “feminists”, a term that to them signifies a woman-only socialist group emanating from political elites, possible co-opted by the state and Westernised in their views. Many of these groups are happy to recruit veiled women who may be regarded as more approachable by the public, are technology savvy and use the arts, the media and the internet as their main site for activism. NGOs established in the 1990s often find it difficult to recruit young members whereas the new generation of NGOs often lack experience in dealing with state structures.

49 When asked whether they are feminists, younger, smaller organisations such as Tawaza and Women Shoufouch answered no, as they see themselves as more open than the older organisations they consider feminist in the Moroccan context. For more information see chapter 7.
5.2 Moudawana

The first issue over which the NGOs united was the reform of the family law. The Moroccan constitution of 1956 granted equal political rights to men and women. In reality however women’s ability to enjoy their political rights was severely limited by the family law, which defined women as minors. The first Moudawana, or the personal status law as it was named at the time, was adopted after independence. It was based on Shari’ah but codified in a separate legal document. The law defined women as minors, requiring the permission of a male tutor for entering into a marriage contract, acquiring a passport and even working outside the home. In practice this meant that the consent of husband, father or another male relative was required for most activities or bureaucratic transactions taking place outside the house. Changing the family law was symbolically much more important to the women’s movements than merely the right to divorce or to have the custody of one’s children, as realising the equal citizenship defined in the constitution was directly dependant on removing the status of minor in all aspects of life.

Women’s NGOs began asking for a change in the family law, the Moudawana, in late 1980s. The campaign included collecting a million signatures to an address to the government asking for a change, collected in 1992. In a speech king Hassan II made in 1993 as a response to the petition he asked the women to leave the Moudawana to him as the commander of the faithful in an effort to retain the Moudawana outside of daily political debates (Cavatorta and Dalmasso 2009: 496). He formed a committee of ulemas to propose small changes that were accepted into the law by the parliament. While the real issues the women’s group were campaigning were not affected in the changes introduced, the fact that the law was voted for by the parliament and thus lost some of its sacredness encouraged the NGOs to press on and continue their campaigns (Sadiqi, 2006). The efforts of the women’s NGOs together with increased attention to human rights and democratisation from Morocco’s close allies also made the king see the
necessity to include women into the political agenda. Women’s participation was not initially linked to equality of the sexes on state level, but rather to the entire democratisation process and the social and economic development of the country.

In late 1990s Hassan II wanted to launch the *Plan for the integration of women in development* (PANIFD), but due to strong resistance from the Islamists the plan was initially abandoned. His son adopted the women’s rights agenda, and aided by the unpopularity of the Islamists after the Casablanca terrorist attacks was able to push for reforms to provide more equal legislation. The PANIFD was introduced in 1999 to include women in the public life dividing the opinions of Moroccan civil society and gave rise to large scale public campaigns by both the opponents and the supporters of the plan. This plan and the feminist movement’s participation in it was highly criticised by the Islamist movements as, according to them, it originated directly from the neoliberal economic restructuring programmes designed and funded by different UN agencies and the World Bank (Salime, 2011). Funds were made available to women’s organisations through the Plan who subscribed to the liberal language promoted by the international funding organisations (Salime, 2011:26). Women’s organisations availing of the funding and language and thus being accused of importing Western ideas began mixing their referential in order to counteract the criticism (Sadiqi, 2003). As a result the vocabularies of the feminist groupings have become more mixed and the dichotomies between the two categories less evident.

The Moudawana was finally reformed in 2003 by king Mohammed VI after several more years of campaigning by women’s NGOs. This time campaigns included public demonstrations, the largest of which, in 2003 attracted nearly a million people to the streets of Casablanca. As his father, Mohammed VI retained the responsibility of the reform to himself: the king appointed a royal commission of religious authorities, judges and political figure-heads to review the legislation and give their recommendations for a
reform. Civil society was consulted about the reform and the commission also included female judges. After the commission made its recommendations, the new law was debated by civil society and the parliament before put to vote by the parliament. If the first reform of the law in 1992 de-sacralised it and made the changes possible, the vote and debate that ensued the reform in 2003 made sure women’s position was no longer taboo and allowed women’s NGOs to spread their campaigning activities to other issues, where Islam and tradition previously ruled the conversation and impeded opposing views from surfacing, such as the nationality law and violence against women. The religious authority of the king ultimately meant, that the new family law was accepted by all women’s groups, and can now be used as a legitimate reference point by both the Islamists and the rights-based groups.

After the reform, the law was renamed family law, or Moudawanan al-ousra, still shortened to Moudawana. The new family law states men and women to be equal in marriage, moves divorce from personal declaration by the man to be obtained by either one of the spouses in the courts and improves women’s access to custody of their children after the dissolution of the marriage. Women are also allowed to sign their own marriage certificates without the presence of a tutor. Both polygamy and the marriage of minors were restricted and are only allowed now in special circumstances with a special permission by a court. Women’s NGOs role after the reform became the surveillance and reporting on the implementation of the law and highlighting the misinterpretation of the law by many conservative judges around the country.

Despite enhancing women’s citizenship rights vastly, critics argue that the family law reform was part of a liberalising agenda which continues to undermine the democratic

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structures while reinforcing the autocratic rule of the monarch (Pruzan-Jorgesen, 2010a; Cavatorta and Dalmasso 2009). They state that by introducing liberalising reforms to appease the political elites, such as the strong women’s lobby, the king has increased his popularity and his direct control of legislative and executive bodies. The augmentation of the powers of the king together with the liberalisation of equality legislation puts women’s organisations in a difficult situation, where they rely on the monarch’s good will for the advancement of their goals, and must make a decision between the democratising forces in the country, which include some of the Islamist organisations and movements, and the monarch, who has shown himself sympathetic to their goals.

5.3 Women’s NGOs activities after Moudawana

The debate and relentless campaigning for the reform of the family law took up all the time and efforts of women’s NGOs until the law was finally changed in 2003. As the law was reformed, many of the NGOs needed to redefine their goals and needed a period of reflection in order to strategise their activities going further. Most rights-based NGOs quickly moved on to discuss the implementation of the new Moudawana, training of the public and the legal professionals on the law and studies on its impacts. Other issues right-based NGOs have adopted since the Moudawana reform include women’s political participation, nationality law51, the gaps in the Moudawana, such as the discretion allowed to the judge in case of marriages of minors and polygamy, women’s land rights and the rights of specific groups, such as unwed mothers and minors working as domestic workers.

51 Prior to the reform of the law in 2007 women could not pass on their nationality to their children if the father was either non-Moroccan or unknown.
Violence against women has become the single most talked about issue in women’s NGOs and has also entered debate in the governmental level. Service centres for women victims\(^5^2\) of violence have been opened in most towns, the government announced its plan of action in 2005\(^5^3\) to combat the issue, and statistics and reports are published annually by both the civil society and the government to highlight the gravity of the problem. Many human rights organisations have also adopted the issue to their agendas. Campaigns are on-going for specific law on gender violence and for changes in the penal code. In 2011 most civil society groups turned their attention to the constitutional reform, and in 2012 rights-based NGOs are coming to terms with the Islamist government and their strategy in regards to it. The constitution and safeguarding achieved changes against the Islamist government have momentarily taken the attention away from other campaigns, such as the reform of the penal code, but the campaign will continue when the situation normalises over the coming months. Centres for victims of violence are currently only day-centres providing listening, counselling, legal advice and accompaniment to courts, police and health authorities according to the woman’s individual needs. Over-night stay outside of the family home is still not allowed for married women without the permission of the husband, and NGOs providing accommodation to married women face prosecution. Accommodation services do exist for unmarried mothers. Some regional authorities have adopted in the last years a system of domestic violence cells, which incorporate the police, the courts and the hospitals and are aimed at providing discreet and safe services to the women who come to them. There are still many problems with the cells related to the lack of institutionalisation of the procedures and regional women’s NGOs are involved in the administration and reporting of these cells to improve the services.

\(^5^2\) As opposed to many European NGOs, Moroccan NGOs have deliberately adopted the word “victim” in their discourse around gender violence to highlight the need for further legislation and services from the state.

Most faith-based organisations refrain from talking about the Moudawana and discuss the values of Islam in regards to family instead, putting emphasis on family unity rather than divorce, which was made more accessible and has thus become more prevalent in Morocco since the reform. While some rights-based organisations have ceased their support and social service activities in order to concentrate on advocacy, in most towns faith-based and rights-based organisations compete for constituency by providing literacy and crafts training that may help the women in economic empowerment. Many organisations who are involved in professional training of women also found or link up with cooperatives that can help women commercialise their handicrafts. There are great differences between the faith-based organisations’ attitudes towards women’s political participation and domestic violence: some will advocate full equality in politics; those addressing the issue of domestic violence often emphasis family unity as long as no member of the family is in physical danger, others do not discuss the issue. All faith-based organisations say they to have no criteria for receiving aid or services, but most women who attend these organisations are veiled.

Campaigns by many women’s NGOs have taken and are still taking place to improve the quota system and to include more women in the political decision-making. ADFM’s Marrakech section is solely concentrating on the issue of women’s political participation, and Ennakhil in Marrakech has organised seminars and workshops to build the capacity of female candidates and elected representatives to bring forth women-specific issues within their parties and the bodies they are elected to. When in the 1990s women’s political participation was still associated with lower levels of corruption and more democratic political processes (Belarbi 2001), this trend seems to be now passing, and women are judged as hard as men in regards to their elitist background, financial gains through public life and perceived lack of political initiatives either in terms of women or the population as whole.
5.4 Women and political participation

The first Moroccan constitution in 1961, drafted in the name of modern independent state, guaranteed equal political rights to men and women. These policies of state feminism existed in Morocco in the 1950s. This form of state feminism championed by the independence party Istiqlal’s leader Allal El-Fassi was abandoned when independence was achieved in 1956 and women’s status was restricted by the adoption of Shari ‘a-based personal status code (Alami M’Chichi 2010; Mouaqit 2009).

Although the history of women’s activism in Morocco shows close links to independence, human rights and democratisation battles, in reality all these movements have largely ignored women’s plight until now. Women specific legislation, such as the domestic violence cells introduced in some municipalities are run on an ad hoc basis and their effectiveness depends largely on the personal interests of the civil servant in charge54. The institution of monarchy has similarly taken on a personified and ad-hoc role of the protector of women. Hassan II was the first to address Moroccan women and promise his protection to her during the first Moudawana discussion in 199355, and his son, from the beginning of his reign has shown his commitment to equality and women’s rights through speeches and legislative initiatives. Most critics agree, that these initiatives have served to enforce the autocratic power structures in Morocco, providing a point of legitimisation for the monarchy, while appearing to promote pluralism and modernity

54 Most of the participants of this study commented on the lack of institutionalisation of state services as a big problem for women. Comments such as this were common: AN: “Even though the treatment of women victims of violence has advanced and in theory the government takes responsibility for women on the level of accompanying them, these services are not institutionalised and depend always of the people who work in the state services.”

(Belhaj 2006; Cavatorta and Dalmasso 2009, Pruzan-Jorgesen, 2010a). When secular feminist activists then refer to democratisation in their campaign, it must be understood in this light; democratisation of the electoral system and curbing of the powers of the monarch are unlikely to serve the purposes of the rights-based women’s NGOs in the current political climate.

The current government of Morocco, formed after the election of November 2011 with coalition of PJD, Istiqlal, PPS and PM. Out of the 31 government seats one is held by a woman: the minister for solidarity, women, family and social development, which is held by the Islamic party’s Bassima Hakkaoui, a former activist from the party’s affiliated student and women’s groups. In the previous 2007 El Fassi government six seats from 37 were held by women. This low percentage was despite a voluntary parliamentary quota that was introduced in 2002. Instead of encouraging women to compete for seats in their own constituencies however, the quota places women on a separate national list which is not included in the ballots. Every party running in the elections is allocated one seat from the national list, and as long as one or more party members are elected through local lists the woman allocated in the national list is also brought forward. Women MPs’ role could thus be interpreted to be national representatives of all Moroccan women, instead of representatives of individual constituencies (Darhour and Dahlerup, 2013). As the women elected through the national list are not in contact with voters, they are also more accountable to their parties than to the electorate, making the possibilities for introducing change more difficult for these candidates (ibid). As Naciri (1998) points out, women’s political participation, even on a symbolic level, is needed to challenge the established norms and values regarding the political and social order (p.22). The latest election results show however, that this challenge and the visibility of women in politics, when left to tokenism without real impetus for democratisation either within the parties or in the political system at large, women’s access to decision-making remains limited and at the discretion of the male party leaders (Liddell 2009).
From the 1960s until the 1990s the conservative party Istiqlal was the one putting forward the most women in its committees and elections, although these women were rarely able to bring forward active transformative ideas regarding women’s role (Brand 1998). The socialist parties also failed to act on any equality agendas they put forward. In the late 1990s when the Islamist party PJD first gained political legitimacy they began competing for popular vote in the large cities. One of their main strategy was to put forward more female candidates than any of the other parties in the local lists (Alami M’Chichi 2010). This policy has recently been shown up as a mere political strategy, as the party only put forward one female minister after their 2011 election victory.

Outside of the electoral system the king has been actively recruiting women for royal commissions and other public bodies, where he has the sole authority to appoint members. As is the case for equality and women-specific legislation, where the democratic channels keep failing, the monarch regularly steps in to bypass the system in order to put women forward. Out of the six ex-government members, three were technocrats brought forward from outside the political parties. Women are often also recruited from NGOs to royal committees, which can cause criticism towards the NGOs and the activists and their motivations: an activist who gets recruited to high-paying and esteemed positions in various committees is criticised for giving up the fight for personal gains or having joined NGOs in order to pursue political careers. These appointments can blur the links between political parties, state bodies and NGOs and is often seen by the public to compromise the independence of the NGO whose member is recruited to government or royal posts, disallowing criticism and co-opting the entire organisation. It is important to remember, however, that “a state is not a monolith of intentions – such as, for example, to ‘co-opt’ – but rather an abstraction that refers to ensembles of institutions and practices with powerful cultural consequences” (Schild, 1998:97). Co-optation may be a consequence of intricate working relationships with different state institutions, but is
not an inevitable outcome of cooperation with the state in achieving crucial strategic changes.

Faith-based organisations, as many of them stem from Islamic political opposition to the ruling parties or the institution of monarchy, have a different conception of democracy and relationship towards it. The country’s biggest faith-based organisation Al Adl wa al Ihsan, which also has an active women’s circle, is still illegal as it challenges the rule of the monarchy. The movement’s critical view extends to religious texts too: Nadia Yassine, the official spokesperson for the group, while refusing the title Islamic feminist, is enabled by the critical discourse of the Al Ald wa al Ihssan towards any religious or political authority involved in corruption and abuse of power, to hold her own critical views towards the *fiqh*\(^6\) as patriarchal (Rhouni, 2011:71). Many of the independent faith-based women’s groups tend to remain outside of the political game and concentrate on their service provision activities, often without state funding. Faith-based women’s organisations linked to the official Islamic political party al Adl wa al Tanmya (PJD) follow the party line in their rhetoric about democracy and monarchy: to have been accepted as a formal party al Ald wa al Tanmya must have sworn allegiance to the king and continue to do so through the annual demonstration of Be’ya. As restrictions on the party’s nominations for different constituencies have gradually been lifted since their initial joining of the official political structures, the party have gained popularity and seats in all areas of Morocco. The 2011 elections and the aftermath of the demonstrations leading to the constitutional reform also worked in the party’s advantage: as the party gained ever more popularity in most of Morocco’s underprivileged areas and with many disillusionsed youth calling for better employment for the university educated, or the “diplomés chomeurs”, other parties lost the votes of many in the middle class due to the

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\(^6\) Islamic jurisprudence derived from knowledge of legal rulings from the religious texts
perceived lack of internal reform and listening to the voters. The Islamic party, similarly to its women’s groups, had its difficulties in finding allies for the government. The Islamic government has met with harsh criticism from secular women’s and human rights groups for nominating only one female minister. They have also been criticised for refusing to reform the penal code article, which stipulates that a rapist can escape imprisonment by marrying his victim. The criticism came about after a 17-year old girl committed suicide in March 2012, having been raped multiple times by the same man, forced to marry him and continuously physically abused by her then husband after the marriage. Faith-based women’s groups may see their activities linked to those of the government, whereas secular NGOs are currently capitalising on the anti-government feelings in order to promote their women’s rights agenda.

5.5 Competing modernities in Moroccan women’s NGOs’ referential

Faith-based groups are ever more important for women and in women’s social and political activism. These can be roughly divided to three different categories: the ones working within the auspices of Justice and Spirituality, the largest Islamic organisation in Morocco which is still banned as it refuses to recognise the monarch’s authority; the ones linking with the official Islamic party Justice and Development; and independently run and funded small social service organisations. The political agenda, referential and definition of the role of women in a society vary greatly between these categories (Pruzan-Jorgensen, 2010c). As Guessus has discussed in her doctoral thesis, there is a severe mistrust between the rights-based and the faith-based women’s organisations, and

57 TelQuel editor Karim Boukhari wrote one week before the election that he will not vote, as the two leftist parties who weren’t boycotting the election had changed neither their candidates nor their politics since the golden age of socialist parties in Morocco in 1970s (TelQue, 12-18.11.2011, n 496).
58 Bouchra from a faith-based group linked to al Adl wa al Tanmya recounted her experience of organising a round table on women’s political participation and parity, and no secular women’s groups were willing to participate.
in many areas the different groups are in direct competition for constituency and some also for state funds, such as the INDH funding. Mahmood (2005:1) attributes some of this mistrust to the difficult relationship Islamic societies have with the West and to the challenges Islamic feminism poses to the secular and liberal political movements from which secular feminism stems. Moghadam (2002:22) reveals the same contention to be true in Iran between the supporters and opponents of Islamic feminism, those opposing to it stating that confined in the limits of the Islamic Republic women can never gain equal status.

Despite these criticisms, women’s activism in faith-based groups cannot be reduced to notions of false consciousness or women’s tokenism within Islamic movements. Faith-based groups are the fastest growing organisations in state universities and in many urban areas of Morocco, where traditional party politics has failed to make a difference. From conversations with rights-based NGO members in Morocco, it is evident that they share what Mahmood (2005:5) calls a “dilemma for feminist analysis”: why would any woman want to support an organisation whose ultimate goal is women’s subordination to men and a society divided along gendered lines? Mahmood (2005:14) discusses Islamic feminism from a new view point of feminism, severing the assumed links between agency and subversion; abandoning the idea that anyone with agency will wish to struggle for liberal progressive politics. Agency can only be understood and defined within the social context where it operates, and a concept of agency cannot be directly imposed from post-enlightenment Europe to post-colonial Arab Middle East. Moghadam (2002) also encourages considering the social and historical location of feminist praxis as part of wider, ever evolving feminist philosophy that should not be divided into binaries but rather seen as fragmented movement that reflects social realities in different regions in diverse ways. Thus there cannot be one good or correct way to do feminism: “Women, and not religion, should be at the center [sic.] of that theory and practice.” (Moghadam, 2002:45). The main criticism Moghadam has for Islamic referential in feminist activism
is the possibility of it reinforcing the legitimacy of an Islamic system and reproducing it. Mixing the referential with narratives of human rights may reduce this risk, but Islamic feminists are nevertheless limited in their discourse within the confines of the religious laws.

*Ijtihad*, the interpretation of the religious texts from a new point of view, has become an integral part of women’s activism in Morocco and other Arab Muslim countries, but also a point of division between competing referential and ideas about modernity. Sadiqi (2003) reflects the idea of *ijtihad* to have spread to rights-based feminist organisations since the adoption of the *Integration of women into development* (PANIFD) – policy as a technique of translation, offering “smooth transition between the universal and the local” (p.36). This is because the policy initiative codified into national legislation some aspects of women’s lives that were previously only talked about in the laws directly influenced by *Shari’ah* and available only for the *Ulema* to interpret. Now these laws had been reinterpreted already once and further reinterpretation by any actor became possible. For many rights-based organisations however religious references pose a danger of being locked into traditional interpretations that do not allow for full equality of the sexes (Othman, 1999). Faith-based groups base much of their work on the reading of the scriptures from a woman’s point of view, stating that the current interpretations have been tarnished by patriarchal cultural constructs (Mernissi, 1991). *Ijtihad* cannot be directly linked to religious organisations wishing to return to the golden past of Islamic state however, as women’s *ijtihad* is in itself a challenge to male control of religious interpretation (Badran, 2005). More particularly Morocco has allowed women to become teachers of the Qur’an, *mourchidat*, since 2006 as an effort to bring about a more tolerant view of Islam. The country’s Islamic council, nominated by the king, has also included a woman within its 16 members since 2003. Both religious roles for women have come about as a political response to the terrorist attacks in Casablanca in 2003, as women’s greater participation in religious life was thought to curb extremism (Steinberger, 2010).
References to religion and especially to *ijtihad* can thus also refer to this new empowered position Moroccan women have been given in regards to religion and as a challenge to existing power structures.

In discussing Moroccan feminisms Sadiqi (2003) traces their roots to the encounter of the Moroccan civilisation with the West through the French colonisation, an encounter to which she affords the term ‘modernism’. The first existing feminism in Morocco from the 1960s onwards Sadiqi deems as liberal, or secular feminism, and from the 1980s onwards she denotes the co-existence of religious, or conservative feminism (ibid:21). Both have their roots in the wider political organisations of the country, the liberal feminism stemming from the leftist political rights movement and the religious feminism from conservative political parties and associations which were free to flourish in the 1980s when the king Hassan II sought to fragment his political opposition. Sadiqi indicates the differing interpretations of modernity as an important signifier between the liberal and religious feminists: liberal feminists refer to modernity as a political opening of the country and the encounter with universal norms and laws, whereas for the religious feminists modernity refers to a return to an authenticity to counteract western cultural imperialism (ibid.).

This return to authentic or pure religion is at the centre of Rhouni’s (2011) criticism towards the ways in which theorists like Sadiqi define Islamic feminism: patriarchal cultural norms have distorted the view of gender in Islam, and the job of Islamic feminism is to retrieve the pure founding norms (Rhouni, 2011:77). To Rhouni a more useful name for women and men redefining the gender roles in relation to Islam through *ijtihad* is “islamic gender critique”. This allows seeing *ijtihad* as a contextual and deconstructing analysis and critique of the religious texts rather than as a search for an existing truth that risks being patriarchal in its essence. Nadia Yassine, the spokesperson of Al Adl wa al Ihsan, the Moroccan illegal Islamist organisation and the founder of its
women’s circle puts this in similar terms: “No, I am not a feminist. I am an Islamist, and Islam is feminist” (interview with Nadia Yassine quoted in Salime, 2011:19). With her remark Yassine refers to the power of *ijtihad* in redefining the gender roles within Islam and contesting the prevailing macho interpretations. Despite these discursive contestations to the term Islamic feminist, Rhouni allows the use of the term, not as an identity category activists must be locked into, but to identify their speaking positions. Islamic feminism, then, is connected to the quest by women to reinterpret religious texts (*ijtihad*) and move away from the male interpretation which constitutes the patriarchal rule in society independent of Islam itself (Latte Abdallah 2010, Badran 2005).

Definition of secular feminism in Muslim countries is more multiple, whereby Badran (2005:6) includes referential to multiple sources including nationalist, “Islamic modernist”59, humanitarian/human rights and democratic and Sadiqi (2003) shows the roots of Moroccan secular feminism in middle and upper class ideologies and political parties’ modernisation and secularisation efforts. Other scholars try to deconstruct the categories of secular feminism and Islamic feminism by adding a third category somewhere in the middle: Muslim feminism. Muslim feminism placed away from Islamic feminism who are identified as the group of women who “belong to the rank and file of the organised conservative Islamists movement” (Saadallah 2004:217). Muslim feminists are thus the women who seek to find women’s liberation within the frames of Islam, as opposed to the Islamic feminists who have joined the patriarchal understandings of Islam which put women in an inferior position in a society. This understanding makes Islamic feminism a paradox. The faith-based NGOs in Morocco often perpetuate this idea of Islamic feminism, but as discussed in chapter 2, this study has found all its participants to fit the criteria of working to increase women’s autonomy and choice. The faith-based participants of this study are all questioning the patriarchal understandings of

59 The quotation marks here are used to draw attention to the already mentioned multiple interpretations of the word modernity in the context of Islam and Morocco more specifically.
womanhood within Islam, but many identify as Islamists. Pruzan-Jorgensen (2010c) has identified some of the limits that are imposed on Islamist women activists by the Islamist organisations they work within, but despite these she sees great scope for challenging patriarchy within Islam on one hand and providing examples of women in the public life on the other hand. As the faith-based women’s organisations are able to reach a part of the population not influenced by rights-based or leftist activism, the faith-based groups can be seen as a “home-grown” voice, representing “an important complement to the efforts of both the state and the secular/liberal women’s organizations in Morocco” (Pruzan-Jorgensen, 2010c:8). Muslim feminists are sometimes identified as the feminists who don’t believe in God and who are using the Qur’an merely to “make all sorts wrong claims about it”\textsuperscript{60}. A further problem with the name “Muslim feminism” is that it assumes Muslim to be a member of only this category, and the other two categories to be outside of “Muslim”. Islamist feminism should not be viewed as a paradox based on reductive views on Islamism, but rather understood as doing feminism from within political Islam.

Rhouni (2011) defines secular feminist in the Islamic context as those, who are open to Islam as a means of women’s empowerment, and secularist feminists as ones who see Islam itself as an obstacle for achieving women’s rights. The description of secularity many of the interviewees have given is more closely linked to the French idea of secularity, whereby religion may be present or not, but it should not be seen in the public space and should not be at the foundation of a state and its constitution, its legislation and its public offices. Women’s empowerment can then perhaps stem from whatever force each woman finds empowering, but their legal status should be entirely separated from all religious ideologies. Many of the rights-based women’s NGO representatives fear, that by allowing religious argumentation into the advocacy and activities of the NGOs, there

\textsuperscript{60} Asma Barlas, The Qur’an, Sexual equality, and feminism, public talk at University of Toronto, January 12, 2004, url: http://www.asmabarlas.com/TALKS/20040112_UToronto.pdf
will be no recourse against limits to women’s inheritance for example. Scholars such as An-na’im argue, however that to fight the ever growing Islamist resurgence in many Arab countries the arguments must be made from the inside and in a language that responds directly to the Islamist discourse (Rhouni, 2011:71). Islamic feminism also has more complex origins than a mere response to Islamic revival. It is also a demarcation of difference towards the hegemonic feminist ideology, often duped Western, which has traditionally seen “culture” and “religion” as patriarchal structures opposing gender equality. This position has been reinforced after the stigmatisation of Islam after 9/11 (Rhouni, 2011:72). Finally, Islamic feminism is an expression of the centrality of one’s spirituality to the political person, and the importance of that spirituality in everyday interactions.

While understanding faith-based women’s organisations from this theoretical perspective, we must also allow for local understanding of the rights-based organisations, which are as much grounded in the cultural and political context as the faith-based organisations. The tendency, by rights-based NGO activists themselves too, is to create a binary vision of faith-based and rights-based organisations, seeing the former as “local”, “traditional” and also “anti-women” and “backward”, while the latter are often regarded as “imported”, “Western” and “progressive”. The challenge is to ground both types of organisation in the local context and suspend value judgments of their goals. The advocacy, the work and the aims of both types of organisations are as much part of this grounding in the Moroccan context and results of the background of the actors as the referential they use. Rather than rating the NGOs by their goals, it is important to ask what the relationship between these goals, the way they are articulated and the audience to which they are presented is; or how are these organisations socially constructed and continuing to redefine themselves in their social context. Agency is present in all the groups’ activism, but differently defined within the confines of different ideologies.
Suggestions of merging the forces of secular and Islamic feminists are at times made, often by Islamic feminists. Iranian feminists Najmabadi and Sherkat suggested in the 1990s that secular and Islamic feminists should forge strategic alliances over shared goals, and that through ijtihad both secular and Islamic feminists could begin to separate cultural norms from religion, revealing patriarchal social structures that impede gender equality in the name of religion (Moghadam, 2002). In Morocco similar pleas have been made by at least faith-based groups affiliated to the Islamic party PJD, only to be refuted as double language by rights-based groups. In Iran, too, Islamic feminists face the accusation of double standards from secular feminists: why speak of women’s participation and leave out veiling, sexuality and Islamic law (Moghadam, 2002)? The criticism is the same in Morocco towards faith-based groups. “They talk about political participation, but what about inheritance? Did she tell you what she thinks about that?” asked an interviewee from a rights-based group when told that this research listened to faith-based groups too. Islamic groups are judged on being selective about which women’s rights and what kind of equality they defend, yet none of the rights-based women’s groups are entering the debate on homosexuality or freedom of religious consciousness, i.e. choosing one’s religious affiliation, or indeed choosing not to have one, for fear of losing their status with local and national media and authorities. Indeed, the issue of defining someone as Islamic feminist is underlined by the problem that both the secularists and the Islamics tend to reify each other’s standpoint and “carry implied or unstated assumptions about either feminism or ‘Islam’” (Rhouni, 2011:75). In fact the perceived antagonism and opposing views, according to Salime (2011), have helped both movements redefine their activities and gain new areas of influence, the Islamist women drawing large numbers of supporters to the streets, and thus to the public sphere, to demonstrate against the PANIFD and the Moudawana reform, and the feminist movement increasing its constituency on the back of the Casablanca terrorist attacks, which made Islamists movements unpopular in the public eye. The two movements are
continuously constructing their activism in response, rather than in parallel to each other (Ibid:54).

In reality the seemingly clear division between liberal and religious feminisms has been significantly muddied first of all by postcolonial considerations of liberal feminists and their efforts to root the liberal feminism in cultural and linguistic authenticity, and vice versa by the Islamist movements developing a view of modernity that includes references to human rights and equality, albeit within Islam. Although the feminist and the Islamist groups are often presented as opposing movements, neither one can be understood as the anti- or counter-movement to each other. Salime (2011) describes this evolvement as feminisation of the Islamist movement and Islamisation of the feminist movement. Indeed the greatest divide between the viewpoints is not with definitions of gender roles, but rather the source of the legitimacy of these gender constructs with rights-based groups seeing the Islamist women as yearning for the past, when in fact they are aiming to construct new gender identities using ijtihad, and with the faith-based groups imagining the feminists as appropriating neo-imperial discourses and political practices.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed women’s activism in the context of Morocco; the history, the political divisions and the links it bears to the ideas of modernity and activism in other MENA countries. The previous chapter introduced the Moroccan political system and social context to give the reader an understanding as to the playing field women’s NGOs operate in. This chapter has taken a more in-depth look at the political and civil society structures around women’s activism. Although Islam cannot be understood as a singular, defining element in women’s activism in the geographical area of North-Africa, women’s groups continue to use it as leverage against which to define their activism and in relation to which to design their strategies and referential. As this chapter shows, however, there
are many more forces that define, unite and divide women’s NGOs in Morocco, including political alliances, generational, educational and class differences as well as geographical location. While in the 1990s and up to 2003 the family law provided many groups a point of unity on either side of the debate, the field of women’s activism has since become more fragmented. Priority in regards to the most important activities and legislative changes cannot be universally defined, and thus political, referential and geographical differences have come more to the fore.

While the terminology for the different conceptions of modernity and the referential employed by NGOs stems from a complex post-colonial, post-9/11 political and social system and is highly influenced by politics, class and family, in order to discuss the competing and co-existing speaking positions we must be able to name these. Much of the theoretical discussion is fraught with euro-centrism and value judgements from both sides of the divide, and thus finding value-free terminology is difficult. The term most frequently employed in this thesis for activists and groups that base their work within religious frameworks is faith-based groups, as opposed to those using a human rights framework that in this thesis are referred to as rights-based groups.

The term faith-based group does not make explicit the group’s conception of gender, equality and women’s role in the society. Faith-based group merely defines a group as working from within the confines of Islam. Each group constructs their understandings of gender relations through their continued activism and there are few common lines between them; the category cannot capture the multiple ways of seeing women, and thus this will only be discussed in relation to each group separately. At times the groups or activists may be referred to as Islamic, but the term Islamic feminist is reserved for those who use it of themselves. Islamist is a name many of these actors give themselves, and again refers in this thesis to any such actor’s self-identification with the term. The same is true when discussing rights-based groups and actors in this thesis: secular feminist will
only be used in reference to those who identify as such. In general, all groups who tell their main reference to be international human rights are identified as rights-based groups. At times it will be important to place the groups who originate from the 1980s and 1990s leftist political activism. In those instanced they will be referred to as leftist political organisations, but this term holds within it the understanding that they are also rights-based groups.

This chapter also introduced some of the main campaigns women’s NGOs in Morocco have been involved in. The family law has been by far the most important campaign for both rights-based organisations, who supported it, and for the faith-based organisations, who opposed it. The campaign divided the women’s civil society and these divisions are still strongly in place and hinder any cross-political and cross-ideological cooperation among women’s NGOs. This chapter has given a brief outline of other topics women’s NGOs have campaigned for. The next chapter introduces some of the campaign materials that have addressed these issues and gives an empirical presentation of the processes, strategies and languages that are at play in women’s activism.
Chapter 6
Women’s NGOs campaign materials

The last chapter has given the historical and theoretical context of women’s activism in Morocco. This chapter presents the activism from the point of view of the empirical evidence of activities that have taken place from the 1990s until 2011. It outlines the main campaigns and topics using the documents, websites and other materials produced by women’s NGOs. The first part of the chapter presents a qualitative content analysis of 64 online and printed documents, videos, audio files, websites, social network site postings, posters, booklets, leaflets, newsletters, reports and studies produced or commissioned by women’s NGOs for lobbying or public awareness purposes. QCA allows a superficial exploration of the major themes, strategies and actors in the field. It also allows the study to trace major changes in themes and strategies through time from the beginning of women’s rights campaigns in the 1990s until the Arab Spring and the constitutional reform of 2011. The findings of this chapter feed important background information into the analysis of the semi-structured interviews. As the aim of the chapter is to explore the wide array of activities across an ideological, geographical and cross-generational spread, the NGOs whose documents are included in this section are not limited to those interviewed. Especially from the early 1990s little material is available, and thus it is helpful to include as many actors as possible. Some of the early campaign materials could not be accessed for this study, and thus literary references are used to fill in the gaps. From the materials in the later years some relate to NGOs that could not be contacted but who are prominent actors in Moroccan society, and thus including their work into the study at this stage allows recognition of their work and the different contribution they make to women and women’s rights in Morocco.
This chapter begins by discussing the changes in the variety of formats available to NGOs from printed materials to audio and finally online and social media postings. It then discusses the intended audiences of different types of documents and the implications the audience has for choices of language and referential. The following section unpacks some of the most prevalent themes in the documents; what is discussed and what themes are left unsaid. Then the chapter identifies some of the issues around funding of NGO materials.

The second part of the chapter discusses in more detail three women’s groups from different ideological backgrounds. It presents a thematic analysis of two documents from each group produced in 2011. The first group whose referential and activities are analysed in more detail is the network Feminist Spring for Democracy and Equality, which campaigned for inclusion of equality and women’s rights in the new constitution in 2011. The network is made up of many of the leftist feminist women’s NGOs who used the same network for campaigning for the family law, and supporters of these NGOs. In the public eye this entire network represents the rights-based groups aligned with leftist political parties and trade unions. The two documents relating to the activities of this network give a good overview of the language used in rights-based campaigns. The second group are faith-based organisations. I have chosen one document from each of the large Islamist groups’ women’s sections. Justice and Spirituality is the largest Islamist movement in Morocco. Its women’s section was founded by Nadia Yassine, the daughter of the founder of the movement. One of the faith-based documents is an on-line interview of her in 2011. The second one comes from the women’s section of the official Islamist party PJD. As the two movements have a very different view of Moroccan politics, choosing one document from each gives a rounded image of faith-based organisations. The last detailed document analysis concentrates on two pieces from Women Shoufouch, an online anti-sexual harassment group founded by university students in Rabat. The group is not a formally registered NGO, but represents a new generation of women’s
activism, and new forms of engaging with the public. Initially the group only existed on facebook, and the two pieces analysed in more detail here are some early facebook discussions between the group’s supporters and opponents. The group has been selected here as it represents a new form of activism that is not as divided by political history as older organisations tend to be. The conclusion of this chapter discusses briefly the importance of these findings for the study, and the limitations of the document analysis method used.

6.1 Sourcing the documentation

The data that has been accessed online includes

- Electronic newsletters of an NGO cooperative working with domestic violence services. These newsletters include contributions from several different NGOs.
- Press releases of NGO activities relating to advocacy campaigns
- Front covers of larger publications related to advocacy campaigns. These are generally publications of research commissioned or conducted by the NGOs into the issues they are campaigning for. The full publications are rarely available on the internet and often difficult to come by as hard copies too due to small print of these independent publications.
- Open letters to the king Mohammed VI, sent directly to the king, usually published in newspapers and also on the internet.
- CEDAW shadow reports: these are produced in cooperation by several NGOs.
- Interviews of NGO leaders on international websites and media: while the research is not focused on transnational activism, the NGO leaders often reiterate the main concerns of the NGOs in these interviews. They may also suggest that NGOs are using international pressure to make domestic changes.
- Project descriptions from international funders
- Websites of the NGOs, including images, reports, descriptions of activities and NGOs’ backgrounds and main actors
- Entries from NGOs’ social media pages and comments from followers, supporters and critics of the NGOs’ activities

Hard copy documents include:

- DVDs of plays and of NGO country tours with interviews of main actors involved and of some of the beneficiaries
- Studies and reports generally commissioned by NGOs and conducted by academic researchers into a phenomenon clearly defined by the NGO
- Posters and programmes from seminars and conferences organised by NGOs, some of which the researcher has attended
- Audio files including music and testimonies by NGO service users
- Newsletters with news of NGO activities and testimonies and other contributions from service users
- Annual reports of NGOs outlining activities, number of users availing of services, financial details, testimonies of service users and images.
- Training guides and reports into training and other projects completed

6.2 Tracing NGO materials through time

The earliest documents used by women’s NGOs in their campaigning for women’s rights from the government and the king and in public awareness raising and collecting women’s opinions and grievances are only known to this study through secondary sources. These included a women’s magazine, Thamania Mars (The eight of March), a monthly self-published magazine by UAF with articles by some of the activists affiliated to the groups and letters from women readers about their issues. Indeed the open letters section as the first location for women’s opinions as women is stressed by the UAF
activists time and time again to have played an important role in establishing a voice, or shared narratives for Moroccan women (Salime, 2011:36 and interview with UAF for this study). Another famous document from the UAF was the petition that was created in 1992 to ask the parliament for a reform of the family law and included the signatures of 1,000,000 women and men. The mailing for the petition referred to both the Moroccan constitution and the UN conventions as its source for demonstrating the need to reform the family law, which was in conflict with both. The petition was also ground-breaking in its conception of democracy, addressing itself to the parliament instead of the king (Salime, 2011). Although unavailable to this study, the knowledge of these early campaign materials and the discussions evoked in and by them provide an understanding of the literary aspect of the early campaigns. This reminds us, that the early activists were middle-class, university educated political activists with wide knowledge of international feminist movements and the strategies employed by them.

The first NGO documents this study was able to consult date to the late 1990s. These documents include annual reports of NGOs and newsletters and date from the late 1990s and early 2000s. The focus of attention at that time was the impending change of the family law, and many of these documents relate either directly or indirectly to the proposed changes; often they cite problems experienced by women that could be alleviated by the proposed changes to the law and use testimonies of women to demonstrate this point.

The majority of the documents date to the mid-2000s and thus to post-moudawana change period. The greatest emphasis overall on documents and reports from 2003 to 2010 is still the moudawana: during those years NGOs were providing training to the public, to solicitors, judges, the police and other public workers who would face women in precarious situations in their work. Many NGOs are also reporting on the lack of application of the law and on the gaps that were still left in the legislation after the
reform. Another focus of attention in the documents from this time is violence against women. The earlier documents begin to highlight the problem through studies into prevalence and effects of violence to society and to the women and families who experience it. In 2010 the government published its own study into violence against women, and with the issue officially recognised, many of the NGO campaigns began to focus on legal protection for women. Training of the public health workers and of police on treatment of victims of violence also gets under way. Other popular topics include women’s political participation, single mothers, nationality law, tribal women’s land rights and banning or at least regulating the employment of young girls as housekeepers.

The period from 2003 until 2010 is marked also by greater variety of formats of documents used by NGOs in support of their activities. Many start using music, theatre and audio testimonies to reach a wider audience and make recordings to distribute with other campaign materials. Some NGOs have websites, but few are able to update them actively at this time. New focus on Moroccan Arabic and oral documentation is evidence of NGOs aiming for greater representation among their constituencies.

In 2011 two separate networks of rights-based organisations began to campaign for changes in the penal code. One advocated for a separate law on domestic violence, other wished to incorporate this to the penal code and change also articles on rape, sexual harassment, pre- and extra-marital sex and abortion. Little documentation about these campaigns was published before the Tunisian revolution began and spurred on pro-democracy demonstrations in Morocco in February. When the constitutional reform was announced by the King in March women’s NGOs were quick to coordinate their response and demands for the new constitution. The penal code reform has become the focus of attention to all rights-based NGOs again in 2012 after the much mediatised case of Amina Filali, a 17-year old girl, who after a two year abusive marriage to her rapist finally killed herself. In 2011 a new group was also formed initially using onlyfacebook as their means of organisation and communication. The media attention and popularity
among the Moroccan youth of Women Shoufouch since its formation in September 2011 has inspired other NGOs to become more active in social media. It is free, easy to manage and can potentially attract younger members to the long established feminist organisations that have thus far struggled to enlist the new generation of students to their cause.

6.3 Language in documents

Where only French language would have been used by some NGOs in the past in their documentation (Sadiqi, 2003), most materials are now available in both Arabic and French. English has also become more and more prevalent especially in the web sources of NGOs’ documents. Although some Moroccan written press has lately adopted a written form of Moroccan Arabic for their publications to mark themselves as independent of state authorities, which generally use Standard Arabic, in the NGO world dialectal Arabic is still often perceived as oral, and thus most of the written materials in Arabic are in Standard Arabic. Because Standard Arabic in the written materials is also linked to state bodies it also gives a more direct link to local and national authorities. Moroccan Arabic is included in the materials of all the NGOs at some level in order to show the direct link to the largely illiterate and often unilingual female population; it is the language most commonly used in the audio and video materials and trainings and public talks. Academic and professional conferences on the other hand use a more official version of the Arabic language which borrows vocabulary from Standard Arabic and may be inaccessible to speakers of dialect.

6.4 Types of documents

NGOs list in their annual reports and general activities public meetings, information days, training and links to smaller women’s groups as strategies of reaching the grassroots level
women and engaging in dialogue with them. These meetings are portrayed as the direct link the NGOs have with “real women”, allowing them to speak on behalf of them and showing the relevance of the NGO to the public. Women are asked for their opinions and educated about their rights during literacy and professional training, health and legal consultations, arts and craft workshops and public meetings and information stands. Tawaza, like many other NGOs, use other local organisations to reach a wider constituency and offer trained educators for the use of small women’s groups, making sure to include legal and human rights components to all the training they provide. Most of the NGOs have a double role in providing social services such as professional and literacy training, counselling for victims of violence, legal aid, health services and other social services and advocating for changes in public opinion, state policy and local authorities treatment of women and implementation and interpretation of existing policies. Social services are valued as an important part of the NGOs work in filling a gap in the state services, but are also used as a vital source of information regarding the problems women face and solutions they may suggest. Many NGOs publish surveys that have been conducted of service users as part of their lobbying efforts. Meeting the public and being accessible to them serves multiple roles, as it legitimates the NGOs work, often constitutes an important part of the NGOs’ social role, informs their advocacy campaigns and gives them an audience for specific public awareness-raising.

Examples of documents that can be identified as public awareness materials include a wide array of audio and video material. Some of these mix music and testimonials of “real women”, other concentrate on one of these only. In an interview, representatives of Association Tawaza explained “real women” to be members of public who are accessed through NGO work but who are usually not members of the NGO. The “real women”

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61 Interview with Association Tawaza January 20th 2011. During the interview the researcher also had an opportunity to observe a literacy class organised by a small women’s group in Martil and taught by two educators.

144 Interview with Association Tawaza, Martil, January 20th 2011 Tawaza educators.
are part of the constituency of the NGO, and the women the NGOs work is aimed at helping, but who may not have access or resources to help themselves in the issues they face in their everyday life. On the audio records intended for public awareness campaigns music used is either traditional Moroccan Gnaua music recognisable to the wider public or music produced for the campaign only, often by young people involved in the NGO. Examples of such audio are produced by the Ligue Démocratique de Droits des Femmes (LDDF), where the background music is professional Gnaoua music, and by Initiatives Pour la Protection des Droits des Femmes (IPDF) where the music on the audio material is written and performed by young members of the NGO. Testimonials on the LDDF audio CD introduce women from different social backgrounds and on the one hand show that the problems women have do not depend on their background, and on the other hand also demonstrate the wide constituency of the NGOs, and thus link in with the statistical data intended for state authorities in order to push for legislative changes. NGOs may also use “real women” to provide a justification for the campaign: that the NGO has not made up the problem, that the problem is real and experienced by women “on the ground”. The “real women” are used for campaign activities aimed at influencing decision-makers, either through recorded testimonials of their lives and difficulties they face paired with statistical evidence of the wide-spreadness of the particular difficulties they may be facing, or through accompanying the NGO representatives to meetings with local or national authorities to give their testimony orally. IPDF’s songs on the CD Testimony purposefully written to raise awareness about violence against women, and the lyrics of the song itself tell a story of a woman who has experienced violence. Public awareness also uses theatre as a media, and the documents include a play that has been recorded on a DVD and photos and leaflets from plays that have already toured in Morocco. The researcher had an opportunity to attend a rehearsal of a play which aims to open up the issue of violence against women to the public. The play includes a scene of a

145 Interview with Association Tawaza, Martil, January 20th 2011
school girl being dragged off stage by a man on the street to be raped, and the aim is to question indifference by onlookers when they witness similar situations\textsuperscript{64}.

While some of the public awareness documents may have a double role in also supporting the materials intended for state authorities, few of the documents aimed at the state (or indeed the local authorities) have the public in mind. These documents are produced often in standard Arabic and occasionally also in French. They present studies that support the idea put forward. These studies rely largely on tables and statistics and are presented as objective and scientific. Human Rights are often referred to in the introductions of studies of rights-based groups. Faith-based organisations use a mix of religious and neutral references in the documents intended for state actors. For example Association Al Karama in Tangiers published a study in 2003, at the time when the new family law was about to come to force. It is a study of 300 women in difficult situation\textsuperscript{65}. The first page of the study presents it as “objective and scientific”. While other documentation by the organisation frequently refers to Islam, the claims to objectivity are maintained throughout the 14-page document by refraining from mentioning religion. Despite lack of statistical significance the study’s claim to scientificness is upheld by frequent use of tables (7) and graphs (6). The study sets out as its objective to show that the proposed reform of the family law, which promised some measures equality to women with regards to marriage and civil status, would not alone solve the problems affecting most Moroccan women\textsuperscript{66}. The report states:

\textsuperscript{64} Association Tawaza has produced plays on women’s rights since 2009. The first one talked about the new family law, the second one was aimed at encouraging more women to be involved in politics and the 2011 play talks about violence against women. All three plays have toured widely in Morocco.

\textsuperscript{65} The original report was published in Arabic. The analysis is conducted from a French translation of the study done by the association and quotes are translated by the researcher of this study. The original title of the report “Étude diagnostique des cas d’un échantillon de 300 femmes vivant en situation difficile”

\textsuperscript{66} The family law, known as the Moudawana was reformed in 2004 and among other things gave women the right to ask for a divorce and sign their own marriage contract, right to custody of their children, and removed their legal status as minors. Full text available in French at http://www.justice.gov.ma/MOUDAWANA/Codefamille.pdf
“Definitive or temporary absence of the husband due to his death or incarceration can poison or even destroy the existence of the women/wife”

This quote aims to reinforce the image of a woman as a dependent on man, a minor, who needs looking after – a metanarrative adopted from the earlier version of the family law, which in turn has been adopted from Quranic texts and the Hadith. Without mentioning divorce it contests the new interpretation put forward by the campaigners for the family law reform, which sees divorce as a necessary right for women. According to Al Karama however absence of husband is a precarious situation to a woman. 50% of women living in difficult situations are estimated to have alcoholic or drug addicted husbands, and one of the suggested solutions is to create detoxification centres to fight “the destruction of more than half of households” further suggesting that marital problems cannot be resolved by divorce.

Other documents aimed at state actors wish to influence policy and budgetary decisions, either to change policy, oppose changes in policy or to direct state funding to certain activities. Funding may be sought as direct investment by the state or local authorities to the services required, or in form of a grant or funding to the NGO in question. Association Assaida Al Horra from Tetouan published a study into a local rural community in 2003, which aimed to highlight the lack of services and investment in the area and the effect it was having on the local community and especially women. Assaida Al Horra is active in providing services such as education, training and health care in the Tetoua area. The report was published in French and it relies heavily on statistics and tables. The main message on the report is that more resources must be made available to the community, but no direct reference is made in the report itself how the funds should be provided or who should be in charge of the services. The report in question was written prior to the commencement of the National Initiative on Human Development (INDH), which since 2005 is in charge of channelling funds to health and education.
projects such as seems to be required in the community. In addition to the family law reform of 2003, which has already been identified as a historical turning point for women’s NGOs in Morocco, the INDH provides a second legislative turn whose importance for women’s NGOs campaigns must be interrogated.

Both the public awareness and the policy influencing documents also address potential and existing funders at some level. Funders are often listed directly in the document; documents are either produced in or translated in French and distributed together with new funding applications. The use of French language is also justified when NGOs wish to link with transnational partners and provide information to researchers and news and media from outside of Morocco and to international organisations about their activities.

6.5 NGO websites

Many of the women’s rights NGOs in Morocco have their own websites and most are also listed on the website of the Reseau Nationale des ONG Tanmia. Tanmia gives a short description of the NGO, its main activities and contact details. These details have been written on the Tanmia website by the NGOs themselves, so the language used to describe the NGO activities can be taken to be representative of the NGOs. On the Tanmia website NGOs are put into one or more categories including “women and development”, “human rights” and “environment”. The category “women and development” includes 1071 NGOs, of which some can be directly linked with women and women’s rights, others seem to speak merely of development as an economical term,

67 A great number of documents were accessed directly from the Finnish Embassy in Rabat, where NGOs had sent them in support of funding applications and progress reports related to existing contracts.  
68 Interview with Association Aspirations Féminines, Meknes, January 19th 2011.  
69 www.tanmia.ma
making no reference to gender, and some link the two. Some NGOs under this category are also generic faith-based organisations.

Web maintenance does not seem to be on top of the skill sets and/or priorities of most women’s rights NGOs. The most up-to-date website belongs to Anaruz\(^{70}\), an umbrella organisation of services for women victims of violence. They also produce a regular e-newsletter, which can be found on their website, and to which some of the other NGOs contribute. The news section of Anaruz is also updated weekly, with news from member NGOs. Large part of Anaruz news and newsletter contributions are from ADFM. ADFM\(^{71}\) also maintain their website regularly with news updates, campaign materials and new publications, very similarly to AMVEF\(^{72}\), another member of the Anaruz network. The website has most of the information on the NGO and their current and past activities in both French and Arabic. The most recent campaign, “Spring of democracy and equality” headed by ADFM and aimed at influencing the constitutional reform from a feminist point of view is frequently updated on ADFM’s own website and also has a separate blog site with information posted on a weekly basis in a mix of Standard and dialectal Arabic. LDDF’s website in mostly in Arabic and includes videos of activities of the organisation, news clips of their actions the organisations contact details\(^{73}\). Some of the NGOs have a presence on Facebook with postings on a fourth-nightly (ADFM) or monthly (LDDF) basis. IPDF only joined facebook in April 2011. The presence in the social media aims at making the organisations appealing to young people, but fall short of being fully relevant when these media are not fully utilised. The lack of presence in the internet and especially the social media is a shortfall for many of the NGOs trying to

\(^{70}\) www.anaruz.org
\(^{71}\) www.adfm.ma
\(^{72}\) www.amvef.org
\(^{73}\) http://www.flddf.ma/
appeal to young Moroccans, the majority of whom are already online\textsuperscript{74}. INSAF, UAF, Solidarite Feminine, Jossour and IPDF have no active website. Solidarite Feminine can be found in Facebook but with very little information attached. IPDF among others lists a website in Tanmia, but the site is no longer available. AMDF has a simple blog spot website with some information in Arabic but no updates since 2004.

\textbf{6.6 Keywords and themes}

The keywords and themes that are identified from the campaign materials are partly related to the previous considerations regarding the intended audiences and aims of the campaigns but also help to demarcate the NGOs on the spectrum between religious and liberal feminist organisations. The selection of the important keywords is inspired by previous literature into women’s activism in the MENA area and Morocco and supported by multiple word searches into the documents to ensure prevalent terms from the documents are discussed. Some of the keywords are obvious references to the referential of the NGO, whereas others need further critical investigation and carry multiple meanings.

\textbf{6.6.1 Religion}

An obvious category arises from keywords which refer to religion. Words such Islam, Allah and \textit{ijtihad} feature in some of the written materials and also in audio. Some audio links in directly with the Qur’an. The words directly referring to religion are common for NGOs that identify as religious women’s organisations, such as Karama in Tangier, and

\textsuperscript{74} \url{www.internetworldstats.com} an online internet statistics website compiled by Miniwatts marketing group estimates that in December 2009 nearly 10.5 million Moroccans, or 33.4\% of the population were actively using internet and 2.5 million people were using Facebook in December 2010.
Association CHAML for women and family but references to the Qur’an also feature in audio by the Ligue Démocratique des Droits des Femmes (LDDF), an organisation which uses mixed referential and prioritises human rights. Religious vocabulary is an important demarcation of the referential of the NGO, but can also be used as a strategy for attracting constituency and stressing the relevance of the NGO – or as a technique of translating the idea of equality to local references.

Religious affiliation or sentiment does not however exclude women from associating with the ideals and goals of the feminist constitutional reform process, as is evident from the photos posted on the web blog of the Printemps Féministe pour la Démocratie et l’Egalité of women’s demonstrations in Rabat on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2011 where veiled and non-veiled women of all ages joined to demonstrate for equality of the sexes in the new constitution carrying banners in French and Arabic. Many NGOs have a list of supports made up of family members, friends, and service users, who will volunteer for their rallies without being otherwise active in constructing the NGO advocacy goals or strategies. On the other hand rights-based organisations can use the image of veiled women as evidence of wide constituency and representation within the Moroccan female population, thus counteracting criticism from faith-based organisations and political groups that they represent narrow Westernised elite among the Moroccan female population. Organised faith-based groups are unlikely to participate in rights-based groups advocacy activities.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Doctoral thesis by Nadia Guessus explored the animosity between rights-based and faith-based groups, and found it to be based on sentiment rather than actual political or social advocacy goals. In research interviews for this thesis all rights-based and some of the faith-based groups affirmed the wish to continue acting in separate spheres by both groups.
6.6.2 Feminism

Feminism itself is a keyword with strong links to the wider referential of the NGO. In Moroccan context feminism usually refers to women activists who originate from leftist political parties, and thus the word is mostly used by rights-based NGOs. ADFM defines itself on its website as an “autonomous, feminist, and non-profit NGO”. Also the LDDF uses the word feminist in its campaign materials. The current campaign for the constitutional reform, “the spring of equality and democracy”, which echoes the “spring of equality” campaign by an assembly of NGOs for the family law, is described by ADFM as consisting of “components of the Feminist Movement in Morocco”. Rights-based NGOs, more accurately those founded in the 1980s and 1990s and involved in the transformation of the family law have owned the term feminist and refer only to the rights-based women’s groups with it. They may include in the category the younger generation of rights-based NGOs, who nevertheless do not identify as feminists.

Keywords referring to feminist discourses are used by rights-based groups, but also at times co-exist with religious references. This includes words like gender, patriarchy, gender violence and references to the international women’s rights movement and legislation, such as CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action. These words are commonly utilised by NGOs listed as or identifying as secular or liberal feminists, such as IPDF76, LDDF and ADMF. IPDF shows their affiliation to the word gender and to its feminist origins through a series of trainings and training manuals explaining the term to local civil society actors without further cultural translations of the word. One clue as to which organisations are willing to use the feminist discourse is the list of NGOs who contribute to Morocco’s CEDAW shadow report. The 2003 shadow report was written by ADFM and many of the NGOs listed as contributors, such as Association Marocaine des

76 In an interview the 17th of January 2011 the director when asked where the NGO would fit in the scope replied “secular feminist”.
Droits des Femmes (AMDF), IPDF and Solidarité Féminine are rights-based organisations. The CEDAW report also demonstrates however that the translation process between international feminist agendas and local and even religious ideals is more complex than a linear range from liberal to religious allows us to understand. References to CEDAW exist side by side with references to Islam in the materials of Association Assaida Alhorra from Tetouan.

In discussions with rights-based activists, the opposite of feminist is usually understood to be Islamist. International feminist narratives are however used by faith-based groups at times in order to defend the criticism against them as traditional or backward and to display a different kind of modernity alongside ijtihad. An example of feminist discourse as a reference to modernity is used in the introduction leaflet of faith-based organisation Karama. The leaflet defines as the objectives of the organisation:

“Protecting the family against dissolution”, “diminishing the phenomenon of psychological and legal divorce” and “combat against all forms of violence and discrimination against women”.

Although the organisation aims to fight all forms of discrimination against women, a goal that resonates with international feminist networks, the protection of family is listed first in the goals, suggesting a greater importance. Discrimination and violence against women are defined as issues to combat and are generally linked to Western feminist ideas. For the faith-based organisations the discourses on equality and rights brings a new layer of modernity to their referential, while qualifying this equality as existing within the traditional family structures and values. Through the written and spoken accounts of equality a new narrative begins to emerge as to how rights fit in with the conception of women’s role in the patriarchal family structures but also as equal social actors outside of the home.
6.6.3 Violence against women

Violence against women or gender violence is mentioned by every NGO whose documentation has been accessed as a major theme in women’s advocacy and social and development work. Most generic human rights, development and citizen rights NGOs also have a stance against violence against women. Unlike in some other Arab countries\(^77\), where women’s organisations still struggle against public justifications for violence against women and even women’s NGOs, depending on their affiliation to religious organisations, may differ on the matter, no Moroccan civil society organisation is defending or justifying violence against women in any form. For example Justice and Spirituality state in their information about the women’s section\(^78\):

“It also aims to break the trilogy of ignorance, poverty, and violence that prevents women from joining the process of development and help fight illiteracy.”

Rights-based organisations are more likely to use the word gender violence. Perceived reasons for, the prevalence of and the solutions suggested to combat violence against women differ according to the referential of the NGO. Whereas rights-based NGOs are likely to link campaigns to combat gender violence to legislative needs, legal aid and training of judicial personnel, faith-based NGOs refer to family counselling, family unity and the effect on children. Rights-based organisations like IPDF also refer to patriarchy and non-adoption of existing legislation, as well as lack of legislative tools as the main reason for prevalence of violence whereas Karama for example gives alcohol and drug abuse as the main causes. The Moroccan state published a study into the prevalence and

\(^77\) In Egypt for example the Egyptian centre for Women’s Rights reported on the 15\(^{th}\) of May 2012 that an MP had defended lifting the ban on FGM in Egypt. The Koranic verse relating to punishment of wives is also discussed at times a justification for violence against women. For more information see www.ecwronline.org

\(^78\) Quoted from the leader Abdessalam Yassine’s website
causes of violence against women in 2010\textsuperscript{79}, and while some of data suggested that women’s behaviour and dress could be the cause of violence, it also legitimised the campaigns against violence and gave them a new local resonance. Violence against women has been on the NGO agenda for over a decade, but with the new Islamic government translation of the issue to religious terms may be required in order for it to resonate. The question of the means for combating the violence still reflects the level of challenge the NGOs wish to put on existing family structures and gender norms.

Whereas European NGOs have begun to speak of survivors of violence in order to empower the person who has experienced violence and allow her to rebuild her self-esteem and life, in Morocco every NGO document refers to “victim”. The word victim is used across NGOs from all ideological and geographical locations. The term for the violence itself varies from violence against women, gender violence, domestic violence or spousal violence, but the person who experiences it, a woman, is always the victim. Speaking of survivors in Europe was preceded by a long period of struggle to get violence within a family or partnership recognised as a crime and a violation of human rights. Although the public discourse in Morocco is mostly on the side of the NGOs and now written legislation about domestic violence exists, the provisions for it in the penal code are vague and in practice unable to bring violent spouses to justice. The victim narrative allows NGOs show women as vulnerable to the random and undeserving attacks from men and thus the real need for the state and the society to protect them.

\textsuperscript{79} In May 2011 the study could not be found on the ministry of social development, family and solidarity’s website, where it was nevertheless announced \url{http://www.social.gov.ma/fr/Index.aspx?mod=3&rub=13&srub=122}. A copy of the study was acquired from the Finnish Embassy, whose representative was invited to a seminar discussing the findings of the study in January 2011.
6.6.4 Democracy

Democracy and democratisation often become part of both faith-based rights-based NGOs’ referential in national campaigns. Democracy featured in many NGOs’ documents already before the beginning of the constitutional reform project. The word democracy is often attached to the name or the slogan of an association, for example Femmes Democrates in Rabat and Association Democratique des Femmes du Maroc. Democracy is linked to women’s rights without problematizing it, suggesting one will automatically lead to the other. For example IPDF’s study into the application of the family law states:

“The judicial reform concerning questions of family answered the demands of women and of those who work towards modernisation and democratisation of the society, but also constituted a necessity to adapt the judicial system to the actual forms and structures of family that are leading towards a new mode of distribution of roles and status in the society.”

Often it is also grouped together with other terms that seemingly put forward an image of advancement and respectful participative society, such as citizenship and modernity. Democracy, citizenship and modernity are all conceptualised as good and desirable characteristics for a society and something that all Moroccans can accept should be strived for, and thus women’s rights and equality, added to this list become good and acceptable too. Faith-based groups speak of democracy in similar terms as part of modernity, while also criticising the Western model of democracy, suggesting instead a
democratisation compatible with Islam. For example Nadia Yassine explains on a videoed interview from 2005:\(^{81}\):

“If on one side of the world the Occident accuses Islam of being archaic and on the other side democracy as heresy.”

Yassine discusses the post-9/11 world and the effect the day had on global discourses around Islam and democracy, showing the Western tendency to use democracy as a cover for imperialism, but also the backward, Wahabist version of Islam’s reluctance to openness and dialogue. This false essentialisation between the two sides ignores modernist conception of Islam, based on ijtihad and dialogue. She adds, that democracy has become a compulsory universal value to everyone since 9/11 and especially since the media discourses around it. According to Yassine, Islam has become a symbol of anti-modernity in these discourses. Democracy is directly linked to the modernist view she presents of Islam: contextualisation and reinterpretation of both Islam and democracy are needed before they can be merged and the essentialised notions of both must be abandoned. Modernity is not the imitation of the West, but a dialogue between cultures and contextualisation and re-interpretation of texts.

Since the Arab revolutions of spring 2011 and the constitutional reform campaigns in Morocco the word has inevitably gained more resonance in the local and international language. The use of the word however in the NGO documents has not changed significantly. Feminist Spring of democracy and equality’s memorandum for constitutional reform states:

\(^{81}\) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzbtSzeN0c&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzbtSzeN0c&feature=relmfu) and [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xcnLuVzmt4&NR=1&feature=endscreen](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xcnLuVzmt4&NR=1&feature=endscreen) accessed on 12/4/2013
“The Feminist Spring for democracy and equality considers that to introduce a true democracy, equality between the sexes must be placed as a foundational principal in the constitution.”

Women’s rights and equality have always been painted as part of democracy in Morocco, but the constitutional reform process highlighted this due to the possibility of having equality between the sexes written in the constitution. When marketed as necessary for democracy and modernity, women’s rights and equality can become societal issues.

6.6.5 Equality and equity

In the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action a great deal of attention was paid to the phrasing of the aims of the conference between equality and equity for women. CEDAW adopted the word equality as equity was understood as too vague a term allowing for too much differentiation (Facio and Morgan, 2009). In the discussions during the Beijing Platform for Action the supporters of the term equity were mostly identified as religious actors including Catholic and Muslim organisations. Equality is the word preferred in UN and other human rights documents. In Morocco too then I expected equity to feature in the campaigns of faith-based organisations and equality in the documents of liberal feminist NGOs, but to my surprise found that this wasn’t the case.

Most women’s NGOs in Morocco were founded in the late 1990s and after and not all are aware of the debates that took place in the Beijing Conference in 1995 around the terms equality and equity. Many smaller organisations use the two terms side by side in their publications without further definition of what is meant by each. Same organisations will generally refer to international human rights conventions, suggesting that they are speaking of what these conventions define as equality. The campaign for the constitutional reform has adopted the word equality in its title. Also NGOs clearly
defining themselves as secular feminists and who are acutely aware of the background to the international feminist debate on this terminology, such as IPDF, are more likely to use the word equality in their documentation. Association Assaida Alhorra, rights-based organisation that uses also religious references refers to CEDAW and Islam side by side, linking the two with equity. In the NGOs’ other materials both equality and equity are used. Using the word equity may be aimed at a level of translation of the idea of equality from CEDAW which can help the NGO attract wider constituency. Equality is by far the more common of the two words used by NGOs across the board. Only Karama, a faith-based organisation refrain from speaking of either.

For older organisations that have been able to define their referential more clearly equality and gender equality are usually the terms used in reference to their goals and the legislation. Conversely faith-based organisations do not always choose the word equity, although their definition of equality may resonate with the narratives on what was named equity in Beijing (Salime, 2011:28).

### 6.7 Funding

The funding bodies of all the campaign and particular documents were noted as far as information was available. Most organisations listed wide range of funding, both national and international. Foreign embassies and cooperation bodies are frequent funders of women’s rights projects, but the NGOs with the closest links to religious referential were least likely to have direct foreign funding. For example Karama lists Islamic organisations and national state and private funders only in its documentation. The National Initiative for Human Development funds women’s NGOs across the spectrum especially for building and infrastructural projects. Other frequent funders are Oxfam and
different UN organisations. The biggest problems with funding are the questions of language competency and resources, different reporting requirements and short termism of funding and occasional lack of sensitivity by funders towards the security and anonymity of service users in NGO service centres. State funding on the other hand can sometimes help NGOs in legitimising their advocacy.

6.8 Strategies and referential of women’s NGOs

The documents discussed thus far in this chapter provide an insight into the development of women’s NGOs’ campaigning activities and strategies in Morocco since the 1990s. The fieldwork for this study was conducted in 2011. To comprehend the changes that have taken place and to give a background to the interview data of this study, discussed in the next chapter, it is interesting to look in more detail at the activities that were taking place in 2011. I have chosen documents from three categories of women’s NGOs to look at in more depth: rights-based women’s network, faith-based groups and new group without fixed referential. Although the categories rights-based and faith-based do not translate directly as referential, due to the dichotomies that exist in Moroccan women’s civil society, it is interesting to contrast groups from these categories. Women Shoufouch provides an alternative view outside of the dichotomy, and the combination of the three allows us to consider the differences and similarities in strategy and referential formulation. The main questions to consider when analysing these documents are: What is the referential put forward by the groups? How are linguistic strategies used in the

82 Faith-based organisations are said to be receiving more and more funding from the Gulf States, but little evidence of this is found in the documents. Many rights-based organisation would refuse such funding as politically motivated, while they are happy receive funding from the US, Canada and EU states as well as international organisations.
83 Interview with Aspirations Féminines, Meknes, 19th of January 2011
84 Interview with IPDF Fes, 17th of January 2011
85 Ibid.
documents supporting this referential? How do the documents relate to overall strategy of the group(s)?

6.8.1 Feminist Spring for Democracy and Equality

A network that called itself the Feminist Spring of Democracy and Equality was established on the 16th of March 2011, soon after the Royal discourse in which King Mohammed VI announced the constitutional reform. The members of the network include ADFM, AMDF, LDDF, AMVEF, UAF and numerous smaller women’s organisations. The founding members of the network were all members of the original spring of equality, which campaigned for the reform of the family law. A Wordpress blog site was established for the campaign network86. The network is a prime example of a strategic alliance formed around one issue only. The website is entirely in Arabic, except for the titles on each page which are written in French. Under “who are we” the group states:

“We are a coalition of components of the Moroccan women’s movement.”

As is habitual in both literature and conversations, the women’s movement is taken to mean rights-based organisations and often the leftist politically aligned organisations only. The language on the page relies heavily on human rights references, calling for civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights of men and women.

The main text of the website is the joint memorandum of the network for the constitutional reform87. The memorandum is divided to introduction, general proposals

86 http://pfdemaroc.wordpress.com/
87 Full memorandum available in Arabic in http://pfdemaroc.wordpress.com/
and specific proposals for the constitution. The introduction of the memorandum ties the participating organisations and the principle of women’s rights into democratisation, progress and modernity to such a level, that to disagree with the proposals one would need to defend their position in regards to democracy and social justice in general. For example:

“This large project is considered by the progressive and democratic forces as an advance and a positive response to the societal and political dynamics and the youth that are known to Morocco and the Arab region.”

The contextualisation and knowledge of Morocco’s society itself is linked to the will to reform the constitution with equality in mind: any progressive and pro-democratic person who is aware of the conditions in Morocco would have to agree. Those who disagree must thus fall outside of this description.

In the general propositions the memorandum touches also on the basic principles of democracy, such as independence of the judiciary, separation of powers, reinforcing the powers of the elected bodies and transparency and good governance. The strength of the document is mostly on its insistence on the specifics of gender equality however; other parts of democratisation can be deliberately left vague and for other fractions of the society to comment upon. One issue that is insisted upon especially outside of women’s rights is the formal recognition of the Amazigh language. The specific propositions ask for integration of universal rights such as they are defined in the CEDAW, the declaration of Paris and other international human rights documents. They ask for parity in all political instances and specific measures in tackling violence against women.

88 I received a printed copy of a French translation of this document, which I used for the thematic analysis.
Underneath the memorandum on the website is posted an explanatory note based on feedback received in response to the memorandum at the meeting with the Consultative Council on Constitutional reform. This bears evidence to the interactive process of advocacy. It also demonstrates the network’s efforts at greater transparency regarding their advocacy. The notes are a response to questions from the consultative committee and reemphasise some of the points made in the memorandum, such as the need for supremacy of human rights in the constitution and for measures of positive discrimination in guaranteeing political parity.

Although the blog site is public, the documents themselves are all directed to political decision-makers. In the texts on the page no reference is made to Moroccan culture or religion as a basis for drafting the constitution. The only cultural contextualisation on the blog is a collection of photos of women’s demonstration in Rabat in March 2011 for new constitution. The Placards are mostly in Arabic, and the women in the pictures include young, old, veiled and non-veiled women, suggesting a wide constituency of support for the network. Not all of the member organisations of the network engage in public awareness, but those who do, often use different basis of referential in the two. For example LDDF’s website presents videos of the organisation’s activities with traditional music and women in Berber dress. Any public awareness or communications intended for the public that are posted online are nevertheless intended for a minority audience of literate population with access to internet, and differ from those public awareness documents intended for rural illiterate populations who are the beneficiaries of the women’s rights caravans depicted in the videos.

6.8.2 Faith-based organisations

Materials from faith-based organisations are more difficult to come by than those from campaigning advocacy organisations with rights-based referential. Nadia Yassine, the
spokesperson for Justice and Spirituality and the founder of the movement’s women’s section has actively written on a blog-site for several years. However the site went offline in 2012 and is still not available\textsuperscript{89}. The two pieces of data selected for this in-depth thematic analysis on faith-based women’s groups materials both originate from the press. One is an interview of the director of Mountada Azzahrae, the faith-based women’s network affiliated to the PJD regarding the group’s demands for the new constitution. The other is a video of an interview of Nadia Yassine from March 2011 regarding the movement’s participation in the M20 demonstrations conducted by an online journal, who has since ceased its activities. The two pieces are united in their theme of democratisation and the compatibility of Islam and human rights. Although the two groups share their faith-based referential, their view on democracy differs. PJD has participated in the general elections since 2000 and have thus sworn allegiance to the king as the ultimate authority on governance and legislation. Justice and Spirituality on the other hand are against constitutional monarchy, which they see as a form of dictatorship.

Mountada Azzahrae was among the women’s organisations consulted by the consultative committee on constitutional reform. Their participation in the consultation process was also widely mediatised. Some newspapers emphasized the network’s religious referential, whereas others concentrated on their demands regarding recognition of family as central to constitutional rights. In the article by \textit{Echo} (Bennajah, 2011) published on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of April 2011 the director of Forum Azzahrae is quoted as saying:

\textit{BK: “The orientation of the Forum in the case of constitutional reform are essentially founded on the reinforcement of Islamic referential in the questions of women and family,\textsuperscript{89}”}

\textsuperscript{89} This may be linked to the scandal in 2011 when a Moroccan newspaper published photos of Yassine with a Moroccan man, allegedly her lover. She was publicly discredited in Moroccan media and has since been replaced as the spokesperson for Justice and Spirituality. She was nevertheless the founder of the women’s section and her philosophy regarding equality, human rights and Islam guides the work of the section.
the realisation of harmony between the international conventions and national legislation and the consolidation of the position of women.”

Islam is presented as compatible with human rights and women’s participation in society. The speaker makes no hierarchy between Islam and international conventions, claiming both to have equal importance in the constitution and other national legislation. Interestingly, Mountada Azzahrae is presented in the article as part of the women’s movement.

In the 20-minute interview posted on the website of Lakome90, an independent web-based Moroccan journal Nadia Yassine speaks about the movement’s view of democracy. She stresses the movement’s commitment to non-violence while it criticises the position of the monarch and the hereditary system of leadership. The hereditary monarchy, according to her is based on patriarchy. In relation to the moudawana and the movement’s rejection of the reform of the law she states that with ijtihad and a modernist reading of Sharia-law the moudawana could have become more equalitarian. Instead, the new family law is still based on patriarchal norms and the political positions of the actors who were involved in the reform. Also the process of reform is criticised by her as undemocratic and taking into consideration only the points of view of certain powerful political actors instead of being a true consultation of the Moroccan people. The same criticism is made of the consultation for the constitutional reform. Moroccan legislation is not based on Islamic jurisprudence, but on perpetuating the patriarchal and class hierarchies that benefit the Makhzen, most of all. And, as she states:

90 http://fr.lakome.com/politique/42-actualites-politique/232-nadia-yassine-nous-sommes-plus-proches-du-mo.png accessed 1/10/2012 This site is also no longer available
“Woman and the society must give an image of power. That there is a supreme guy and his subjects.”

This system of values “doesn’t respond to the values of the great Moroccan population”. True Moroccan values come from the philosophy of Ibn Khaldoun, who was a man of Siba Bled, the countryside, not of Makhzen. What is original to Morocco is women’s participation in the society and equality between citizens, whereas the values of the monarchy and its supporters are a distortion, safeguarding the economic and political power of the families that run it.

Yassine supports the Turkish model of secular state for Morocco, as long as the freedom of religion is guaranteed in that system. A republican state is in her mind “much closer to the original system”. The movement is practical, pragmatic and for the adaptation of their ideas to the social system, which led them to support the M20 movement in Morocco. The constitutional reform did not respond to the demands of the population for democratisation, as the propositions were made by “the people who are above the law” and not by the Moroccan population. She reiterates that Justice and Spirituality do not wish to enforce their values or ideas on the society, but their view of democracy is “We are for progress, but also for the true choice of the people”. This is the main difference, according to her, between the Justice and Spirituality and the forces that support and collaborate with the Makhzen. True deliberative democracy can only happen within a republic where freedom of speech and conscience are guaranteed and people’s need for spirituality respected.

The two faith-based women’s groups hold different positions in regards to democratisation and the Moroccan state due to their political affiliations. Both support democracy and human rights, and both believe these to be compatible with Islam. Family is central to the demands of Mountada Ezzahrae. The discourses on democracy display
the different political positions where the religious referential remains shared. Forum Ezzahrae participated in the constitutional reform and make national legislation central to authenticity in Morocco and democratisation of the country. Justice and Spirituality on the other hand are outside of the state political machinery due to their wish to abolish monarchy. They thus regard national legislation as a distortion of Moroccan values, designed by the powerful political elite to maintain their position of power. Religion is an important value for both within society, but political affiliations become central when discussing democratisation.

**6.8.3 Women Shoufouch**

Women Shoufouch was founded as a facebook group only in the autumn of 2011 by a group of students from Rabat. The idea for the group comes from the worldwide phenomenon of Slutwalk and it opposes all forms of sexual harassment and violence against women. The group has not defined a fixed referential for themselves, but their cooperation with ADFM suggests as rights-based approach and the modelling on SlutWalk a feminist referential. Initially the group called itself Slutwalk Morocco, but the name proved to be too controversial in the Moroccan context, eliciting comments suggesting sluts do indeed ask to be harassed, as “*Unfortunately these sluts think that they are the only ones violated and don’t see the type of moral and physical harassment they submit men to as they must avoid them and lower their eyes and close their ears and pinch their noses to please the egotism [of these sluts] so that they wouldn’t be angry*”, as written by the user Mohammed Errabbaa in the comments on the wall of the group on the 31st of October. Many women also felt, that calling the group Slutwalk meant some women, who are victims of sexual harassments on a daily basis, would not be willing to speak out against it for fear of being called sluts. Women Shoufouch is a reference to a popular insult women in Morocco hear “manshoufouch”, which roughly translated means invisible.
The group’s facebook page had 8363 followers in April 2013 and many of the posts frequently attract several dozen comments from both the defenders of the group and those who oppose it. The name initially attracted a great deal of attention and media coverage for the group however. The first piece selected from the group for a more in-depth analysis is a video clip of a popular Moroccan talk show Ajial where one of the founders of the group, Majdouline, is invited, and the subsequent comments and discussion of her TV appearance created on the group’s facebook page. The second is an open letter to the group by the user El Guelta Samih and the comments from the followers of the group to the letter. Both are from October 2011. Activism on facebook is a new kind of activism, as it encompasses not only those who are included as group members, but everyone who wishes to partake in the online discussion. Many do not use their own names, and some only participate to provoke other users. The group has also blocked several users throughout its existence due to offensive comments. Main strategy of the group is to provoke public debate on sexual harassment through the facebook group and national media. The group has also participated in demonstrations, for example ones to demand changes in the criminal law provoked by the death of Amina Filali.

In the TV chat show Majdouline is given few chances to speak. Although the programme is in Moroccan Arabic and all the other participants speak it, Majdouline speaks French throughout. This is one of her first TV appearances. Her ease in expressing herself in French is also indicative of her educational and class background. During the programme she briefly explains the reason the group was founded, and while the host and the other speakers do not directly contradict her condemnation of sexual harassment, her message is slightly side-lined by several interruptions to her talk. Her choice of language is one of the most commented upon issues regarding the programme, although ironically, most of these comments are written in French. This may reflect the wider Moroccan youth
membership of Facebook and the group’s page. As the user Zineb Salamat states (in French):

“I think that to speak French on 2M is an unforgivable negligence. The woman who suffers on the street, she often doesn’t understand a word of any other language than Darija. A movement, it is above all of the common people, and that you are missing.”

The same part of the population the writer speaks about is also missing from Facebook. Other commentators link the use of French on TV to the elitism of the group members. Those defending Majdouline’s intervention remark that it was her first time, the next time she will be more articulate and at least she was able to introduce the subject to the wider public.

The second piece analysed here is a letter from a young man who opposes the rhetoric and the aims of the group. He has attached his photo and says he presents his objections under his own name. His open letter states his objections to the aim of the group to introduce anti-harassment legislation and to criminalise men for all sexual harassment. He argues, that equality is menaced by “an excess of femininity”, that the founders of the group have fallen under the charm of an occidental movement, and that the approach taken by the group does not suit Morocco, as it is too antagonistic towards men. The writer agrees, that sexual harassment is wrong, but suggests, that instead of accusing men, women should take their part of the responsibility and “understand that her roundness and her shape do not leave a man indifferent”. He refers to the group members as “Young women with modernist tendencies” and while he attaches certain intelligence to such women, a certain patronising tone may also be detected from his address:
“From our part let’s assume you are young women with modernist tendencies, free, and a priori of good intentions” and

“We think that a modernist woman should understand that she shouldn’t seek to taunt a man in order to present him another way to see things”

The most effective means, according to the writer, to battle sexual harassment is engaging in a dialogue with men rather than accusing them of merely following their nature, “a scientific truth”.

The group Women Shoufouch posted a link to this letter on their facebook page, and the posting had received 187 comments by the 7th of December 2011. For large part the discussion becomes a series of personal attacks between few commentators and the writer of the original letter. These attacks are invariably masked in a competition for most eloquent expression in French and exaggerated politeness; both the vocabulary and the syntax used creates a mockery of the addressee through patronising them with the eloquence of the expression, such as “I appreciate entirely your text. It appears that we are two Moroccans of the same register although each of his own mental card⁹¹” and “In the latter you have jovially decapitated common sense, you have ignored all good faith spread in front of whoever may wish to read your ignorance of the Moroccan women’s type and the little case you make for their dignity.⁹²” The comments follow two main lines in their discussion of sexual harassment itself: those who believe that sexual harassment happens to women no matter what they wear, and those, like El Guelta Samih, who believe that women bear part of the responsibility in the matter and should not provoke men, as it is in their nature to be aroused by the sight of beautiful women. El Guelta Samih nevertheless stresses, that he is aware of the gravity of the problem and

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⁹¹ User El Guelta Samih 20th of October
⁹² User Joseph Tlm 22nd of October
agrees that sexual harassment and violence must be combatted, but merely disagrees about the means suitable to do so. The arguments are constructed around the idea of victimhood and who makes a suitable victim whose rights must be protected. “Sluts” in this rhetoric are unsuitable victims.

The majority of the comments are by ten different users, but there are suggestions by some of them, that even within the ten there are some who participate under two user names. Of the over 7000 group members many may be either Moroccans living abroad or non-Moroccans living in Morocco, some may have several accounts, and yet others may have no connection to Morocco. The language and register used in all of the comments and discussions on the page suggest that most of the people actively participating in the group’s discussion are either university educated or living in Francophone countries. Although the membership and active participation in the group’s facebook discussions might be limited to certain social classes and those living abroad for reasons of language and access to internet, it quickly created public debate outside of its existence in facebook, as the founders were interviewed in numerous Moroccan magazines, radio and TV shows and online blogs. Lack of clear referential in all of this work indicates a shift in women’s activism in Morocco from the older faith-based and rights-based organisations.

The three case studies suggest the importance of referential as women’s NGO campaigns have become more diverse since the Moudawana reform of 2003 as well as the convergence in referential across seemingly opposite organisations. In 2011 most rights-based organisations concentrated on the constitutional reform. This made democracy and equality an important part of their referential. Democracy is presented in the constitutional reform campaign as a form of modernity that is compatible with human rights and Moroccan national legislation and international obligations. Although some of the members of the network have a mixed (human rights and religion) referential in their own work, the network refrains from religious references. Even though the Justice and
Spirituality did not engage in the constitutional reform process, their discourses in 2011 closely resembled the rights-based organisations’ call for democracy. In addition to presenting democracy and human rights as part of modernity, both faith-based groups analysed here assert its compatibility with Islam. Rather than a division between rights-based and faith-based groups, a greater difference in how democracy becomes part of the referential of women’s NGOs is their political affiliation. The Feminist Spring of Democracy and Equality and Forum Azzahrae, both affiliated with registered political parties, speak of democracy as part of Moroccan culture. Justice and Spirituality however see democracy as something that Morocco has not yet seen, a new construct of modernity required to overcome the traditional autocratic political system.

Women Shoufouch represents many newer, smaller women’s NGOs that have been founded around an issue instead of a referential. Witnessing the formation of a small organisation like this can reveal why referential is important for the work of an NGO. The only aim of the group in the beginning was to raise awareness about sexual harassment, but without a referential formulating a coherent strategy was difficult for the group, especially as they received large amounts of media attention before working out with a strategy and referential. Which issues would fall under the auspices of the group? Who should the group cooperate with? What language should be used? Through trial and error the group has seen the need to translate their name to a contextually more fitting one, and have begun to use more local references in their writings. Without a strategy and referential they risk being co-opted to existing groups with strong strategies and losing their particular independent position.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has identified and also reaffirmed key themes for the study through mapping Moroccan women’s NGOs’ campaigns and the materials used for them. This chapter has
shown the NGO activities in their ideological as well as historical scope, giving an insight into the developments of women’s NGOs activities and narratives of women and gender in Morocco from the 1990s until 2011. Including a large number of documents in the qualitative content analysis has made it possible to gain some insight into the changes in campaigns, materials and strategies over time, as in the wide array of activities women’s organisations are engaging in. This qualitative content analysis of documents has highlighted major trends and keywords as well as some differences between ideologically diverse organisations. The keywords and themes that emerged from this analysis are religion, feminism, violence against women, democracy, equality and equity.

The second part of this chapter has looked at three different group’s documents and strategies in more detail. All of these date from 2011 and thus work as a good introduction and verification of interview data. The three groups represent different ideological and structural entities within women’s civil society in Morocco, and differences between approaches and linguistic references are more evident than in the first part of the chapter. It must be noted however, that the analysed pieces from the different groups also represent different activities and aims. Women Shoufouch’s facebook page is aimed at creating societal debate about sexual harassment among young people in Morocco, but fails to connect with large parts of the society due to the language and media used. The Feminist Spring for Democracy and Equality’s blog contains documents intended for advocacy purposes only, and their intended audience is the government and the consultative committee for the constitutional reform. Nadia Yassine’s writings on the other hand are her thoughts aimed at public awareness of the ideals of the movement and its women’s section. Questions of language, referential and location of the norms referred to are present in all three sources however, and evoke the question of translation, modernity and democracy on different levels.
It was not possible to do an in-depth thematic analysis of all collected documents, and thus the first part of the chapter has only given some indications as to the main themes and strategic choices of language. Nor were my language skills adequate in including Arabic language documents into the thematic analysis, and thus these have only been used in the larger sample. The themes that were presented in this chapter come up again in the interviews. This chapter has thus prepared us for the important themes that emerge in the interviews and given the empirical evidence to back up some of the findings of this thesis.
Chapter 7
From binaries to complexity of referential

This chapter presents the main themes that were discussed in the 24 research interviews for this study. The chapter aims to show the multiplicity of voices present in women’s activism in Morocco and begin to question the binaries that have been presented between faith-based and rights-based organisations. Although these binaries are also very present in the interviews I show here, I wish to question them by presenting the differences on one hand between those NGOs perceived to represent the same referential, and the similarities on the other hand across the divide that has been imagined in between rights-based and faith-based women’s groups. Junctures with the documentation produced by NGOs wasn’t always evident, and the themes and discussions presented here are based on the content and thematic analyses of the interviews alone. Although I was sometimes reminded of discussions from the document analysis while reading through the interviews, this chapter show the interviews in their own context, and the next chapter begins to bring the two analyses together.

The themes here follow closely the research questions of this study. The activists reflected deeply on the referential chosen for their NGO and how this is present in their work, guiding campaigns, informing the language of activism and helping and hindering cooperation with other actors in the society. Although for the purposes of clarity I have tried to make categories of women’s organisation, as the empirical data presented here shows, these categories are very fluid. Identity politics is present as a tool for activism, but the reflexions behind defining each organisation’s point of reference and frame of action goes far beyond simple categories and binaries. Unfortunately this chapter allows showing only a small fraction of the rich and in-depth conversations that took place with
the participants regarding the ideologies, positions, political frames and choices of vocabulary that make up the activism of each NGO. Democracy and democratisation were discussed from the point of view of women’s rights and women’s participation, but issues of democracy and governance were also present when relating each NGO’s experiences of working with the local and national authorities. Key themes that emerge from this chapter are those relating to the referential and its use in NGOs’ work and the critique the NGOs produce for the lack of democracy in Morocco and the concept of democracy in general.

The chapter begins with a discussion of how NGOs come to choose their referential and whether they believe it to be important. It then explores the different uses of human rights NGOs have adopted and the ways in which these relate to Islam. Cultural references are given a separate section, because the multiple and sometimes conflicting ways in which culture, traditions and social contexts are used and interact with women’s activism require this space. As the interviews were all conducted in 2011, democracy featured in all interviews. But what does democracy mean to the participants? The question was discussed both in terms of the realities of Moroccan political situation as well as on a more theoretical level. NGOs’ chosen referential is one of the contributing factors in choosing allies and building networks, but an examination of how networks are built in and out of Morocco show the complexity of the NGO sector and problems of networking within it. Finally the chapter discusses one of the discursive techniques commonly used by NGOs in advocacy and public awareness: language of science.

Some of the conversations that were pertinent and important to the participants do not address the research questions, and are thus not included in the discussion in this chapter. Issues of finance, volunteerism and collaboration with the state, which are vital questions for the activists, will be further explored in the conclusion. The interviewees are identified in the text according to the following table:
List of speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initials</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADFM</td>
<td>Interviewee didn’t wish to be identified, only NGO</td>
<td>Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc</td>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>Casablanca</td>
<td>Rights-based, born from leftist political parties</td>
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<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>Amina Echchaikhi</td>
<td>ARFEDEC (Association de Récherche Féminine pour le Développement et la Coopération) and CAFMAT (Centre d’Assistance pour Femmes Maltraitées)</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Tetouan</td>
<td>Rights-based independent with links to leftist student union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Aicha Laayussi</td>
<td>Association de Quartier Assalam pour le Développement et la communication</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Agadir</td>
<td>Independent faith-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Asma El Mehdi</td>
<td>Initiatives pour la Protection des Droits des Femmes (IPDF)</td>
<td>Ex-director, current member of</td>
<td>Fez</td>
<td>Independent rights-based, leftist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Affiliation</td>
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<tr>
<td>AN</td>
<td>3 members in the interview, not recorded, all statements affiliated to the NGO</td>
<td>Ex-director, current treasurer and director of campaigns</td>
<td>El Jadida</td>
<td>Independent rights-based</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>Amina Trasfia</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Taznakth</td>
<td>Independent development organisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Bouchra Abdou</td>
<td>Director of advocacy</td>
<td>Casablanca</td>
<td>Rights-based with leftist political sympathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>BK</td>
<td>Boutaina Karouri</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Rabat</td>
<td>Faith-based aligned with the government party PJD</td>
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<td>FA</td>
<td>Fatna Afid</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Rabat</td>
<td>Socialist trade union member, rights-based</td>
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<td>FF</td>
<td>Interviewee didn’t wish to be identified, only NGO named in the study</td>
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<td>FM</td>
<td>Fatima Maghnaoui</td>
<td>Union de l’Action Feminine (UAF), Director, Rabat, Rights-based with leftist political sympathy</td>
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<td>HE</td>
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<td>Aspirations Feminines, Director, Meknes, Independent rights-based</td>
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<td>HZ</td>
<td>Hayat Zirari</td>
<td>Association Marocaine de Lutte Contre la Violence a l’Egard de Femme (AMVEF), Director, Casablanca, Independent rights-based</td>
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<td>Ilham Cherkaoui</td>
<td>Initiatives pour la Protection des Droits des Femmes Meknes (IPDF Meknes), Director, Meknes, Rights-based, born out of leftist political</td>
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<td>IL</td>
<td>Ilham Laghrich</td>
<td>Comité Nationale de Soutien de scolarisation des filles rurales</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Rabat</td>
<td>Network based on schooling of rural girls as only referential</td>
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<td>KE</td>
<td>Khadija Eridat</td>
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<td>KI</td>
<td>Khadija Ida-Ali</td>
<td>Dar al Oumouma/Association Amal Tagoudicht</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Tagoudicht/Tazenaght</td>
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<td>LK</td>
<td>Latifa Khalif</td>
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<td>El Jadida</td>
<td>Independent faith-based</td>
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<td>LX</td>
<td>Lamia</td>
<td>Justice et Spiritualité, women’s circle</td>
<td>Member, speaking on behalf of the spokesperson Nadia Yassine</td>
<td>Rabat</td>
<td>Faith-based, part of the Islamist movement Justice et Spiritualité</td>
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<td>ML</td>
<td>Majdouline Lyazidi and Leila</td>
<td>Women Shoufouch Founding members</td>
<td>Founding members</td>
<td>Rabat</td>
<td>Independent rights-based facebook group</td>
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For further information on the organisations please refer to the methodology chapter and the list of participating organisations in the appendices.

7.1 Choosing a referential

All of the NGOs who were active in the 1990s and during the societal debates on the National Action Plan of Integrating women into development have had to think carefully about their referential. As the PANIFD and the family law divided the society to Islamic and secular camps, many NGOs felt their referential needed to be relocated in less binary
discourses. Although human rights triumphs for most leftist feminist organisations, many also opted for mixing the referential to gain further legitimacy.

**FM (UAF):** “We organised seminars on women’s personal status, I mean we had a reading of even the Koran and there was the problem of referential: as in, what do we base ourselves on. So we based ourselves on the referential of human rights, as in the conventions of CEDAW and human rights in general and on the spirit of Islam. We concluded that the spirit of Islam is equalitarian; equalitarian; and the personal status of women was only one interpretation among others of Islam: and a patriarchal interpretation of Islam. And so with this referential we were able to assemble the committee and do a lobbying, a lobbying, and do an advocacy towards the political decision makers.”

The question is especially pertinent to older NGOs who keep returning to it regularly. Referential is renegotiated in relation to new campaigns and coalitions. As long as everyone in the coalition agrees to human rights as the basic referential, a mix of voices is often seen as beneficial, especially for those NGOs, who subscribe to human rights alone. Although some of the leftist feminist NGOs founded in the 1980 and 1990s, notably UAF and LDDF use a mixed referential, they can be identified as rights-based organisations, as human rights are their first point of reference. While they deny using Islam tactically in their work, it is defined as fitting the equality agenda. By collaborating with NGOs, who also refer to religion, purely rights-based NGOs reap the benefits of mixed referential without entering into the debate about the essence of Islam.

**NR (AMDF):** “The diversity of the women’s movement, I believe that we have benefitted from that diversity of referential, but also as I explained a while ago for us the principle and the objective is the same. The principle is equality and the objective is to change; to eradicate violence and to change things in favour of women’s rights. How to achieve
that? For us, all the means that can reach the decision makers or the public, especially in the phase of the moudawana, because the moudawana imposed a religious debate because it was the only law that called itself; that pretended to be based on religious referential. [...] Do for us for example AMDF, we are secular, we have a human rights referential but we weren’t against the utilisation of cultural referential that interpreted religion in our favour.”

AMDF admits to using the mixed referential of some of their partner organisations to give them the legitimacy from the religious side without entering the debate on religion themselves. Smaller organisations that work in small rural towns and concentrate on concrete actions to improve the lives of women have less need for a clearly defined referential. In fact, when allies are limited, it may be more beneficial to define the entire organisation in terms of its activities, as ideologies can alienate possible members and allies in the local authorities.

FF (Forum de la Femme): “Yes we work exactly on the rights of women. It is a little reserved. [...] what concerns us is the promotion of the status of women. We don’t want to work on several tracks because then we will lose certain specificity. What is missing in this region [...] exactly to be accessible and to help women a little bit, approach them, try to understand them.”

Loose referential can be helpful for smaller NGOs in local level for both their public awareness and social work with women from the community as well as for any cooperation they try to do with local authorities. Through national coalitions they can still access legal advocacy campaigns, as long as they subscribe to the rights-based agenda for the purposes of the campaign.
7.2 Human rights as referential

Rights-based organisations use the language of human rights to different degrees based on the audience they are addressing at any given time. Some refuse to refer to other competing referential, such as religion; others mix religion, tradition, local legislation and international human rights conventions in all of their documents. Embedding human rights into national legislation has helped legitimise it as referential for women’s rights organisations, as using national legislation as a point of reference eliminates the criticism of imported values.

**ADFM:** “No but as the universal rights are in the preamble [of the constitution] we refer to that. Islamist; it’s a religion, it’s personal. Rights are universal. That’s all.”

Rights-based organisations lobbied for human rights to be directly applicable in the constitution so that they could refer to the constitution instead of international documents, which may at times be criticised for being located in the Western values system. In relation to equality and women’s status NGOs often prefer to use the new family law, despite its lack of application as a reference rather than the CEDAW, as both are seen to defend the same principles. As the Moudawana has been passed by the king and the parliament, local and national authorities have little recourse to criticise it as the basis for women’s NGOs’ demands. International human rights documents may also seem distant and inaccessible to both state actors and the public due to their language and people’s limited knowledge about them or where to find them, whereas knowledge of national legislation comes closer to civic duties of citizens, and especially of civil servants and politicians.

Rights based organisations are either implicitly or explicitly correlating human rights with modernity. Where the national legislation fails to live up to the standard of
modernity and rights that NGOs seek, international conventions are the exemplary used to point out these failures and to show how this should be corrected.

AM (IPDF): “[The penal code] speaks of debauchery to speak about adultery, it mixes between prostitution and relations between consenting adults; there are a lot of mix-ups. These are examples but there are a lot of mix-ups. And we want to stress that also on the level of language the concepts should be more modernised, more clarified, in conformity exactly with these referential of universal human rights.”

Referential is also related to the audience each communication is intended to. Most NGOs agree that international human rights have little resonance with the public, and are most useful in communications addressed to the authorities. Actors also note that whatever the choice of referential, women seeking help for their immediate daily problems are unlikely to care, as long as their needs are met. A woman looking for support service in case of economic hardship or family violence is unlikely to choose the service provider due to their ideology or referential if both a rights-based and a faith-based organisation are ready to meet her needs. An organisation with pure rights referential will likely need to find a different manner of communicating with service users than the international conventions used in advocacy. Most NGOs estimate service users to understand and be able to relate to religious references.

BA (LDDF): “It [the referential] is the international conventions. Of course in our speeches, in our speeches with the people, an illiterate woman or a woman who work... who is in the countryside or the mountains etc. We cannot talk with her about the CEDAW. But there are Koranic texts that are more open with equality. There are hadiths of the Prophet that are with equality.”
Although it may be assumed that an illiterate woman’s knowledge of the Koran could also be limited, the religious texts are perceived as a more legitimate and immediately relevant source of knowledge and guidance than international conventions. The NGOs using a mixed referential, such as LDDF find it easy to switch from one to another based on their audience. Indeed, what is often more important than the referential in diffusing a message to the public is who speaks, and what techniques or medias are used to reach the audience. NGOs use a mixture audio, theatre and music to access younger populations, local dialects of Berber and Arabic in training and communications with illiterate women. NGO members may dress accordingly when visiting rural villages and seen access to local women through community leaders. Instead of adhering to referential, what becomes important for NGOs working in a variety of communities, is flexibility of the means of communication and strategies to access the target groups while still maintaining the values of the message.

*MZ (Tawaza): “Ok so we work on the techniques of communication to speak with the women in the villages, like we speak dialect, their dialect, it’s a woman who takes part to speak with them; every time we speak with them we don’t say you, we say ‘we’, as women, so to include ourselves with them; every time we tell a story or something so that the others can share what they have.”*

While gaining access though community leaders and dressing according to the rules of the community may reinforce power structures in the communities, the message itself takes priority. Those NGOs, who don’t have this direct access to the local communities often opt to working with small associations from the communities instead. Working through a local group also means that the central NGO may not need to take part in local struggles for access, but can maintain their referential and ideology while supporting the local group to do the ground work.
IL (Comité Nationale de Soutien de Scholarisation): “We cannot come and pretend to do public awareness for them, it’s for that reason that we work with local associations who are already there and who know the community leader and know the families. Because even if we go with our team to do the public awareness and even if the parents say yes, you are right, they will not send their children to school because they don’t trust us.”

Gaining the trust of the public the NGOs wish to influence is the first step, after that comes referential.

Just as NGOs may speak of “spirit of Islam” as a referential that doesn’t have the power to limit their discourse to specific texts, some NGOs make similar precautionary claims about human rights. In general, human rights are defended as belonging to Moroccans and to Muslims as much as to anyone else and as being truly universal rather than Western.

NR (AMDF): “We are part of the world and of that evolution that leads towards respect and dignity of the person in the entire world.”

Faith-based organisations are more likely to put Islam first in their referential, whereas rights-based organisations often mention rights first. While some rights-based organisations refuse to speak of Islam in relation to their activism, all faith-based organisations seem happy to mix the two. Islam can be interpreted from the point of view of equality, but human rights can also be interpreted from the point of view of Islam. Re-reading happens on both levels and through it NGOs can find the right referential that corresponds with their values while also resonating with the decision-makers and the public.
IC (IPDF Meknes): “The debate is not pure and inflexible so we do try to bring things into context. For example heritage, it’s a right but we couldn’t; because it’s the context. We have to reconcile between religion because in effect people are very sensitive on that discourse so we need to reconcile it a little.”

The argument between human rights and religion becomes somewhat circular: human rights themselves can be considered as having been inspired by all humanity, including Islam, and they are then re-fitted into the principles of Islam to form an understanding of what is required and what is just for women in Morocco now. Religion - although sometimes used as an excuse to control women - stands at the foundation of human rights.

NR: “The religious referential is most often used to put breaks on the women’s movement, but women are convinced that this international referential encompasses also the principles of the values that can exist in religions and in the religion of Islam. But they are values of not of Islamic legislation, they are values that... in which the people who put in place the referential of international human rights leaned on. The declaration of human rights in 1948 is based on everything that is open and just and equalitarian in the human cultures in general; Asian; African and of course also of Muslim countries.”

Principles of human rights are behind schooling of girls, banning marriages of minors and forming women’s economic cooperatives, but often the realities of women’s and girls’ lives are enough to show the need for reform. In case it isn’t, NGOs can always go back to the original human rights documents to defend their actions.

BA: “It is in the international convention that girls be schooled. That is why we are asking for a ban on the marriage of minors. That’s in the conventions. Etc. But we are
not going to say that it’s the international convention that says that, that and that. But it’s the... it’s the reality; the daily lives; it’s the lived experiences that we want to change.”

7.3 Islam and Ijtihad

When leftist feminist organisations campaigned for the changes in the family law for the first time in the early 1990s the question of Ijtihad had not yet been publicly debated in Moroccan society. Interpretation of religious texts and customs was reserved to few religious leaders and the sacredness of Sharia-based laws or traditions not open for public discussion. As discussed in detail in chapters IV and V, the campaign activities caused religious fatwas against all the campaigners who spoke of reform of a law based on Sharia. The king intervened, setting up a commission of Ulemas to consider the law and introducing minor changes to it. Finally with the parliamentary vote for the reforms re-reading of codified religious law became possible for the first time. Ijtihad and religious referential could be used to defend different causes. Many rights-based women’s NGOs adopted religious discourse as part of their referential at this point.

FM: “There were, there were reforms, but they were very very minor, symbolic reforms. But the essential point of those reforms was the opening of what we call the door of Ijtihad.”

At the time of the introduction of the PANIFD and the debates of the family law reform faith-based and rights-based women’s NGOs were sitting on the opposite sides of the debate. The reform of the family law nevertheless helped also faith-based women’s groups to begin using Ijtihad for criticising the patriarchal interpretations of Islam popular at the time within the Islamist movements. Islamist movements also put women forward while opposing the family law reforms. Islamist women marched as part of the
public demonstrations against the PANIFD, and were not contended afterwards to be made invisible again.

Although some rights-based organisations are vehemently opposed to religion as a point of reference, some issues are necessarily linked with religion in the Moroccan context. Applying religious referential is still pertinent to questions of family, sexuality and inheritance, but can be ignored when it comes to political participation or other parts of the penal code, for example.

HZ (AMVEF): “But on the referential: religious one isn’t possible because [the penal code] is a law that is inspired by Napoleon; by the Napoleonic penal code; it still maintains the virtues and forms of that code.”

Inheritance is one of the issues that need to be debated within Islam, because the rules regarding inheritance are stipulated in the Koran. The proposals to reform the penal code is more complex. On one hand questions such as adultery and pre-marital sex are strictly regulated in the religious texts, although these texts are currently only applied to women, socially at least. The penal code itself on the other hand is derived from Napoleonic law, which renders the penal code in its entirety secular.

Some rights-based organisations are far stricter on remaining in the rights referential.

NR: “Us in AMDF we couldn’t use the religious referential in our arguments because we find that there is a contradiction; there are discriminations in some texts; there is violence in some texts – we cannot use what suits us. So for us, we remain true and as an association of Human rights we aren’t supposed because even the Human rights organisations with a capital H don’t base themselves on religion.”
This is due to the perceived risk of being locked into a religious discourse if it is adopted in the first place. Being locked into the religious discourse could limit the campaigns the NGOs engage with in the future. Issues that are clearly and indisputably against Islam, such as freedom of conscience, homosexuality or other questions of sexuality may become extremely difficult to speak of if the adopted point of view is Islam. The rights-based organisations, who refuse religious referential, are nevertheless prepared to work in coalition with organisations who use mixed referential and with religious experts.

AM: “And for example in regards the family law the strategy that was used by the women’s rights movement – it could be the same by the way now for the inheritance – it’s alliances; looking for alliances with religious people who call themselves open, liberal; democratic. But we don’t hold the speeches of those religious people; it is they who defend their cause to say that there is no contradiction.”

This way they benefit from the religious arguments that support the cause without being locked in the discourse themselves.

7.4 Traditions

“Traditions”, “mentalities”, “conservative mentalities”, “traditional mentalities” and occasionally also “culture” are referred to by the interviewees frequently as the source of inequality and oppression in Morocco. These “bad traditions” are often experienced through learned mentalities of certain factors of the society, often those living in rural areas. “Bad traditions” and “mentalities” governed by them are patriarchal, against equality and in general backward. They stand as the antithesis of modernity.

AE (ARFEDEC): “There are difficulties. There are mentalities, mentalities of people who don’t accept that their wives come here. In the institutions, in the institutions of the state
there are for example those who say to women that they shouldn’t come to the associations, but there aren’t a lot of those. They are mentalities that need to be changed with time. The mentalities that remain, there are a lot that remain, they remain in large percentage of the population who have traditional mentalities.”

Traditional mentalities affect both the general public and the local and even national authorities.

BA: “We were blocked; we were faced with a traditional mentality. I mean the judges still have the same mentalities as before.”

“Bad traditions” are also to blame for the current systems of governance based on autocracy and are present in current texts of laws.

MZ: “There is also the problem of mentalities, because when we have a judicial article that is written, so there is always the notion which is always very ambiguous in the article, and that gives to the man who has the power to judge or to give his decision the liberty to do so from him personal point of view.”

In the absence of clear legislative articles the police, the judiciary and other authorities are free to impose their traditional mentalities on daily practices and decisions that govern women’s lives. Bad practices by the police or hospitals in treatment of women victims93 of violence are seen to be caused by traditional mentalities. Lack of access for women’s NGOs to local meeting rooms, permits for organising public events and limited access to funding are also often blamed on mentalities.

93 All Moroccan women’s NGOs choose to employ the word “victim” when speaking of women who have experienced domestic or sexual violence. One participant explained the use of the term in the following manner: HZ: “Because victim; yes, because there is an aggressor, direct or symbolic. That can be the state if we are talking about institutional violence and so there is someone who is subjected to it and so it is a situation that isn’t normal.”
These “bad traditions” or “mentalities” are present in the society, in the interpretation of national legislation as well as in the interpretation of religion. These “bad traditions” have also interfered in the “true meaning” of Islam and in the interpretation of the Koran and other religious texts that provide the basis for Islamic jurisprudence. The “true meaning” can be recovered through Ijtihad, as faith-based organisations believe. This is how Ijtihad and return to the original meaning of Islam as providing equality and dignity to all believers becomes part of “good traditions”, which in turn help to shape modernity.

NR: “[We work with] feminist associations who are convinced that our patrimony in our cultural capital and of course in our culture is constituted also of religious components. We can find the arguments in favour of equality and emancipation and promotion of women’s rights.”

Both rights-based and faith-based organisations refer to “mentalities” as an obstacle for women’s rights and equality.

LX (Justice et Spiritualité): “I cannot deny or ignore that there is also an important baggage of tradition and of masculine reading during 14 centuries. So you want us to change in one strike, it’s not possible. Like I told you, we are going slowly. So there are even women who are so used to, to listening, to hearing, to living in the middle; that they begin to believe that it is the reality, that it is Islam.”

Many organisations perceive bad traditions to affect mentalities in different regions to different levels. Rural areas are viewed as inherently more traditional than urban centres. Also, areas where agriculture and land ownership are of greater importance seem to harbour greater control of women.
AN (Assanaa Annisaya): “The mentalities of the region (small town, North Atlantic coast) are somewhat more difficult than on the other regions of Morocco: the region is dominated by the rural and by agriculture, which carry with it conservative and traditional mentalities.”

Interviewees relate differences from different areas. In the Southern area of Souss, where women have traditionally been the breadwinners as carpet weavers their mobility is described as less restricted. In the area of Marrakech tourism has brought in openness towards the West and towards some ideas perceived as Western. Many of these examples are little more than anecdotal, as no research to the differences exists.

Regional differences aren’t only linked to “traditions” and “mentalities”. Sometimes a far bigger constraint comes from the lack of infrastructure.

AT (Association de Tazenakht): “A major problem in the rural world in general, whether here or in all of Morocco they suffer from, especially here, is the roads. It is true that in contrast to other villages they have water and electricity. [...] The women, sometimes they do 16 km on back of animals, on an ass or whatever for the road where they can find; at least a normal route where the transports can enter. [...] It’s great to do projects, it’s great to think of future projects, work on the projects, but a huge and primordial blockage is the roads. Not everyone, not all the women can come here and take advantage of the advancement.”

“Bad traditions” may indeed be disguising economic and infrastructural problems in other regions too. Questions of land ownership in agricultural areas are sure to play a role in the control of women. In Souss region in south of Morocco women have always
worked as carpet weavers and merchants and can be the main breadwinners of families. Perhaps coincidentally, there are no reports of domestic violence in the region. “Bad traditions” are often discussed as forming part of men’s mentality and their defence in controlling women. Women also come to internalise “bad traditions”. Patriarchal norms are restricting women through societal pressure, but many have also been socialised into believing that these limitation apply to them. NGOs are faced with battling the norms on both levels.

*L (Women Shoufouch): “There are people who won’t want to make the debate evolve exactly because there is maybe a macho mentality that remains. There are also women who don’t accept the fact of talking about a taboo subject because that, how to say it, because there is a mentality that reigns, the fact that a girl who respects herself and who dresses in respectful manner will never be harassed, so even from the side of the women there are some who don’t want to admit that they have been harassed, because that indirectly means that they don’t respect themselves or that they are not respectable.”*

Although women may suffer greatly from the “traditions”, “myths” and “stereotypes” that govern their actions and silence their complaints, it may be difficult to move beyond these harmful “traditions”. The strategy most NGOs hope will eventually work is concentrating public discourse on these stereotypes, highlighting them through different media and trying to gain public support for alternative discourses.

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94 Both of the interviewees from this area confirmed this fact. Both also referred to a government study into domestic violence conducted in the area, in which no cases of violence were reported. This research has not been able to get hold of the said study. One of the participants reflected, whether the understanding of violence may be different in the area or fear of authorities greater than the fear of violent spouses, but in light of never being confronted with issues of violence through their work with women in the area both regarded violence by and large not to be a significant issue.
MM (Femme pour le Développement et la culture): “But the big problem, really the big problem is ignorance. It’s the big problem. When we are ignorant we don’t seek to change; we are content with what we have; we think about what other say; we take it for the truth and we let them go with it. But when we are educated; when we have a great vision of the world, then we try to change. We look for real solutions.”

“Traditions” are allowed to reign due to lack of education. Literacy training and public awareness can give women access to modern ideas; make them realise their full potential and begin to demand their rights. Few of the NGOs are looking to analyse what, if anything causes these traditional mentalities to remain powerful. The assumption is that with more public awareness work and with time, modernity will win and “bad traditions” give way. Modernity marked by gender equality stands on the side of reason and justice, and will inevitably triumph in the end.

BA: “And also we are now on the 20th century so really we need a change in mentalities.”

Reform of the family law, lifting of the reserves on the CEDAW, greater number of girls attending school until secondary level, men’s support for women’s rights and women’s outspokenness are all signs of developments towards a modern society.

BA: “But we can say anyway that in our society there has been change. In our society there has been an opening. The women... it’s not like before: they don’t dare to speak; they don’t dare to criticise; they don’t dare to tell their suffering. Now they come to the support centres; they say I have this, I have this, I have this, that’s very important.”

Women’s position is society is presented as a benchmark for modernity and development. By looking at the position of women in any society we can determine where the country
stands in terms of international development rankings. This includes looking at the statistics around women’s participation as well as general trends in the society.

AM: “We know that it is in the interest of the state to modernise its structures; we also know that modernisation can only happen through the question of women’s rights, because we really touch the... we really touch the family unit.”

The same is true for political parties and movements. A movement made up of men alone is locked into the past. In order to evolve and embrace modernity a movement – even an Islamist one – must include women at all levels of participation.

LX: “To advance, to improve, he [the founder, Abdessalam Yassine] always said that women’s participation is needed. I mean a movement cannot advance; cannot go further; cannot put; cannot give results and objectives we want if women do not participate.”

Although the Islamist discourse around women and modernity is very similar to the rights-based women’s organisations’ idea of women’s participation as a benchmark for modernity, rights-based organisations see the Islamists as a threat to modernity95. Another threat is posed by lack of young members in rights-based organisations. As public support for Islamist political parties and movements grows, unless rights-based groups can attract young people they fear society may retract in terms of the achievements made for women.

BA: “Because if we don’t have young people; we don’t have young girls and boys who believe in the cause, we will not have after, after, of course, 30 years, we will no longer have change. Maybe we will retract. And especially if the Islamist mentality will be stronger etc.”

95 As discussed in Chapter II. For more detailed discussion on the matter, please see Guessus (2011).
Rights-based NGOs see evidence that their work with the public is bearing fruit however. An indication that the population is outgrowing “bad traditions” is the acceptance of the work of women’s NGOs in communities.

HE (Association Ennakhil): “They begin to understand and after taxi drivers, I know several of them, now they bring cases to the association. If they listen to it, they distribute information, they do the word of mouth to other women who get in their taxi or who talk about their problems: that is very good. We haven’t achieved the ideal and if we achieve the ideal we have succeeded but there is still work to do.”

Are “mentalities” or “traditions” merely an excuse for excluding women though? There are indications that issues, such as access to finance and grants and questions of land ownership may co-exist with questions of “patriarchal traditions”.

HE: “They [the government] put more emphasis on artisans knowing well that 90% of the artisans are men. And they didn’t work to increase the number of women participants in the artisan chambers. It is very important because there are many opportunities that women don’t know exist. It is evidently the people who are in the decision making, in the artisan chambers who know and profit.”

Without further research into the correlations between economic structures and “bad traditions” the evidence remains anecdotal. It seems, however that NGOs could benefit from such an analysis, instead of naming “bad traditions” or “mentalities” alone as the source of inequality. These “bad traditions” and “mentalities” are treated as issues pertinent to lack of education. NGOs are now also working with issues of women’s land rights and economic independence, but “traditions” and “mentalities” are rarely discussed in the context of economics.
Advancement in the society is marked by a change in traditional attitudes. Modernity and development then become the opposite of bad traditions. Gender equality and women’s increased awareness of their potential in building the society are part of modernity, as are open, liberal views of men who are not afraid to give women more freedom. Women’s rights stand in opposition to bad traditions and are the first step towards development. On the other hand, Ijtihad also opposes these “bad traditions” and “patriarchal mentalities”. Rights-based and faith-based groups regard each other’s referential and goals as opposing their own ones. Both however align themselves similarly in regards to “traditions” and “mentalities”. For both, these “traditions” and “mentalities” create a block for women’s advancement in the society and for both the “traditions” and “mentalities” oppose the modernity they seek.

7.5 “Good traditions” – foundations of Moroccanness

Although all of the NGOs refer to “bad traditions”, which are holding back the society from development, it is not easy to define them in relation to “good traditions”, the foundational pillars of Moroccanness. NGOs are fighting against traditional mentalities but simultaneously find themselves defending their work against accusations that they are opposing or aiming to surpass the “good traditions”.

HZ: “The question of equality, in the communication it shouldn’t pass by the universal. It should pass by something from the Moroccan patrimony, examples taken from Moroccan history.”

Family values and family unity is part of good traditions, and thus many organisations, both faith-based and rights-based, opt for mediation as the first recourse in cases of domestic violence.
BA: “Because our battle is the family: it’s a harmonious family, equalitarian family; a family that believes really on the principles of human rights.”

While Ijtihad is an important tool, Islam itself is an integral part of the Moroccan culture and respected as such. When talking about equality, NGOs often find themselves stressing that it isn’t about taking power from men. Nor is the work of the women’s organisations trying to turn women against “good traditions” and Islam.

KE (Alliance des Femmes du Maroc): “So they told us that you come to change women against us. They don’t let their women to assist our classes because they say, oh, you have, we are Muslims and you have a different idea, you want to imitate the West and something like that. Our wives are satisfied, why do you… So with our efforts we tried to convince them that what we do is not against Islam, nor democracy, nor their sake.”

Culture, patrimony or good traditions – whatever name we wish to give them – are also an important resource for women’s NGOs. Religion alone is not enough to translate values and goals between global and local, and the good parts of culture are needed to root global values into the local context. Using culture as the reference helps respond to criticism of importing values and ideas from the West. A pertinent and a very concrete example of translating global values to Moroccan cultural context is the adaptation of Slutwalk to Morocco. The organisers wished to open the debate on sexual harassment, found the values of the global Slutwalk movement inspiring, but quickly came to realise that the wording, the strategy and some of the values of the movement would not be accepted.

L: “So in fact Slutwalk we saw very well that it wouldn’t go well with Moroccans, a walk of sluts isn’t doable in a Muslim country with quite traditional values and all that. So for
us to be accepted we said we needed a more adapted name, a name that would speak to Moroccans too because not everyone understands. So I said we should do a wordplay because often when we do wordplays it sticks faster and so in fact the phrase they say often when we are on the street is manshoufouch, because we can’t drink so I did Women Shoufouch so then there is women, the cause of women and the frequent expression that refers to sexual harassment.”

The group translated the name into Moroccan both linguistically and culturally. Moroccan language here is part of the patrimony, as is the rejection of the word slut as disrespectful of women. The wording is an adaptation of what is described as part of bad traditions – the harassment of women. The group has appropriated a word that plays a part in patriarchal culture denigrating to women and turned it into a pro-women statement.

Sometimes certain events, rather than vague references to culture can help localise problems and highlight their importance in the society. Such examples are the suicide of Amina Filali in 2012 after she was forced to marry her rapist, which attracted great public debate on rights of rape victims, or the Tabit affair in the 1990s. These examples that have horrified large masses of Moroccans, have shown, that there is an authentic Moroccan sentiment against such atrocities committed to women and girls. There is no need to speak of human rights, abuses of power such as this are wrong.

FM: “And there was the Tabit affair. Tabit was a divisional police commissioner who abused several women and young girls, he abused his power, he harassed, he raped several women with girls and he filmed all of it. And we grouped together the national committee and a lot of associations to organise a march against violence against women in the first time in history. It was of course refused by the authorities. We couldn’t have the march, but it was a form of advocacy. And we started the advocacy against violence
against women. So by the case of this Tabit problem we established that there is violence and we need to break the silence around the violence against women.”

As the march was cancelled, women’s NGOs thought of other ways to combat violence and opened day centres for women victims of violence. Activism concentrated on receiving funds for the centres that were providing medical, psychological and legal assistance to women victims of violence and encourage them to speak out and seek help.

7.6 International influences

The women’s movement was born in Morocco after the 1995 Beijing conference, and activists were already well connected to women’s movements in the West and the South when activism only began in Morocco. Activists in Morocco were searching for advice and experiences of those abroad.

HZ: “Why did we invite at the time the Tunisians and the Algerians? Because the Tunisians and the Algerians were ahead of us on the question of violence.”

The West and Western feminists have been a help and an inspiration to Moroccan feminists. The West, the “other” also works as a mirror to reflect upon one’s own position. French colonialism is rarely discussed, and little analysis on women’s position in pre- and post-colonised Morocco enters the debates about women’s position, at least in the conversations with a Western researcher. Interviewees seem to accept the situation of today and regard the benefits it gives in today’s world without an analysis of historical inequalities.
FA (Association Femmes Démocrates): “European feminism has helped the Moroccan movement a lot in the transition. It was easy to work with the French feminists because of the colonisation and Francophonisation of the country.”

Both the West and Moroccan tradition feature in the strategies for advocacy of both rights-based and faith-based organisations. Collaboration with European, North-African and Middle Eastern women’s groups dates back to the Beijing conference in 1975. Rights-based and faith-based NGOs are studying Global campaigns for ideas and adopting strategies from international feminist movements, such as women’s tribunals, which are organised annually in Rabat.

BK (Mountada Ezzahrae): “I like the, that study on women mothers, the movement of global mothers, the global movement of mothers, it’s excellent. It’s in Europe: it’s excellent, I liked it. It is one of the themes we work on so I read that study to have ideas; to see how they, the women; the feminist movements in Europe and in the whole world have developed their demands as real demands.”

This often leads to accusations of importing imperialist ideas to Morocco, but only the rights-based organisations are asked to defend their position in regards to adopting ideas from the West.

FM: “So the accusations: you are aligned with the West, there, you are financed by the World Bank [...] by aid organisations form abroad, by imperialism, by the Americans, oh, all the accusations you can imagine.”

Defending themselves against the accusations of importing Western ideas NGOs have claimed these ideas as belonging to everyone, much like they feel about human rights.
AE: “There are ideas, thoughts, that are universal, for example the thinking around the concept of gender, concepts of feminists in all the world. They aren’t foreign ideas but feminist ideas.”

French-, and more often also English language capacities are a vital asset for NGOs who wish to attract funding and publicity, develop their international networks and access international advocacy and legislative documents.

HL (Aspirations Féminines): “For this year in general we plan to make our publications in two languages: French and Arabic. [...] In general French is for the other. Those who don’t speak Arabic, to give them a point of view on the association, on what the association wants [yanii] so that the other know... So that the other also has access to the information, even within Morocco.”

The participant refers also to the Francophone population of Morocco, which includes a university educated urban young minority who have graduated from French language private schools and have difficulty in reading and writing Arabic.

“International” also refers to Arab and North-African partners. Some of the older women’s organisations in Morocco, who are familiar with accusations of Westernisation, have focused many of its international partnerships to other Arab countries in order to counteract the accusations.

FM: “The means we have made for activism for advocacy also, the networks in the UAF and members on the level of Arab, on the level of Maghreb, on the international level, that’s it.”
Working with the women’s movements from the neighbouring Tunisia and Algeria can be easier than working with those from the Gulf or Europe as the languages and cultural traditions of the three countries have several commonalities.

7.7 Democracy

Democracy is an important concept in the work of the NGOs. While some of them recognise the inherent contradictions of relying on an autocratic king for women’s rights development while wishing for further democratisation, most of the NGOs have in fact began problematizing the accepted notion of Democracy, which relies solely on institutions and assumes a universal citizenship outside of inhibiting power structures. Feminist conceptions of democracy are multiple, many of them aiming to imagine new ways to achieve social justice. Because the actors give such multiple and in-depth critiques of liberal democracy and insightful feminist alternatives to the liberal model of democratisation, I will present them as a list. This is not a conclusive list of the participants’ concept for a feminist democracy in Morocco, but highlights some of the important ideas.

ADFM: “Yes but democracy, what is democracy? It is the rights of all the citizens too. Democracy: I give someone the power; he can do what he wants with people? No. [...] Democracy it is democracy for everyone, as well for men as for women.”

NR: “So how can we talk about democracy while attacking human and women’s rights, and we think we find in women the first target to, let’s say, confirm or to invalidate our political identity or specificity. So for us, all democrats should mobilise and all the same the modern people who are for evolution of history should mobilise and remain vigilant so that there is no regression, so that as we have attained such a level of mobilisation of the streets we need to be responsible at the same time; to take responsibility to protect
human rights and to protect the gains and not to allow a regression and not to allow a threat to women’s rights.”

AN: “The values that our association represents are the humane values: human rights and citizenship of women. We want to participate in a democratic society, where violence or discrimination against women don’t exist.”

KE: “Democracy is not only food. Democracy is whenever you go you find what you are looking for. [...] So whenever a woman is in place she can speak also her problems, they neglect the needs of women. See?”

LX: “If we are talking about democracy: we want democracy. What is happening now for us is very far [from democracy]. It’s not democracy for us. So if we want democracy we want... we hoped to organise conferences and discuss the problem and make everything clearer, talk about the constitution, that’s true, but a constitution where people participate. We want a constitution where people participate in the establishment of the constitution; that isn’t established by some well-known heads.”

HZ: “So democracy should be based on equality as a founding principal: equality between men and women and equality between different categories of men; equality between different categories of women.”

FA: “The question of women’s rights and their defence cannot be separated from the question of political equality.”

As these comments demonstrate, democracy should not end at institutions. Women’s NGOs see the purpose and main building blocks of democracy in equality, participation and in each citizen having a stake in the society. Democracy means participation at all
levels of society, from girls having the same right to schooling and play as boys to citizens having a say in the constitution. Democracy means that everyone’s rights are guaranteed and everyone can live free from fear of violence. Democracy and women’s participation are intrinsically linked. Quotas are needed to ensure women access to power.

BK: “The state should speak of a possibility of having a certain quota in the electoral law so that women can access the decision making positions that were in relation to the parliament but in all positions of decision making: in the administration, in the embassies; in all decision making positions.”

Most actors recognise and denounce the currently prevailing politics of window dressing in putting women to the front without giving them real access to decision making.

LX: “We want women’s real participation, we want participation in the real sense, we don’t want an image. Not a question to say there you are, it’s real. They are participating, we have 30-40% women; that is an image. We want real participation. If she is there, she is there to participate, to give her point of view, to also participate in the decisions. We don’t want the woman just there: that’s make-up.”

Women’s rights are not the only consideration for democracy however, and while the activist agree, that institutions alone, especially the ones currently in place in Morocco or elsewhere don’t make democracy, women’s rights alone do not make a society democratic either. Both are needed, and sometimes there is a trade-off.

HZ: “How to reconcile the between the question of women and the question of democracy? Which is the priority? Which is the priority? Is the question of women or of
democracy? Because democracy doesn’t necessarily bring the question of equality. The democracies in Europe haven’t brought the question of equality.”

There is also fear that as has happened in the history of postcolonial North-Africa, including Morocco, women’s rights and participation gets side-lined when larger societal concerns for democratisation take place, as is happening with the Arab Spring.

Common problems identified with the current organisation of the state are over-personalised positions of power within the state and local authority structures. No institutionalised channels for complaints, gender policies and funding structures exist, but compliance to policies and permission and funding for civil society groups depend on personal contacts. Another great problem is the freedom of judges to make judgements at the periphery of law that is too vague to limit them. Those who view democracy as an institutional structure lament the lack of democratisation in most of the royal commissions and other state bodies.

AE: “We feel when we are working with individuals; with judges, with the police; we feel it but the relationship between civil society for one part and the state on the other part must be institutionalised. For the durability and viability of the work and to work with the other associations in the same way.”

Personalisation of government and local authorities means that there are few institutional channels for NGOs to follow in order to receive permissions or funding and to be able to pressurise the authorities to apply laws and procedures that can help women. This personalisation of politics can sometimes work in the advantage of NGOs too, but each time the power changes, all the work needs to recommence from the beginning.
AT: “The advocacy for the hospital: we had a festival of... a big exhibition of carpets of Taznakht, the minister was here and I had the opportunity to ask – it was a direct type of thing, it wasn’t organised. I asked the help to have the hospital. He invited me to Rabat. I explained a bit more what I wanted exactly. I had a meeting with Mme the Minister for health. And after what happened in the Arab world, after the demonstrations and the constitution nobody had the time. Now I am still waiting for reply.”

Without institutionalisation any advances made on local or national level in advocacy are erased at every election or change of civil servants.

The state, in the opinion of many women’s organisations, both faith-based and rights-based, also engages in politics of window dressing, where laws are passed but not applied. Passing laws on equality and women’s political participation can thus not constitute advancement in democratisation.

MZ: “Also there is an obligatory quota that women participate in the political life. The political parties in all of Morocco have taken women and... but who are not well trained whether it be on the level of human rights also, and they took women it’s just to add to the number of representatives of each party. But these women, they have exposed these women on the list so that people could give their voice, but after they always have the very marginalised role because they are not trained, most of all.”

There are contradicting forces at play, where parts of the state machinery support women’s participation, but do not wish to offend the more conservative forces. Laws are passed by one section of the state to advance women’s position in the society, but the same laws are not applied by those sections responsible for application. Although the last government seemed eager to pass equality legislation, the same political parties who were
NGOs are often trying to balance their own role with the state structures, hoping to influence the state in a positive manner without being accused of co-optation. Many feel that close working relationship with the government is more useful than a mere critical and antagonistic stand against them.

*IL*: “*From our side we try to do a bit of work and advocacy. It is useful for us to do, not to put pressure, but it’s a bit like working is parallel with what the minister for education is doing, to educate him even more so that their work would be even more effective. [...] We work in advocacy not to show that the minister hasn’t done his work, no, but to say that there are efforts but they are not sufficient.*”

Most organisations regarded the new constitution as a step towards further democratisation, but some also disagreed. While rights-based organisations are keen to support new legislative initiatives, they recognise that application remains the main problem. Many still concentrate on the application of the new family law eight years after it was introduced, while maintaining that the constitution, as well as other new legislation is important.

### 7.8 Is support for the monarchy anti-democratic?

Women’s NGOs face a dilemma when it comes to the powers of the king. On one hand a strong monarch may hinder democratisation, but in the other hand both Hassan II and his son Mohammed VI have shown themselves as protectors of the rights of women. With the first moudawana campaign in 1992 women’s NGOs began by appealing to the government for a reform, but Hassan II addressed them and asked for questions of
women and family to be addressed to him instead as the commander of the faithful. Since then, too, women’s NGOs have found more support for their initiatives from the new king Mohammed VI than from any of the successive governments in place. In the view of many rights-based organisations the institution of Monarchy is required for the stability of the country and to keep the Islamists under control.

FA: “Luckily the Moroccan king has always protected women from the massacre of the Islamists. The Islamists want women to remain dependent.”

The problem with democracy is also the fact that political parties don’t seem to listen to women, whereas the king does. Other civil society activists have also noticed that asking the parliament or the government for meetings or legislative changes is often in vain, whereas the king is more likely to listen.

HE: “So we always have the traditional history because the moment we have problems, we no longer have a person who responds, we go directly to the king. It’s the king who settles; it’s the king who decides; it’s the king who finds solutions. [...] And when the king settled it everyone respected the decisions of the king and couldn’t demand something else.”

The king also has his critics in the faith-based groups that work in the margins of the law. The recognised Islamist party PJD recognised the supreme authority of the king when they entered official politics, but groups linked to the Justice and Spirituality follow the movement’s lead in opposing the monarchy.

LX: “We always say we are against a whole population being governed by one person. There is one person who alone decides for everyone, who thinks for everyone. We want everyone’s participation. Despotism… we want to change it.”
Some right-based organisations also recognise the risk of using the king’s good will to gain women’s rights while speaking of democracy.

AM: “That’s a question we can always ask, the arbitration of the king cannot go but further in the sense of women’s rights. But democracy, it’s a whole. We were just saying, it can be a little paranoiac somehow to ask for the arbitration of the king and to say that women’s rights are part of democratic rights; as in we cannot have democracy without women’s rights while we also know that we cannot have democracy without limiting the powers of the monarchic institution. So it’s very risky. [...] Even though it would be... it is in our... it would be pragmatic, in our favour or not in our favour, you know that in long term, is it in favour of democracy...?”

It, of course, depends on the conception of democracy each NGO holds, whether the role of the king in Morocco is seen as anti-democratic or not. Public criticism of the king is still regulated by law in Morocco, which is another reason why some NGOs, as well as other fractions of the civil society may present themselves as favourable to the king. If democracy is more about citizens’ rights than democratic decision making in the governing institution, then the role of the monarch is less of an issue. While most of the NGOs criticise the view of democracy that gazes only at institutions without considering who has access to citizenship rights, they also recognise institutions and governance to play an important role in democracy. In that case strong monarchy can be seen as an important transitory institution, whose role is to secure rights while transferring power slowly to the governing institutions.

ADFM: “In the current context I don’t think that absolute democracy; I mean it should be stipulated in the constitution then in that no matter what government couldn’t touch the rights of the citizens. Right. So if we were a; for example the Islamists got to power
and had no power in terms of the constitution it wouldn’t bother me. They could govern; they couldn’t touch the rights of people. That is the problem, for the moment: who holds certain prerogatives is important for a period, for certain transitions. Because if we give all the power to the Islamists, that’s dangerous too.”

In praising the king for his political will to advance equality legislation, some forget to give due appraisal to whom it really belongs.

**MM:** “It wasn’t the king who defended women’s rights; it was the women’s organisations in Morocco. The king only presented the cake after it was well prepared and cooked. [...] And it will always be like that: nothing will be given; we will always need the fight of women.”

Although the Islamist party came into power through the most democratic elections Morocco has ever seen, few women’s organisations are happy. Women in Justice and Spirituality don’t believe any Moroccan electoral system where the king is involved can be democratic, whereas rights-based organisations fear for reverting of women’s rights, which for them constitutes an act far more undemocratic than the control of elections. Even the women’s organisations affiliated to PJD aren’t entirely happy, as women of the party are still side-lined from important positions within the party. Moroccan government in 2011 has fewer women than it has had in over ten years: at least in terms of accessing political roles women are not benefitting from the new democratisation that has occurred since the Arab Spring.

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96 As discussed in Chapter 5, emergency meetings were organised between rights-based organisations. Justice and Spirituality on the other hand sees any elected governments within existing political structure as part of the corrupt regime.
7.9 Networks and divisions

As discussed in chapters II and V, antagonism between rights-based and faith-based organisations is endemic, especially with actors who have been involved since the early 1990s and lived through the great debates regarding the National Plan of Integration of Women into Development. Rights-based organisations especially are often dismissive of faith-based organisations and Islamists in general. Antagonism is based on stereotypes of what rights-based organisations believe faith-based groups to stand for.

AE: “And there are for example the associations who work, as you said, with referential that is traditional. They are... it is a contradiction with my work because they say to women that they must accept the submission and remain with their husband and after the husband it’s the father. “

Even when rights-based groups are faced with actual discourses of faith-based organisations, they often refuse to accept these discourses at face value. Rights-based organisations are keen to believe in a conspiracy of global Islamism which is always anti-women. While rights-based groups are keen to present diversity between their positions, same diversity is not observed when speaking of faith-based groups; rather they are all believed to be the same and to stand for the same political issues.

ADFM: “Yes but for example, because it’s true that they call themselves democrats, they want parity, but for me parity; when they say they want parity is it going to be the women of PJD who go to the parliament? It... it is true that it is democracy but at times we don’t know what to do. We have never worked with the Islamist associations nor the other parties, PJD, never.”
Faith-based organisations are keener to show their openness on this level, and whereas rights-based organisations may remark on the hypocrisy of a veiled women’s group activist after the recorder has been turned off, faith-based groups maintain that veiling and other religious customs are each woman’s personal choice and has no effect on the way they will be treated.

_LX:_ “With women who are members of the movement, with women from outside of the movement, veiled women, unveiled women.”

One faith-based organisation interviewed for this study recounted of having tried to organise a meeting across all women’s groups to discuss political parity, for which all organisations stand for, but having found it difficult to connect with the rights-based organisations. Faith-based organisations are also aware of the polarity of their position in regards to rights-based organisations. Younger generations of faith-based activists are sometimes looking for a dialogue with both rights-based civil society and secular civil servants and are disappointed to find themselves excluded.

_BK:_ “But there is a wall if you wish a historical wall which – I am so to say young, I am not one of the old Islamic activists. I am a new face. I tried for example on the question of quota, I tried to organise a joint commission with the other organisations that are, if you wish, socialists. We made a joint commission to write a memorandum, the whole group applied themselves on that memorandum. We agreed on certain points but didn’t agree on certain but the important point was that we did one. Because sometimes we find that certain people from the Islamic currents and certain people from the socialist currents, because they already have a history of if you wish a combat of convergence so they physically they cannot be contented.”
Not all rights-based organisations or organisations who don’t themselves subscribe to the Islamist ideology are adhering to the idea of strict dichotomy and antagonism between rights-based and faith-based organisations, but even the ones who recognise the need to express different opinions in a society are unlikely to foster cooperation across referential.

**FF:** “We work with the prisoners of that prison but while working in parallel with [an Islamist] organisation. And so they do their work and we come and do our work and never have we thought of opting for, for example speaking unkindly of their organisation. They have their point of view.”

Faith-based groups also present themselves as more open about membership and each member’s ideology, although their view of their own openness is not shared by rights-based groups.

**LX:** “But we don’t have interest, we are against our principles in imposing people. I told you we want women’s participation, men’s participation. We want freedom of thought; freedom of participation. If there is a project where everyone participates it would be... it is contradictory if we impose someone something, it doesn’t make sense.”

Although most of the organisation on both sides of the divide share goals of improved health services, especially in regards to reproductive health, women’s literacy and fighting women’s poverty and even discuss these problems in same terms, cooperation between rights-based and faith-based organisations is unimaginable.

The fact is often ignored by rights-based groups, that only a fraction of Moroccan Islamists are represented in the official political structures. Instead of recognising the different positions within the two major and several minor Islamist movements in
Morocco, “the Islamists” are talked about as a coherent homogeneous group with one voice. Islamist, when the term is used by people defining themselves as such, refers merely to those who wish to make Islam a public and political religion and the basis of the state and the law. Great differences exist in how they wish this to come about, and what the Islamist state should look like, however.

Some speakers, who consider themselves either secular, meaning that religion is a private matter and has no place in public and political discourse, or consider themselves atheist, at times refer to believers, who nevertheless wish to keep Islam out of politics “Muslims”.

*FA:* “*But the moment was excellent, left and right parties, Muslims and socialists and human rights organisations marched together against violence and for parity*”.

The debate on Islam belongs to everyone and refers to the intersectional identities of women activists in the Moroccan civil society as simultaneously secular and Muslim.

*FA:* “*The feminists in Morocco are also Muslims, so this debate is not a criticism of Muslims, but a debate on political Islam which poses a threat on democracy.*”

When observing the discourses of the two sides of this perceived binary from the outside, the discourses may seem very similar. At times rights-based organisations use the very same references as the faith-based organisations. Words like dignity (al Karama) are frequently used by both, and references to family unity are localised in not only Moroccan culture, but the narratives about women’s role in Islam.

*BA:* “*Because our battle is the family: it’s a harmonious family, equalitarian family; a family that believes really on the principles of human rights.*”
It seems paradoxical then, that rights-based groups accuse faith-based groups of contradicting themselves by talking about women’s rights, when the references and narratives on both sides are the same. Of course, based on interviews and some document analysis alone it is impossible to understand the positions of the groups in relation to one another. Discourses that seem similar may gain different meanings depending on the position of the speaker. I wish nevertheless to underline the confusion here, of presenting the groups in terms of dichotomous positioning vis-à-vis women’s role and rights, when the discourses produced by the two groupings seem so similar.

Another divide exists within rights-based organisations as the newer, politically independent NGOs accuse leftist political women’s NGOs of co-optation to the goals of the party and to government as members of the politically affiliated NGOs are recruited to important posts.

*IL: “We are a bit far from the politics so if they are associations that work very closely with politics we avoid them.”*

Links to political parties and the state can cause problems of co-optation or make cooperation with other NGOs difficult due differences in political points of view. Working with the state can also help the NGOs in their own work. As long as NGOs manage to remain independent, feminists inside state structures may be the only way to keep women’s rights on the state’s agenda. As all state structures still work on very personalised level, it is important that women’s NGOs have allies within the structures.

*HZ: “I think we have to be inside. I don’t do it but now I think that we need to be inside, but when we are inside it is a big responsibility, I mean one must remain a civil society activist. [...] If for example a person is in the inside but doesn’t manage to influence they
should quit. [...] It is better that there are feminists inside the elected instances because if they aren’t there the question of equality will not come up.”

Small independent NGOs are sometimes reluctant to cooperate with large NGOs linked to political parties, as they fear that party politics will take precedent over women’s rights and equality. One organisation, which itself is closely affiliated with a leftist trade union criticises the large women’s rights NGOs of the opposite; of severing their links to the parties. According to the participant separating civil society too much from politics can mean cutting off important allies of the cause.

FA: “In all the world there is a problem of separation between feminists and political parties and feminists do things that aren’t linked to the work of the parties. Feminists can’t remain alone; coordination with other institutions, such as the political parties, state apparatus of health, education and environment is required. A woman is never just a woman but she has other interest, so we should cooperate. The feminist voice is in the minority but it will be stronger when it is shared with other sectors that work in the same interests.”

This question is not unique to Morocco, as feminists around the globe have tried to position themselves vis-à-vis states. Organisations need enough independence in order to criticise the state whenever it is warranted, but enough cooperation with the state to be able to direct resources to women’s rights and services to women; to ensure that women’s rights, education, health and domestic violence don’t become the sole responsibility of women’s civil society, but that the state will take both financial and administrative responsibility.
Many past collaborations between rights-based organisations have also struggled with questions of leadership, competition for funds and personal differences that inhibit cooperation. There are also differences in networking on national and regional levels.

AL (Association de quartier Assalam): “Often one finds that in the associations there exists an egotism that doesn’t permit cooperation with others or sharing of experiences.”

Networking and cooperation have nevertheless been vital for the success of earlier campaigns and for combatting the harsh criticism women’s NGOs met in the 1990s from conservative religious forces and continues to be important in putting pressure on the Islamist government. The law reforms themselves are also a testimony to the success of networking.

FM: “so we started to think about advocacy. And so for the advocacy we started to plan assembling members. Because we can’t do advocacy on our own, especially when it concerns a discriminatory law; especially when it concerns a specific law with links to the Shari’ah. And it was... imagine, it’s not straight forward or easy. And we thought and considered that Union de l’Action Féminine alone can’t stand against the... I don’t know, the consequences of what will happen when... when showing the bad parts of women’s personal status. It was like, like really... I don’t know. It frightened us.”

Indeed, at the time, in early 1990s many leftist feminist organisations and activists received religious fatwas due to their campaign and even personal threats to their lives. Problems of leadership in the past were also highlighted when the movement tried to work on vague guidelines.

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97 Fatwas and threats were discussed off the recorder in two interviews
HZ: “Sometimes they are personal battles; it is between equals who expose themselves; it’s the problem of leadership. It’s normal because we are a group of individuals who aren’t used to working together, so every time we had to construct everything.”

Many of the activists, who have been involved since the 1990s and the Moudawana campaigns see great improvement in the cooperation between women’s NGOs.

BA: “We have learned that if we are not a force, if we don’t have a very strong network we can’t win. We can’t win anything.”

Shared referential is important for networks to be successful. Faith-based groups sometimes find that they do not share the same referential with other faith-based groups in their network, and this leads to problems in their cooperation too.

BK: “For example we don’t see eye to eye with the Islamist associations who are against the international conventions. They find that the international conventions try to make a certain frame for family [...] that can make a certain international example that should be applied to everyone without paying attention to the specificities of our society. We say we must seek; we must study the conventions; the great; they have made a great gift to us for women’s rights and we must take advantage of that. We must speak our language through the conventions.”

But some networks are built on strategic essentialism alone without any referential unity. These can in fact sometimes work better, as the question of referential and ideology does not get on the way of the work. The network for schooling of rural girls acts solely on the understanding that girls should have access to education. Service provision organisations may also find it easier to define goals and actions than ideologies and referential.
MM: “No it’s not, what I just said, the members themselves, there is a link that joins the members. That link is women in themselves. The cause of women. Beyond that each member has their own personal ideology. [...] we haven’t delved more deeply into it because it is an association that has visible goals that are simple. We don’t go beyond rights of women because when we talk about ideology it’s Islam for example, it’s the religious side. It means how we see; what is our conception of things; how we see change.”

Young Islamists believe that this kind of strategic essentialism could also be at the basis of cooperation between rights-based and faith-based groups. Defining a referential on common vocabulary rather than political or religious ideology may also allow cooperation when joint positions are difficult to find.

BK: “But I hope that we have sent a message to the other; to the other women’s organisations that we can agree on several points and to have an individual circle and have a large circle; a small individual circle and a large circle where we can get together and work for the rights of women. And each can have their little circle where we don’t agree with each other on those points, but that doesn’t mean that we always have to be enemies; but we work for improvement of women’s rights.”

Organising around an issue, such as political parity could provide an entry point for dialogue between rights-based and faith-based organisations, if both were willing to leave ideology out of the conversation. Instead of beginning the collaboration with definition of joint referential, as has been the strategy of the rights-based women’s movement, the network could be organised around a single issue and dismantled after the campaign.
7.10 Constituency from “Real women” to elites

Women’s NGOs have also often met with criticism of looking after elites; normal women struggle with poverty and are not interested in laws or political participation and the women in NGOs are part of elites, looking after the needs of elites. To counteract this criticism NGOs use testimonies as part of their advocacy documents and even bring service users to meetings with politicians to voice their concerns and show that the work of the NGOs is relevant.

The narratives of real women and the social work, or proximity work as it is often called, with them has since been an important part of advocacy as it shows that the NGOs are basing their demands on the needs of those less fortunate than themselves. The bigger the diversity of the beneficiaries of the proximity work, the more legitimate the activism.

MZ: “So we have done a little bit a tour of Morocco to meet women of different regions, different mentalities, but who have the same recommendations, the same problems; the same suffering.”

Only the most straight-talking NGOs are willing to admit to elitism, either on the level of the activists, who need to be financially independent in order to dedicate their time to civil society activism, or even in terms of the work that is being done.

NR: “Yes but of course the battle of the feminists until now it is a battle of elites. It is a battle of elites and it is elite of Moroccan women who can play a role in the change of the situation of women in Morocco. But at the same time this elite reflects on the projects in favour of women so it is for the women it is for the masses that we are in action for. WE cannot pretend that an association responds to the needs of Moroccan women in general
but it can play a role as civil society to favour or to ensure the conditions of change for women.”

Although all actors must to some extent come from the elites for the simple reason that they are the women who are financially secure enough to be able to dedicate time to voluntary work in associations, there are also critical voices to the activism designed by and for middle and upper class women.

MM: “But when we say ‘Moroccan woman’, it’s very vague. It isn’t all Moroccan women. It’s a conflict of class. The poor Moroccan women... but rich Moroccan women who are in the high society doesn’t have problems. Maybe they have other problems, but the ones we talk about have economic problems and problems in their daily lives.”

The lack of class criticism within the NGOs that were born out of leftist political groups should be seen in the context of Moroccan socialism in general, which has from the 1950s onwards been a middle class struggle against the oppressive Monarchy rather than an economically informed political movement.

One of the development organisations interviewed for the study has experienced the other side of this story, as they are often used as a testimony to the work done in the region.

KI (Dar Al-Oumouma): “The local authorities, because I am known to be honest, every time there are official visits or productions on TV on the INDH, they come to my association to show how well the projects are working. That helps me for the future projects and to make my person and my work more valuable.”

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98 See chapter 4 for a detailed discussion on the history of the Moroccan political system.
The participant does not feel exploited by this practice; on the contrary, she has learned to use it for her benefit. In return to appearing as a witness of the progress made in the municipality, she is able to make her demands heard by the authorities. She also feels it is a testimony to her hard work and integrity. Development organisations in general, maybe due to their size or focus, seem closer to their constituency. When working with small communities it is important to gain the trust of the members.

AT: “So when I went to target the women in the villages in the 5 municipalities, being the only person who does the same profession of weaving, like the women. The same profession: I have the same profession as the women from the village of these municipalities. [...] I chose that cooperative because I am from there, and my husband too. It is easier for me to raise awareness with the women and to understand them as these women are from my municipality.”

Sometimes talk of constituencies cannot avoid a dichotomy between “us” and “them” – the women.

MZ: “So we do public awareness with women and also men on the necessity of women to leave their houses and to talk about their problems. We pass the message even to people who are normal sometimes, who have no level of intellect, so that we include them in the women’s rights to talk about their problems.”

When the constituencies are referred to as “women”, it creates a gap between the actors and the constituencies, and separates the actors from the category of women. This doesn’t make the actors men, as men are often the ones the NGO is trying to convince, but neither are they fully women anymore. In these discourses NGO activities become gender neutral defenders of rights of other –women. This may be a strategy to diminish the importance of class within the discourses. But “normal women” are defined here as
illiterate and less intellectual; elitism and class are still present, but can be understood more in terms of education than income.

Young people form a separate constituency, which may be difficult for the old women’s NGOs to reach. Young groups are closer in age, but may lack the analytical thinking around class on the other hand.

*ML (Women Shoufouch):* “We need to adapt to our generation. Because they [the older women’s NGOs] are still on the paper support, still on word of mouth and in fact now we must concentrate on the internet.”

### 7.11 Science and statistics

All of the NGOs are using a special language of scientificness and statistical inference of the cases they are campaigning for. Studies form the first step of advocacy. Many NGOs choose to spend money on hiring an external researcher with some academic credentials to conduct the studies. Often the studies use only the service users of the NGO as participants and sources of data, but make wide claims of representativeness in the wider society based on them. The language in which the studies are discussed creates another narrative of modernity, which is shared by the rights-based and the faith-based groups.

*IL:* “So we created a system of information that allows us to collect the data, I mean the data on the ground, the statistics from our side. It allows us to analyse and to prepare the advocacy document. Why? Because we understood that we really needed to do something. The problem is that people are not aware of the issue of girls.”

On closer inspection many of the studies are limited in scope and cannot be interpreted to have statistical inference. The fact of doing them is nevertheless an important advocacy
tool. The language used to describe them is also significant, in that it adopts a terminology of scientificness, which allows presenting the NGO and its goals as based on objectivity and rationality. Words such as “statistics”, “data”, “study”, “scientific” and “reality” are used in constructing the work of the NGO as legitimate and modern – “Not based on illusions”.

An example of scienticness is the campaign to legalise medically assisted abortions. It benefits from medicalization of the argument, which removes it from the moral debate. This has been largely done by medical doctors and is thus based on statistics and arguments based in medical sciences and professional opinions. Women’s organisations are happy to let the doctors take centre stage in the debate. Medicalization of the terms of modernity can lead to surprising pragmatic solutions to problems women face, as is evident from the story of a maternity hospital situated in the South of Morocco in a region where the lack of road networks and access to transport is the main issue limiting women.

KI: “Sometimes I tell them in the information sessions: if you don’t have the means to come here to give birth, then take the pill.”

It is not clear from the statement how useful this advice is and whether the contraceptive pill is indeed available and affordable to the women of the region. The campaign on abortion and the fact that the argument for the pill is made, however, shows that questions of sexuality may at times be discussed without getting into debates about morality, when they are addressed in the context of medicality.

Social realities are also used in defence of campaigns for women’s rights. These include qualitative studies into women’s lives and life stories of women’s centres’ service users. Basing their arguments on sociological research and what they put forward as facts of the
society is especially important to rights-based organisations that do not wish to engage in religious discourse. Relying on human rights alone would bring on criticisms of occidental values and lack of consideration for the local context. Qualitative data in form of women’s testimonies and quantitative data of service users can provide the grounding in the local context necessary to counteract these criticisms.

AM: “We, when we are told that; it’s universal to reject the universal. It’s something universal in our region unfortunately. But in our advocacy we also try to put forward the social injustices. And at that moment the universal referential is a possible response so that there wouldn’t be those injustices.”

Public awareness and service provision often leads to small scale studies of the problems of women who access the NGO that are then used as the basis of advocacy. Scientificness becomes an important language in advocacy and is used to claim that the campaigns touch all Moroccan women and are necessary to improve their lives.

FM: “And we established that the majority of the cases that we received; that we disseminated in the magazine 8th of March spoke of the personal status of women. So the majority of women, the majority of cases had a direct relationship with the problem of personal status. And we concluded that the personal status was a mechanism of discrimination against women.”

Public awareness campaigns may be designed as mere public awareness, but often both public awareness and service provision for women victims of violence serve the double role of providing a service and informing a study or collecting women’s stories to be used as part of campaigning. This does not diminish the importance of the service or public awareness campaign itself, but does demonstrate the importance NGOs afford to collecting data about the women they aim to serve.
7.12 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the main themes that appeared in the 24 research interviews conducted for this study. The chapter has shown the diversity of positions, referential and activities of the different NGOs. Sometimes these are easily traced between NGOs standing at different viewpoints on ideological lines. More often however the discourses intersect, and the binaries that are presented as static and rooted in deep beliefs are muddled. The evidence gathered from the interviews begins to show the narratives that are constructed in and about women’s rights, women’s role in the society and women’s activism in Morocco. The data begins to converse with the research questions this thesis presents, but also pose some questions of its own.

The next chapter brings the themes presented here into a dialogue with the literature and theories informing this study and the conjunctures the interview material has with the evidence gathered from the documents collected from NGOs. One of the main themes that arise is the importance of the referential to women’s activism, how the referential is defined and how it frames the work of the NGOs. Another important question discussed in the interviews was the link between democracy and women’s activism. Democracy has become an increasingly important topic for women activists in Morocco in 2011, but the activists are also alert to the new discriminations brought forward by democratisation of governing institutions. The fear of Islamist political movements and the strong position of the king create contradictions for women defining their activism in terms of democratisation. These contradictions also bring about feminist critique of the concept itself. Finally the consequences of these issues for women’s NGOs strategies and networking activities are discussed further in light of the evidence from the document analysis and theories of women’s activism. Some important issues raised by the NGOs
are discussed further in the conclusions of this study, such as the main problems of funding and volunteerism faced by NGOs. In the conclusion I also discuss the questions that remain and the little contributions that my participants have asked of me; mainly, my own recommendations as a feminist, who has observed to field of women’s activism in Morocco for several years.
Chapter 8
Translated modernities

This chapter brings together the theory discussed in chapter 2, the Moroccan context explored in depth in chapters 4 and 5, the evidence gathered from women’s NGOs’ publications and the 24 interviews with Moroccan NGO activists presented in chapters 6 and 7. The aim of this chapter is to discuss whether the theory of vernacularisation indeed captures the linguistic strategies and activist realities in the Moroccan context. The chapter first explores Merry’s theory of translating global norms to local context and how this theory speaks to the women’s NGOs activism in Morocco. The theory of translating global norms to local context is explored through the themes of human rights, NGO referential and language used in campaigns. Criticisms of Merry’s theory already presented in chapter 2 are highlighted here: human rights are not merely translated from global norms to local contexts, but are claimed as local in themselves by activists. Some suggested changes to the theory of vernacularisation are presented: the ways in which language is used by different women’s NGOs speak of modernity, but various versions of modernity are offered. When we focus in on the way in which “good” and “bad” traditions are presented, the language of science used and how democracy is defined, we begin to see the multi-faceted identities of NGOs resulting in different images of modernity. The conclusions we come to from the discussion of these concepts in relation to the empirical evidence from interviews and NGO documents suggests rethinking the binaries between rights-based and faith-based civil society in Morocco, and looking towards strategic alliances as a tool for furthering women’s rights.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Merry’s theory of translation. The themes best suited to exploring the idea of translation are human rights and choice of language and
referential as part of NGO strategy. All of the evidence points towards a more complex understanding of translation and vernacularisation, which embraces the different understandings of modernity within the Moroccan context. Next, the chapter expands the theme of translated modernities through its discussion on democracy and its links to women’s activism in Morocco. The theories of democracy that have been applied to political liberalisation in Morocco, and especially to the reform of the family law, assume that democracy is separate from equality, and democratisation only happens in the political institutions. The participants of this study, in contrast, presented their own version of democracy, which for many parts follows closely Alexander and Mohanty’s (1998) postcolonial feminist critique of democratisation theories: participants saw sexual politics and women’s citizenship as core value in democracy and understood democracy as an important societal process going beyond the institutions. The participants’ translation becomes a new model for democracy that takes into consideration much of the feminist theory on citizenship, participation and representation. This chapter discusses these understandings of democracy in light of feminist intersectional and post-colonial theories and theories of democratisation, Moroccan political history and the links made by participants between modernity and democracy. The situatedness of many women activists in political camps is noteworthy within this discussion, as is the role of the monarchy in Morocco.

Both “Good” and “bad” traditions are frequently referred to by all of the participants in the interviews as the sources of liberation and oppression. Throughout the 24 interviews the participants refer to “good traditions” as the cultural and social constructs that allow rooting women’s rights and equality to the local context. These references make vernacularisation possible and desirable in advocacy and public awareness. “Good traditions” are used by women’s NGOs in their advocacy and public awareness to reinforce the values of human rights and women’s greater role in society and make these ideas understandable and acceptable to the people. “Bad traditions” on the other hand
refer to those customs and discourses that perpetuate conservatism and backwardness. “Bad traditions” are linked to patriarchy and violence and are often explained to be mere “mental constructs” rather than cultural, social or religious references that can be located in texts or stories. Although all of the participants refer to both “good” and “bad” traditions, they seem to do so unthinkingly, without questioning the origin or form they take. In terms of translation “good” and “bad” traditions take on opposite roles: “good traditions” allow translation of international norms to local contexts, whereas “bad traditions” are responded to with the language of human rights. Both also have close links to each NGO’s understanding of modernity.

The language of science is used as an apparently non-controversial reference to modernity by all participants. Scientific language doesn’t only represent neutrality in the campaigns that are run by NGOs, but is also placed in a neutral position in the debate about modernity as either Western and imported or as a return to the golden past. Science, as an “objective viewpoint” stands in between these competing narratives of modernity. Language of science is mixed easily into religious and human rights referential due to its claims to transcend the dichotomous Western/non-Western modernities.

Finally this chapter considers what the linguistic strategies, understandings of modernity and levels of vernacularisation can teach us about the dichotomies present in the women’s NGO field in Morocco. As we unravel the complexities of language and referential in women’s activism in Morocco, what new possibilities for cooperation across political divisions present themselves?
8.1 Human Rights as local and modern

The Moroccan state has since the late 1990s adopted a language of human rights: international human rights declarations have become more important policy tools for Moroccan domestic and foreign policies since the enthroning of Mohamed VI, who personally took a stand to make human rights part of Moroccan national legislation. Human rights legislation is applied somewhat more rigorously since the setting up of state body Consultative Commission on Human Rights and the Justice and Reconciliation Commission examining (but not engaging in retributive justice for) violations of political and individual rights under the rule of Hassan II. While the actual human rights record of Morocco is still marred by violations regarding anti-terrorist action and political activism in the West-Sahara, political narratives use human rights in order to gain legitimacy. The constitution of 1996 recognises that Morocco still has work to do in order to abide by international human rights obligations, but that the state “reaffirms its determination” to do so (Moroccan Constitution 1996). The 2011 constitution states in its preamble that Morocco “affirms its attachment to human rights such as they are universally recognised” (Moroccan Constitution 2011). The attachment to human rights and to “equality of opportunity”, “good governance”, “participation” and “pluralism” are all linked to Morocco presenting itself as “a modern state” in this preamble. Mohammed VI in his first speech after his enthroning, and in many of the subsequent ones has referred to Morocco respecting and endeavouring to adhere to international human rights as they are universally known, as he did in his speech on the 9th of March 2011 in which he announced the latest constitutional reform99.

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These narratives on human rights are reflected in the documents that are produced by rights-based NGOs who use international human rights norms as their referential, but are referred to also by faith-based groups. The main women’s group related to the Islamist party PJD, Organisation for the Renewal of Women’s Awareness (ORWA) was the first faith-based group to articulate its goals in terms of both women’s rights as known internationally and of religion. This double referential was highly influenced by the group’s wish to participate in the Beijing Conference in 1995, where the group needed to have access to the language of international human rights. The language adopted by ORWA has allowed other groups, both faith-based and rights-based to mix the two referential in the Moroccan context, gaining recognition both at home and in the international platforms (Salime, 2011).

Many of the participants talked about the process of translating between the realities of Moroccan women and international human rights without being specifically asked about it. Human rights as reference and language are for many activists a domestic advocacy tool. As Morocco has signed all the international conventions, activists felt that the government should be pressured to adopt them.

**BK**: “We say we must seek; we must study the conventions; the great; they [conventions] have made a great gift to us for women’s rights and we must take advantage of that. We must speak our language through the conventions”.

The quote doesn’t refer merely to human rights conventions as a pressuring tool to be used in advocacy, but demonstrates the sophistication of thought involved in planning advocacy. The speaker, a young faith-based activist, applies her own interpretation of equality, inheritance and women’s role in the family for example. Her organisation does not adhere to some of the views held by Western feminists regarding divorce, child care and sexual liberty; instead she is suggesting the use of human rights language in phrasing
the particular advocacy goals she is campaigning for. This can mean using the right to family life or the rights of children to defend her idea of family unity, for example.

**BK:** “We have to demand that through the conventions that Morocco has signed [...] when we talk about the right of women to education, right of women, right of women for health, the right of women for maternity leave, the right of women... many, many women’s rights that have been mentioned in the conventions and that we are not talking about because we zoom in on the margin which is very small, which we don’t agree with, and we leave, if you can say, the diamond of the conventions that we don’t speak about.”

What BK means when she talks about the margin they (the faith based groups and PJD) don’t agree with, she means questions of equality in inheritance for example, already discussed in an earlier extract. Those women’s rights that centre around family, however are what she calls the “diamond”.

Cultural relativism is present in women’s NGOs’ narratives about human rights, modernity and traditions – both “good” and “bad”. Participants are keen to claim human rights as local and belonging to Moroccan and Islamic culture, opposing Eurocentric interpretations of “local” and “global” according to which the universal rights and the values they represent are Western in origin and thus inapplicable in non-Western cultures (Fox, 1999).

**NR:** “We are part of the world and of that evolution that leads towards respect and dignity of the person in the entire world.”

The participants’ assertion, that human rights belong to all cultures equally mirror’s Granzer’s findings in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia (1999). Questions of cultural
relativism became obvious as part of the ethics of conducting research in post-colonial society.

**AE:** “And there are for example the associations who work, as you said, with referential that is traditional. They are... it is a contradiction with my work because they say to women that they must accept the submission and remain with their husband and after the husband it’s the father. “

Of course the critique of faith-based women’s groups as “paradoxical” and “contradictory” is deeply rooted in the politics of division by Hassan II\(^{100}\) and wide public debate about the PANIFD and the reform of the Moudawana that divided the Moroccan public in the late 1990s.

**NR:** “From the creation of the associative feminist movement in the 80s we have always been in conflict with the Islamists. For us it’s the conservative current who have confronted us and who were always opposing our demands; who always constituted the contradicting force to our movement.”

This quote illustrates the politico-historical origins of the divide between rights-based and faith-based organisations in Morocco. Tracing this division in models of agency, modernity and womanhood put forward by faith-based and rights-based organisations may attract relativist positions regarding “good” and “bad” activism. Understanding the political forces, discussed in chapters four and five, behind the division gives a more complex picture of how multiple political and ideological identities form the strategies of women’s NGOs on both sides of the division. Human rights are part of the discourses surrounding these multiple identities. Human rights have also become a national political discourse. As human rights have thus become part of the modernities that are inhabited

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\(^{100}\) See chapter 4
within the local, can they still be seen as translated from the global? This thesis does not provide a straight-forward answer to this question, but the question itself provides a critique of Merry’s theory that human rights are always translated from the global to the local.

8.2 Translation as a tool for activism

Most of the NGOs are acutely aware of the idea of translation of ideas to different audiences. The language and ideas used to communicate the goals of the NGOs to national legislative forces, to the public and to the service users are reflected upon in relation to each new campaign and initiative. Although Merry’s theory hasn’t been applied to women’s activism in Morocco on academic level, the NGOs are conducting their own analysis continuously. Failures of translation are as common as successes, and both are used in future planning.

HZ: “I am asking myself the question, I am asking: was it – it was a very good question – was it a good strategy to subscribe uniquely to the universal referential in relation to the questions that have a link to beliefs; to what is emotional, subjective? I think, I think today when we see the return of religious people, when we see this transition in the Arab world, when we have brought the – unfortunately- the Islamists and not the Muslims to power, I say to myself that maybe we weren’t very close to in fact the notion of reality.”

The moudawana reform council of 1992 came to difficulties due to the different political positions the members of the council represented. Many of the participants were involved in women’s NGOs as well as in political parties and trade unions, and thus their position and allegiance was divided between their identity as women’s rights activists and party activists. Although the question was simply about translating the realities of women so
that the Moroccan king could understand them, these split identities meant, that the council found it impossible to find a joint referential to use at the basis of the translation.

HZ: “…and the national council on the moudawana reform burst. It burst because we didn’t manage to agree on the positions; on common positions. What were the common positions? It was simply to prepare a memorandum that translated the worries of; that translated the situation of women in Morocco and presented them to the king.”

Notably this example speaks of translation from lived realities to national politics, without referring to international norms or conventions.

At the basis of the translation process is the referential adopted by each NGO. NGOs that have opted for a referential based on human rights alone cannot avail of religion as a basis of translating issues from global to local levels. Faith-based NGOs on the other hand may need to limit the ways in which they use human rights in their discourses in cases where there is a conflict between the two. For example in the case of gender equality, there are certain conditions to the way this can be presented by faith-based organisations.

BK: “The majority of the values, there isn’t a problem but sometimes our comprehension, for example, I’ll give you an example: equality. Sometimes we find; we are found in a… certain people said Islam, or your idea of equality; women cannot defend equality because Islam in the inheritance women take less than men. So Islam is for our values on equality between men and women.”

For faith-based activists Islam takes precedence in cases of conflict. Faith-based organisations may refer to “spirit of human rights” as part of their referential rather than human rights as an entity. NGOs using mixed referential have more freedom in regards to
translating norms between local and global. They have recourse to the language of human rights, cultural and social references and examples from religious texts.

Merry (2006b) asks what relationship the translation of norms and values has to the subjectivity of the speaker as well as to the public. For many NGOs, referential is closely linked to the ideological foundation of the group. The linguistic choices used in campaigns must then reflect the adopted ideological position. Adopting new terminology to describe phenomena has the potential to change the way in which women perceive their position and rights in the society. Merry (2006b) suggests, that vernacularisation happens either by replicating international structures and norms at local level, by hybridising the two value systems or somewhere in between. Both of these terms, replication and hybridisation are familiar from translation studies and are also known as domestication and foreignisation (Venuti, 1995). On the surface rights-based organisations with human rights referential only seem to fit into the category of replication, but on closer look, we see that translation of norms in Morocco happens in several different registers. Faith-based organisations’ reference to the “spirit of human rights” on the other hand refers to a hybridising strategy. The principles of human rights, dignity and respect are accepted, and some rights can even be taken at face-value. As seen with the example of gender equality however, some principles are reinterpreted using Islam as the guide. This creates a complex mapping of different levels of translation: where exactly does hybridising, or domestication turn into non-translation?

Although religion is an important theme in the vernacularisation of women’s NGOs’ campaigns, both rights-based and faith-based organisations must make sure also to include cultural references that are free from religious connotations.
AM: “What is good in terms of inheritance is that the beginning of the debate was inflicted with contexts that were less conflicting because it started in fact via the rights of women to collective lands that conveyed more of the culture than of the religion.”

Cultural references that are outside of the possible conflicts of religious debates include references to national legislation, stories of women’s lived lives including the stories that become popularised through media, such as the suicide of Amina Filali or the Tabit¹⁰¹ affair and linguistic or cultural references to Berber traditions, which are perceived to date beyond Islam and are thus authentically Moroccan outside of postcolonial and religious debates. The collective lands of Berber tribes in the Rif Mountains referred to in the quote above are an example of such a tradition.

These stories are closely bound to the local and to the lived life, and are used by activists in order to translate the lived experiences to national or even international instances. Here translation seems to describe the process of using a local reference to make a case for national legislation. Situating the global seems somewhat more complicated however. Human rights have now been embedded in national legislation, and are thus referred to by the activists as local. They have also become part of the language of the modernity that some NGOs wish to put forward as the identity of new Moroccan woman. When human rights conventions are abandoned as the reference and “justice” or “fairness” for example used instead, it becomes difficult to point to the “original” the NGOs are translating from. The process is of course further clouded by the fact that most rights-based NGOs are dealing with accusations of importing non-Moroccan ideas to the country, and thus admitting to translating global norms would be an admission of guilt. Faith-based groups, who speak of “principle of human rights”, are perhaps more easily detected in using hybrid forms of translation when they pick out those conventions that easily fit their referential while referring to Islam only as the source of equality. Just the

¹⁰¹ See chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of these events.
same as human rights have become localised in NGO discourses, it would be simplistic to understand Islam always as local. Although religion is often referred to as part of Moroccan heritage, Islam is also part of a global discourse and bears its own transnational links (Cavatorta and Dalmasso, 2010).

Merry concentrates on gender violence alone as the lens through which she considers women activists’ translation between global and local norms. It is possible that the multitude of topics included in the campaigns in this study are confusing the matter and making it more difficult to show where the local begins and the global ends. In Morocco, advocacy, especially on the issue of violence against women, is mostly done by large rights-based organisations with political links. As this study is a case study of Morocco only, it was deemed important to include women’s organisations from different locations and ideological backgrounds to account for different strategies and experiences. This meant looking at women’s activism beyond advocacy and the issue of violence against women.

8.3 Traditions and modernities in NGOs’ referential

In contrast to many other colonised countries, where traditions became the more or less undisputed symbols of national identity (Said, 1978, Helie-Lucas, 1987), in Morocco a colonial policy of respect for local traditions imposed a dualist definition of modernity and nationalism (Salime, 2011). General Lyautey, in response to the Algerian resistance to French colonialism insisted on Moroccan people’s right to preserve traditions. The nationalist movement reacted to this policy by representing traditions as both obstacle to modernisation and the emancipation of women as well as the site for fighting against colonialism (Salime, 2011:51). Traditions were seen simultaneously as a French imposition aiming to maintain backwardness in Morocco, and as a resistance to the French cultural and political colonisation of the country. Of course, “good” and “bad”
traditions do not apply to Morocco alone, but good and bad elements can be found in all cultures.

HZ: “In all societies, if we are interested in it, we can find in all societies, we can find negative things as well as positive things. So on the positive things we can build, because people need security; they need to feel secure when it comes to their values.”

This description of “positive and negative things in the society” falls short of capturing the historical and contextual meaning of “good” and “bad” traditions in Morocco. The quote indicates that the speaker has identified the existence of both, but has not analysed where these can be located, or what differentiates them from each other. Salime’s theory (2011) suggests that in Morocco “good” and “bad” traditions and their relationship to modernity can be framed in terms of postcolonialism and the specific forms it has taken. This would allow building a more critical and reflexive referential based on “good traditions” that refer to modernity without falling into the accusations of being part of the colonisation efforts. If traditions have been divided into “good” and “bad” in relation to the colonial rule, the “good” ones may be found in cultural and societal manifestations of deviation from the Francophone rule. On the other hand the Dahir Berber which promoted the Berber language and culture to a higher position than Arabic during the French protectorate led to the banning of Berber language after independence. After the independence Berber languages and culture were thus not available as references to “the local”. Mohammed VI has reversed many of his father’s policies of excluding the Berber population and culture from Moroccan “authenticity”, most notably by recognising Berber languages in the new constitution. Berber languages and culture have thus become available again to women’s NGOs as “local tradition”.

This duplicity of the colonial discourse on preserving traditions and the nationalist modernist debate on fighting backward traditions are still setting the limits within which
both faith-based and rights-based groups construct their agency and role within traditions and modernity. Both faith-based and rights-based groups will refer to traditions at the base of patriarchal structures and customs, but both will also refer to a Morroccanness, which has parts of its roots in a pre-colonial understanding of culture and society. Boutaina, from a faith-based group includes religion in these traditions when she evokes them as a positive, authentic feature of the society, citing Moroccan history and religious patrimony as the basis of the referential of the organisation. Conversely, Lamia, also from a faith-based group, splits the two and uses ijtihad as a basis for separating “bad” traditions from “good” religion, as Salime (2011) has discussed. Examples of both can be found from rights-based groups too, Hayat from AMVEF being one to contemplate the potential of Moroccan patrimony as a source of legitimising the demands for equality, whereas most rights-based groups will also refer to the “bad” traditions, especially in the countryside, as something backward, something the modernity represented by the NGO can fight with their advocacy and public awareness. Only the solution is different: for rights-based groups, the misogynist traditions can be fought with equality and rights, whereas the faith-based groups see women’s further understanding of Islam as the solution to counter these customs.

The use of Berber languages and culture in advocacy is another way to refer to the local, or to Moroccan traditions. Not many NGOs use Berber languages and culture as part of their referential however. The references to Berber languages and culture are fraught with colonial complexities, as the Berber languages are now recognised for the first time in the constitution. Their teaching was banned after independence as a backlash against the Dahir Berber, which under French colonial rule aimed to separate the two populations by granting special privileges to the Berbers. Using Berber languages and culture as “good traditions” is a new strategy and may still be contentious: the stereotypes of Berbers as rich and powerful class in Morocco live strong even through year of repression of Berber rights especially in the Rif Mountains during Hassan II’s rule.
Without linking directly with Morocco’s colonial past, women activists from both faith-based and rights-based groups have begun to name cultural interpretations, customs and stories that undermine women and resist equality agendas as “bad traditions”.

**AM:** “Even the organisation of the penal code and the fact that it prioritises what we call security, security of the state instead of individual liberties; it prioritises everything that has to do with family even on the level of... more than the person. So we see very clearly that there are things that remain of a conservative culture.”

In this way, the activists are strategically using a postcolonial understanding of traditions, divided into “good” and “bad” according to colonial practices, and changing the meanings afforded to them. “Bad traditions” become synonymous with patriarchal attitudes, whereas “good traditions” are those that support the work of the NGOs.

**BA:** “But we really also need to base [our work] on the culture of the country. [...] And also it has to be based on customs. Because we have customs, culture... a strong culture.”

“A strong culture” that can be used as the basis of gender equality work is used as “good traditions” to root the activism in the local, to vernacularise the concept of equality and to make the ideas relevant to the political system and the constituencies the NGOs speak to.

If traditions are to be applied to Merry’s (2006) theory of vernacularisation, we can see that only the “good” traditions can be used in the translations process. The colonial process of modernisation and the struggles to define national identity have caused traditions to be muddled to such an extent, that translating to “local” requires deciding between the two types of tradition in order to resonate the message.
HZ: “The question of equality, in the communication it shouldn’t pass by the universal. It should pass by something from the Moroccan patrimony, examples taken from Moroccan history.”

The participants have no difficulty in believing, that equality can be found in the “good” traditions of Morocco. Translation to local norms and customs is possible, because examples of what is being campaigned for can be located in history and tradition. Of course, Mernissi (1984, 1987) has already shown to Moroccan women that stories of daily lives of women, stories of women who lived before us and the religious texts can all be used to question patriarchal norms that keep women disempowered. In her book Chahrazad n’est pas marocaine, autrement elle serait salariée! (1988) Mernissi evokes stories of Moroccan women in the past as economic actors, showing that women leaders and women’s economic empowerment is indeed part of the Moroccan cultural history. There seems to be no great difficulty to differentiate between the good and the bad on conversational level: good is simply authentic and local, whereas bad is patriarchal.

FM: “And the conservatives. [...] because it is a question of mentality. [...] It [the moudawana] is applied with a patriarchal mentality. [...] How to change mentalities? How to do advocacy to spread a culture of equality in the society? To change the stereotypes that exists; to change that patriarchal mentality in the schools, in the school books; in the media.”

In advocacy and public awareness materials the “good” traditions are evoked by using an “authentic voice” of women in testimonies and traditional music on the audio files and by choosing Moroccan dialect instead of standard Arabic as the language of communication.
There seems to be no ideological differences between NGOs in applying the “good” traditions to their advocacy, as all of them struggle to find points of reference that both resonate with the Moroccan state and the public and simultaneously call up narrative of modernity that puts women at the forefront. At times, however, Moroccan traditions are difficult to separate from religion. There are those, such as Hayat above, who believe Moroccan cultural traditions can be told through history, but for many, religion is an integral part of the “good” traditions, as long as the texts are reinterpreted with a modernist view open to equality.

BA: “But we really also need to base [our work] on the culture of the country. We have to base on religion, the most open form that is also based on Ijithad; on another more open reading by the ulamas that are more open.”

Religion, interpreted with view to equality, the country’s history, local customs, events and people to refer to and folk tales all form a part of “good” traditions that are used to translate human rights to the context of Morocco. “Bad” traditions on the other hand are those, which reinforce inequality and women’s subordination, and must be fought with human rights. Women’s rights and equality are part of modernity, and stem both from international human rights conventions, and from the Moroccan patrimony. And when Moroccan patrimony and Islam are seen as major values in humanity, at the basis of which human rights themselves have been written, there can be no contradiction between the two.

NR: “The religious referential is most often used to put breaks on the women’s movement, but women are convinced that this international referential encompasses also the principles of the values that can exist in religions and in the religion of Islam. But they are values of not of Islamic legislation, they are values that… in which the people who put in place the referential of international human rights leaned on. The declaration
of human rights in 1948 is based on everything that is open and just and equalitarian in the human cultures in general; Asian; African and of course also of Muslim countries.”

Human rights are not merely international, but belong to all. The modernity that is being presented is then simultaneously a translation of international norms of human rights and a representation of the values on which the Moroccan cultural tradition is based. Equality and women’s participation, which symbolise modern societies, are both a new construct that can be learned when traditional mentalities are changed. This happens through a return to the original values of Morocco and Islam. “Bad traditions” are expressed as a mere side-track on the path to good society. NGOs seem to believe that by educating people and questioning these learned mentalities and stereotypes Moroccans can be brought back to the modernity that is highlighted in human rights but stems from the “good traditions” of Morocco. Democracy becomes similarly situated in the local understandings of modernity, as its international constructs are criticised and abandoned in lieu of a democracy that takes into account the women who live it through their every-day lives.

8.4 Democracy

Critics of the rights-based women’s movement, including the Islamists as well as other public, often criticise them for speaking of democracy but in fact by-passing democratic channels. This is either discussed in terms of some of the groups’ affiliation and closeness to the leftist parties, or in relation to the king’s role in reforming the country’s legislation with regards to women. A change has happened in the strategic engagement of women’s NGOs with democratisation over the years. The first petition to change the family law by UAF in 1992 was indeed one of the first political advocacy documents addressed to the parliament instead of the king. This placed the movement itself in the lead of the democratisation process as it undermined the autocratic rule of the king and
religious authorities, the ulema (Salime, 2011). In reply to this Hassan II requested in his speech opening the Hassan II mosque that “his daughter”, the Moroccan woman would address her grievances to him alone as the guardian of her rights. By stating this Hassan II affirmed, that Morocco was not in such a state of democratisation as to legislate through the parliament. King Mohammed VI again declared at his enthronement that he stands for the rights of Moroccan women. He has reaffirmed this through legislative initiatives throughout his reign. One of the participants interviewed in January saw the continuous role of the king in gender legislation in Morocco as a double edged sword for women’s NGOs who avail of his support but simultaneously must yield on demands on further democratisation. The aftermath of the demonstrations, the constitutional reform and the parliamentary elections in 2011 have strengthened the rights-based women’s groups support for monarchy. Pruzan-Jorgesen (2010a) contends this to have been the intention rather than a side-effect of the liberalising reforms of Mohammed VI. The fear of the Islamists and of terrorism together with further political freedom has diminished the requirements of the middle classes to participation in political decision making and further accountability of the king. A new narrative on democracy is being constructed, one that places less emphasis on institutions and processes, and more on the outcomes as securing rights.

This new conception of democracy reiterated by Moroccan feminists may be better understood within the post-colonial feminist critique. Alexander and Mohanty (1997) criticise this accepted standard of democracy for its reliance on the capitalist structures and for defining citizenship in narrow consumerist terms, making equality a mere legal term which does not consider the power differentials that impede people from accessing that equality. The authors describe Democracy with a capital D as the formal mechanisms of representative Democracy, and democracy with a minuscule d as the imaginations of what a true democratic state capable of guaranteeing the rights of citizens may look like. To imagine a feminist democracy such as this requires
redefining citizenship and ensuring the rights and freedom of people beyond the formal structures. It also requires paying attention to intersectional power imbalances. Feminist democracy has its resonance also with Habermas’ (1996) idea of democracy as communicative dialogue taking place in the public sphere. Although Habermas’ theory ignores the question of how discussion takes place, an important feminist critique of deliberative democracy (Ulrich, 2004), both approaches concentrate on democracy as a process, rather than on its static institutions.

Only the representative of Justice and Spirituality discussed the movement’s direct criticism of Moroccan democracy. Many of the other participants were conflicted in their position of working with the state and recognising the potential of the monarch for improving the lives of women. All wanted to see improvements in how the institutions were run. The respondents didn’t explicitly refer to feminist critique of Democracy, but when comparing their answers to the criteria Alexander and Mohanty (1997) give for feminist democratisation, we can find several parallels. Remarks about the contradictions of women’s NGOs relying on an autocratic king for their rights seem to be referring to “Democracy”, whereas responses that claim democracy to be about rights rather than about structures could refer to the “feminist democracy” Alexander and Mohanty wish to see triumphing.

Are women’s activists indeed making a feminist critique of democracy? Alexander and Mohanty (1997) give five criteria for a feminist democracy. Firstly, sexual politics must be at the centre of it (ibid:xxvii), meaning that we must look at closely how the state treats women. Many of the participants linked women’s participation beyond politics of window-dressing to democracy. Many support quotas, but see that they cannot be the only means to achieve women’s participation as they often end in politics of window dressing. Women’s role goes beyond political participation however and relates to the citizens’ rights each individual is able to enjoy.
ADFM: “I don’t think there will be a democracy. Democracy it is democracy for everyone, as well for men as for women.”

In the view of the activists who defend the Moudawana reform as the first step towards democratisation, democracy consists of laws that govern the citizens treat women equally and with respect. Laws and legal practices which aim to control women and their bodies are undemocratic. The question for some participants is, whether democracy is indeed equipped to bring about gender equality.

HZ: “Democracy didn’t come with, I would say, the denouncing of violence against women. That’s recent. Democracy hasn’t given equal or equitable opportunities for women and men to be in decision making positions. That’s something that came after. So around us we know that democracy is an important value, but the fact that is should be neutral so it cannot serve equality as it is practiced.”

Instead of seeing the lack of gender perspective in the West, the speaker suspects that democracy itself isn’t enough, echoing Young’s (1990) disapproval of universal citizenship. The feminist critique would assume that if democracy cannot bring equal opportunities and eliminate violence, it is not done right. The question is whether this is seen as a failure of the concept, or as a failure of definition of the concept.

The second criteria Alexander and Mohanty (1997: xxvii) give for feminist democracy is that it understands hierarchies of rule. One of the NGO representatives interviewed for the study refers to the NGO’s constituency in terms of intersectional theory, thinking about the difference gender, age and class may make in situations of economic empowerment. For all other NGOs the constituency is women and the campaigns are run on the basis of the constituency’s sex. Although some campaigns take into consideration specific groups, such as ADFM’s campaign for women’s land rights in the Rif Mountains, or IPDF Fez’s project on women working in the streets, the rights are
imagined for the women as women, rather than as Berbers or as economically disempowered people.

NR: “Yes but of course the battle of the feminists until now it is a battle of elites. It is a battle of elites and it is elite of Moroccan women who can play a role in the change of the situation of women in Morocco. But at the same time this elite reflects on the projects in favour of women so it is for the women it is for the masses that we are in action for. We cannot pretend that an association responds to the needs of Moroccan women in general but it can play a role as civil society to favour or to ensure the conditions of change for women.”

Categories do emerge, but rather than as intersections, they emerge as sub-categories of the main category woman; such as poor woman, rural woman, unmarried mother, girl in domestic work or illiterate woman. As far as women’s NGOs are concerned, being woman outweighs all other identities. Few work together with organisations whose target groups are refugees or disabled for example. Intersectional feminist theory has born out of Black and Third World women’s criticism of the essentialising of women in feminist campaigns and from the blind spots this created when the rights of different identity groups could not take into consideration the rights of those, whose identities did not fall neatly under the subcategories of any of the main groups. Black women could not have their rights as women nor as black (Crenshaw, 1991). Structures and bureaucracy governing civil society funding and registrations, the time it takes to organise action and the high levels of poverty and illiteracy in Morocco mean, that most of the actors are upper- or middle-class and highly educated, and as organisers of women’s civil society, free to define the target groups and activities according to the priorities they see fit.

MM: “We aren’t yet on the level of discussing women’s sexuality: that’s luxury. If we can say, they are problems of privileged women, the bourgeoisie: the problems of sexuality, well-being and parliamentary representation. But the women, the basic women, the
majority of Moroccan women their problems are still vital problems; daily problems: education, teaching, having a job, economic independence.”

This does not mean that the causes they campaign for are not worthy, but may lead to reductionist thinking around identities. It may also be seen to undermine women’s NGOs’ calls for further democratisation of all decision-making in Moroccan society, as decision-making within the civil society is at the hands of small elites. Deliberative democracy, participation in decision-making and representation of all groups does not always happen within women’s NGOs and issues to campaign for are decided for the constituencies perhaps more often than by them.

Alexander and Mohanty’s (1997:xxvii) third criteria for feminist democracy is women’s agency over their own lives. When the first criteria was about how the state treats women, this one reflects processes and practices outside of state structures which govern women’s autonomous decision-making and participation. This refers to education, access to economic resources and all forms of social capital. Development projects and women’s training centres are aiming to give women the tools for economic independence, which can lead them to further autonomy. The family law reform allowed women autonomy and agency in decisions regarding their family lives. All of the NGOs have the same goal, and this goal is women’s autonomy.

LX: “So our objective, truly, it has to do with an important point, for these women who come to the association it is first and foremost to teach them how to have self-confidence, first of all. That she is a human being who reflects, who thinks, who can participate, who can do many things. They have lost; the majority of them have lost that confidence.”

The goal is not linked only to the concept of democracy, but to the project of nation building as whole. As a main building block of the new imagined modern Moroccan society women’s autonomy must also be part of democratisation.
The fourth point in Alexander and Mohanty’s (1997:xxvii) feminist democracy is that it is based on socialist practices, understood as a critique of the capitalist world order. Although many women’s NGOs stem from the Moroccan political left, in the context of the country this cannot be taken as evidence of socialist practices. The fact that the majority of the activists are situated in upper and middle classes creates a distance between women’s rights and the class struggle.

*FA:* “First we need to change the internal structures of the NGOs, the political parties and the trade unions so that the activists and the revolutionaries are also democrats. The organisations have the same problems of transparency, governance, democracy and financial audits as the government. When we are democrats we can do democracy.”

Many of the NGOs are aware of the problems of internal hierarchies, but lack of new recruits and volunteers limit the potential for deliberative democracy inside the NGO structures. Those activists who come from other political or civil society groups know that the same lack of joint decision making and inclusion are present in those institutions too. This problem is not unique to Morocco, as has been shown by Ford-Smith (1997) in her discussion of the Sistern collective in the Caribbean. The feminist ideal of non-hierarchical decision making within the collective did not erase those hierarchies, but rather rendered them unstructured and invisible. Islamist women’s organisations are more insistent on deliberative methods within their structures, but without more detailed knowledge about channels of decision making it is impossible to say, whether this in fact leads to socialist practices on the organisational level. Some organisations suggest that the change is slow, and thus must happen in the society first.

*KE:* “Because [...] they have to get aware from the beginning, not ‘til they grow up and they ask for democracy, but from the beginning we say: you, you have to help your sister, you have to help your mother, your sister have right to play also, not only to go to the kitchen to help her mother.”
Democracy is a process that takes place in all areas of society, and the new generations must be educated to the principles of equality, discussion and socialist practices.

Finally Alexander and Mohanty (1997:xxvii) call for feminist democracy to be transnational and decolonising. All women’s groups, except perhaps small development organisations, use international human rights as some part of their activities and all also have international links and cooperation. Both of these are related to openness towards the unity of women’s global condition. Even though a feminist democracy must take into consideration the different hierarchies that operate on local and global levels, solidarity with the other, made possible through translation (Spivak, 2012) is at the basis of democracy and equality.

*BA:* “*Because the international conventions are the principal basis, of course. Because it’s equality, it’s citizenship, it’s tolerance; it’s all the human principles. Of a human being. We need to be based on that because it is the light for a change in society for a democratic country, equalitarian country, a country of citizenship.***”

International conventions and values, as expressed by the participant are directly linked to democracy. This resonates with the feminist democracy presented by Alexander and Mohanty (1997) and puts global cooperation and joint values at the core of a democratic society.

The groups affiliated with the ruling party PJD are now able to emphasise the democratic processes that have brought the party into government and the legitimacy this gives to the women’s groups linked to the party. Al Ald wa al ihsan, or Justice and Spirituality on the other hand is still standing outside of the political system and thus able to criticise it in the same terms as it always has: a system allowing corruption and a king not standing up to his duties as the commander of the faithful. Among the groups involved in the M20
demonstrations for further democratisation in 2011 Al adl wa al ihsan was the only one demanding the monarchy’s immediate dissolution and the founding of a republic in its place. The model of democracy put forward by faith-based groups is also subversive from the main-stream Moroccan conception of constitutional monarchy and it also questions Democracy as a set of institutions. Although more attached to the idea of representation and participation than the democracy put forward by the leftist rights-based groups, this democracy relies on grass-roots level organisation and bottom-up democratic practices as the guarantor of inclusion of all voices. The contradiction of speaking about democracy and relying on a “benevolent despot” (Maghraoui, 2001) as the guarantor of rights nevertheless described as democratic is not lost on all of the rights-based activists. Recognising this contradiction brings in a different dilemma:

HZ: “How to reconcile the between the question of women and the question of democracy? Which is the priority? Which is the priority? Is the question of women or of democracy? Because democracy doesn’t necessarily bring the question of equality. The democracies in Europe haven’t brought the question of equality.”

When considering the NGOs’ discussions of democracy, we must keep in mind the political repression most of the activists have experienced, and the continuous monopoly on coercive force held by the monarchy. Thus, criticising the existing state structures may be too risky for actors, especially in a study where they have consented to use their own names. For some NGOs it may be easier to use democracy as a strategic concept without analysing this contradiction further. Many NGOs are tied by their political affiliations to compliance with different parts of the governing institutions, whether they respond to the demands of the NGOs or not. These political affiliations then become more important for the NGOs in question than an analysis of the influence these institutions have on the work of the NGOs.
8.4.1 Vernacularisation of Democracy

Democracy and democratisation are important concepts for rights based and faith based women activists. The democratising force of the battles won by the women’s NGOs, especially the campaigns for the Moudawana reform, has been criticised in recent years. These criticisms however take a liberal view of democracy and ignore any feminist critique of the concept. The actors in Morocco have taken on feminist criticism of their own and constructed meanings for democracy which make women’s autonomy and participation as well as human rights of all citizens a core principle of democracy. This criticism from both rights-based and faith-based organisations takes the idea of democracy and translates it to a local concept that has direct bearings on women’s lives.

When we look carefully at the statements the participants give about the meaning of democracy, we must contend that they are not referring to liberal Democracy with its emphasis on institutions and its links to neo-colonial projects in the Middle East, but a concept of ruling based on deliberation with its emphasis on processes and participation. This form of democracy doesn’t embrace intersectional theory or question hierarchies, at least for now. Perhaps women are first needed as a category that has rights in a society, before that category can be further deconstructed. Differences in the conceptions of democracy between women’s NGOs have little to do with each NGO’s referential, but are rooted in their political affiliations instead. Rights-based NGOs with links to leftist political parties are keen to emphasise the Islamist threat to women’s rights and the importance of the monarchy in guaranteeing safe transition or continuous protection of achieved rights. The organisations linked to the official Islamist party are also supportive of the monarchy, as this is the rule in Moroccan political system for parties to be officially recognised. Women’s organisations working within Justice and Spirituality are the only ones able to criticise the king and the political structures surrounding him directly. Michelutti (2008) sees democracy as a societal, bottom-up procedure that has the potential to become vernacularized. Criticising democracy as such is often seen by the actors within the official state structures in Morocco as a safer option than directly
criticising the institutions they rely on. While there is evidence of feminist critique of ideas of Democracy, another interpretation of this critique may be its strategic use by activists who are locked into existing political power structures.

As we have seen from the discussion about the ways in which democracy has become constructed as a concept in women’s activism, the word itself can be seen as a hybrid translation. It has links to the idea of liberal Democracy, represented by the US and criticised by many as being part of a neo-liberal campaign. When we add the feminist critique the participants include to the meaning they give to democracy, and its context in Morocco, democracy as a concept becomes situated in the local narratives of governance, civil society activism and equality. The democracy referred to by most of the activists, whether Justice and Spirituality who work on the margins of society and oppose the rule of the king or ADFM, who for long have collaborated with the state and the royal committees, democracy is one of the goals, not yet achieved nor in existence in anywhere else in the world. The democracy women want for Morocco cannot be found in Europe; it encompasses some of the good values of Morocco and equality and rights for all. It is deliberative at all levels and extends beyond institutions to the way people live. It becomes part of the modernities women’s NGOs put forward. These modernities take into account the political and social context, the “good” and the “bad” traditions, democracy and human rights. They are cleverly constructed using concepts and languages that are both local and global, original and translated. One of the linguistic strategies in building the image of modernity is the language of science and technology and its links to democracy and traditions.

8.5 The language of science as a sign of modernity

One of the strategic narratives used by most of the women’s NGOs is the narrative of scientificness. This refers to linguistic strategies that use statistical information and
language relating to “fact” as part of the strategy to convince decision makers and constituencies of the importance of the work they are doing. Part of the scientific approach to advocacy and service provision is related to the NGOs’ own need to define the issues they are working for, and part of it is related to convincing audiences alone.

AM: “We need to develop information first around the question at hand, to know more about it to be able to argue; to know more about it on all the levels; to have a trump card; to know the actors well; the factors that influence it; to work within the context. That’s in terms of all the programmes, not just the advocacy.”

The various essays on remaking women into modernity in the 19th century Middle East edited by Abu-Lughod (1998) show how women’s roles both in and out of the house were redefined through science. The ambivalence of post-colonial nation-building to the European idea of modernity as enlightenment seems invisible in the campaigns of women’s NGOs in Morocco. Instead of regarding science and scientific language as part of European enlightenment, women’s NGOs treat science as a neutral form of modernity. Both faith-based and rights-based NGOs in Morocco commission numerous studies by local sociologists into the issues they wish to campaign for.

BK: “Because our; now we speak, we want to always speak with; because we don’t want to make our demands because we have an idea, we want to do studies to have concrete things. If we say that; we want to say that the sexual lives of minors; the cause of sexual lives of minors is the morals in our lives, we have to say that with a study. If we don’t have a study then we eliminate that cause and we look for others; is the social situation? Economic? What is the essential element and then we continue. We want to make demands that are based on studies; that are scientific demands; that are based on reality and not on illusions.”

The participant, as many others too, is happy to link statistics to reality. Oral histories and
testimonies – qualitative data – also plays an important part in proving that what the NGOs are presenting is “reality”. Quantitative data and statistics – whether reliable or not – are also required. Regardless of the quantity of data collected or the methods and sampling strategies used to collect it, the data is always presented statistically, often using tables and graphs. A study by Anaruz on gender violence in Morocco published in 2007 presents the findings in 48 tables over 105 pages (ADFM, 2007), and another study by Assaida Al Horra (2004) on the problems faced by a certain rural village displays as many as 87 tables over the 48 pages. Very little narrative and explanations is given throughout the report. The study begins by explaining that men could not be found for the interviews, as they were playing dominoes, watching TV or chatting and smoking in the coffee shops. In the village women and girls do all the work “which will be confirmed through the study”, as the numbers are expected to speak for themselves.

The language of these studies makes frequent references to objectivity and their scientificness. The standard of reports and studies is ever more important as the government is now publishing its own studies on issues such as violence against women. On the other hand this is taken as evidence of the state taking the issue seriously. Many of the studies are of a high standard, conducted by university researchers and are clear about their scope, methodology, and limitations. For example, a thorough study into the application of the new family law by IPDF Fez (Lashika, 2008:5) states: “The study was conducted within the tribunal of the region of Fez. In order to obtain a satisfactory statistical survey we have opted for a sample which represents all the social groups and disparities of judicial actors (in regards to age, sex and professional seniority)”. Statistics, numbers, scientific studies and scientific language are seen as undisputable. They give legitimacy to the NGOs as speakers; they validate the causes advocated for and comply with modernity.

AM: “We work essentially on the basis of an argument that puts forward [...] the testimonies of women to say that there are social injustices; to say that the society has
changed and the laws have not followed; and the statistics of the different support centres. So rather than go on to make a religious argument, for us it’s, here is the data from the society; it’s not just, it’s up to you to find the elements of response.”

The scientific evidence itself is situated in the local, but the strategic use of it in discourses of agency has links to more universal discourse of modernity.

Technology also features as a tool for all activities and links them to modernity. Most NGOs aim to have some online presence, but for those looking for young audiences it is vital. This is the case, even though the actual numbers and profiles of Moroccan internet users isn’t known, and thus NGOs cannot be sure which part of the population, if any, their online campaigns are attracting.

ML: “We have concentrated on the internet quite a lot because these days it is what the young people use. We started with facebook and now Twitter and that’s how we have begun to bring together, it has been really useful and shows how much the means of communication have evolved.”

There are currently nearly 4.9 million facebook users registered in Morocco. This is just 15% of the total population, and includes also the expatriate population in Morocco using the website. Justice and Spirituality’s activities have been restricted in Morocco since the 1980 and thus the group was one of the first ones to exploit the internet for spreading their message. Both Abdessalam Yassine, the movement’s founder and her daughter Nadia Yassine, the founder of the women’s circle have actively written on private blogs for more than 10 years in Arabic, English and French (Zeghal, 2005). Rights-based organisations have been slower to catch up with the technology, seeing their main constituency as those with little access to internet.
The adoption of modern technologies in NGO communication is also a statement about modernity. Discourses of modernity as enlightenment and scientification of the role of women as mothers is explained by Abu-Lughod (1998) as a modernising practice in the Arab world that originates in the colonial period of late 19th and early 20th centuries. The use of science as the basis for argumentation reflects Beck’s (1992) description of “late” or “reflexive modernity” which puts emphasis on knowledge, education, technology and communication. “Reflexive modernity” is also characterised by the emphasis placed by such discourses on individual agency instead of institutions and structures. This has obvious links with the women’s NGOs’ definitions of democracy and the rights and freedoms of citizens as the main demarcation of democratisation. The fact that faith-based groups have been the first to adopt some of the strategies of “reflexive modernity” is resented by some rights-based activists as a betrayal of the type of modernity the faith-based groups are advocating. On the one hand their idea of modernity is based on recovering the true equalitarian meaning of Islam and returning to the authentic values. Adoption of modern technologies mostly associated with the Western media as part of “reflexive modernity” with its links to individualism contradicts this in the eyes of some rights-based participants.

FA: “Moroccan traditions are exploited by the Islamists to keep women in the house and in subordination. This is possible because of illiteracy. [...] But exploitation of traditions and the language of religion is hypocrisy from their part because while they speak against feminism and Western values they are happy to use a computer and other technologies that come from the West.”

Technology is rarely discussed in terms of Western importation. Rights-based organisations face accusations of importing values at other instances of their activism and are mostly criticised for the use of human rights or feminist discourses and values. Faith-based groups on the other hand are criticised for being backward and importing values

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from Saudi Arabia for instance. For them, showing more openness towards the West and towards modern technologies and languages such as English and French can be a strategy for counteracting their perceived backwardness. Most of these criticisms come from other women’s organisations, as the faith-based and rights-based groups compete for recognition, constituencies, funding and political and public audiences.

8.6 Alliances and divisions across referential and modernities

A striking finding from the empirical evidence is the wide gap that exists between rights-based and faith-based groups. Guessus (2011:174) suggests that the aversion of leftist feminists to faith-based women’s groups is a historically specific reaction dependent on the view these activists hold of modernity, progress, religion and secularism. She traces this aversion through a genealogy of events and developments in Morocco in the past 20 years. The Islamist revival and a popular questioning of secular modernity promoted by the Socialist parties and hence the rights-based women’s groups are part of that genealogy, as are the public debates over the moudawana reform. My own analysis of the words of some of my participants showed that the trauma caused by the Fatwas and the public clashes between the rights-based groups and the Islamists in the 1990s and early 2000s should be seen as part of that genealogy too.

Guessus’ thesis concentrates on the veil, but the findings of this thesis show the aversion of rights-based groups to faith-based women’s activism to go deeper. On the surface the values of faith-based and rights-based groups seem to coincide. On the question of referential, a rights-based group that originates from the leftist activism in the 1980s and 1990s states:
HZ: “What is the best way to talk to a woman and to say to her that she has; your husband or your boyfriend doesn’t have the right to attack your dignity. How to say that? To say that in referring to universal referential gives nothing. To say it in basing oneself on Arab-Muslim patrimony, Moroccan culture is going to make sense to her.”

And a faith-based group link to the ruling PJD-party says:

BK: “The referential we have; we work on the rights of women; we are inspired by the values of women’s rights on an international level; we are for the improvement of the situation of women and on the other side hoping besides; our Islamic religion and our authentic values of our country Morocco. So we make an equation between the two values: the international values of women’s rights and the national authentic values of our society.”

Both speak on international human rights and both also refer to Moroccan culture and to Islam as the basis of the values represented and the language used to communicate them. When presented with these similarities, many representatives of rights-based groups claim the Islamists to be dishonest, untruthful and contradictory. The current litmus test for a genuine feminist is the question of inheritance and whether the law should be reformed, although as Guessus (2011) also noted, these litmus tests rarely apply to women who are members of rights-based groups.

The antagonism in Morocco is historically situated in the moudawana campaign and the state policies of setting up the Islamist movement in opposition to the Socialist political parties and groups who provided the biggest opposition to the king Hassan II (Beau and Garcia,). Such layers are present in many post-colonial feminist struggles, and as noted by Heng (1997), are haunted by the history of nationalist struggles and the ambivalence

103 Some of the participants discussed the fatwas off-tape after interviews. For a more detailed discussion on the Fatwas and political clashes during the Moudawana reform see Sadiqi (2006) and Rhouni (2011).
of nationalism to modernity. Women’s NGOs are left to define the modernities they inhabit in the confines of the political divisions originating from nationalist struggles. Iranian feminists have debated the possibility of Islamic Feminism for some time (Mohanty, 2002) and Mahmood’s (2005) work in questioning the feminist concept of agency through a look at Egypt’s Mosque Movement has been of international importance in the discussions about the perceived binary between feminism and religion. Jamal (2005) presents Islamic movements in Pakistan as an alternative to the anti-Islam war on terror and the universalising discourses of modernity as secularism. She recommends a discourse between the feminists and the Islamists in Pakistan through exploring “these contradictory spaces for opportunities, if there be any, for mutual recognition” (Ibid: 71). Kirmani (2011:74) notes that in India, Muslim women are often forced to choose between international secular discourses on women and discourses locked in cultural and religious values, without recourse to a hybrid understanding of their identities. In Morocco both rights-based and faith-based groups seem to be promoting a hybrid of the two discourses, or at least a hybrid of international norms and cultural connotations, even if these are not related to religion. Despite the similarity of the discourses and even the topics campaigned for, faith-based and rights-based groups are unwilling to enter into a conversation with each other.

As the binaries constructed through the identity politics of the different groups seem to be preventing any chance of cooperation, we might ask, whether cooperation would be possible through adopting intersectional thinking into activism in Morocco. Matsuda (1991:1185) suggests that realising the intersectionality of our identities may give us the knowledge of self that may allow us working together, while knowing, that the time may come when we must end our coalition in order to preserve our integrity. By avoiding difficult conversations we are ignoring not only the realities of the others, but also how their otherness creates our own identities. Intersectionality and recognising the hierarchies that operate in the creation of otherness could, according to this view, make
strategic essentialism possible in activism. As we compare the language and referential of faith-based and rights-based groups and find several points of convergence, it is useful to think of organisations as having multiple identities just the same as individuals. An NGO’s political identity may rest closely within the confines of the political party it has emerged from, but this need not pre-determine the organisation’s view-point vis-à-vis religion, use of technology or international human rights conventions.

BK: “But I hope that we have sent a message to the other; to the other women’s organisations that we can agree on several points and to have an individual circle and have a large circle; a small individual circle and a large circle where we can get together and work for the rights of women. And each can have their little circle where we don’t agree with each other on those points, but that doesn’t mean that we always have to be enemies; but we work for improvement of women’s rights.”

The above quote by a faith-based participant suggests aligning over single issues across referential and political divisions as a possible tool for future cooperation. NGOs should get together on an issue-by-issue basis, and ignore referential and identity politics for the sake of the issues. This idea resonates with Spivak’s (1987) discussion of strategic essentialism. Strategic essentialism allows uniting over issues rather than identities, while always critically examining the relationship of the issues to the wider context. For faith-based and rights-based organisations in Morocco to work together for greater representation of women in politics, for example, this would mean pressuring all political parties equally, putting aside the differences of opinion regarding inheritance or single mothers all the while being conscious of the political structures within which the leftist and the Islamist women politicians are to be introduced.
8.7 Contributions to theory

This study has contributed to theory in three distinct areas. Firstly, it has used the empirical evidence from women’s NGOs’ campaigns and activities to examine how referential and linguistic strategies in Moroccan women’s activism relate to Merry’s theories of translating norms between the global and the local. As a result of the nuanced understandings of global and local in the Moroccan context, the study questions our ability to apply the same formula in understanding campaigning in different parts of the world. Instead, it suggests a more complex and dynamic processes of constructing NGO referential and linguistic strategies that depend on the issue at hand as well as the changing political and social contexts. Secondly, this study has examined the arguments of advancement of women’s rights in Morocco as non-democratic. I argue that more critical understanding of the concept of democracy is required in order to make claims about the democratisation of Moroccan society and political system in its current liberalising context. Finally this study questions the dichotomising language used to describe faith-based and rights-based women activists in Morocco.

When I began this study I found Merry’s (2006) theory, according to which human rights “need to be translated into local terms and situated within local contexts of power and meaning” or “remade in the vernacular” (2006:1) very useful. I had read about the competing discourses of human rights and religion in Moroccan women’s NGOs’ activism, and thought I could trace these translations from the data I was going to collect. The findings of this study suggest a more complex and nuanced understanding of how referential and linguistic strategies are constructed in Moroccan women’s activism. Participants explain human rights to be as Moroccan as they are global. Instead of translating from a global to a local context and language, activists draw references from individual stories, ideas of localised democracy, human rights as they appear in national legislation, Moroccan history and traditions, studies and statistics. These different referential come together in activism in multiple and dynamic ways, always depending on
the issue at hand and the present political and social conditions that surround it. The contribution this thesis makes to Merry’s theory is thus to call for a more complex and nuanced understanding of both global and local, and allow for the possibility that no true original from which translation can be done exists. NGOs inhabit multiple, intersectional identities that are constantly renegotiated.

The Moudawana reform in Morocco inspired an interest in the link between women’s personal status and democratisation in Morocco. Critics (Cavatorta and Dalmasso, 2009; Cavatorta and Dalmasso, 2010, Pruzan-Jorgensen, 2010) argued that instead of further democratisation, the political liberation that also included the reform of the family law was a move towards greater autocracy as it increased the powers of the Monarch. Cavatorta and Dalmasso (2010) go as far as to argue that there has been a “decoupling” of women’s rights and democracy. By adopting a critical understanding of the concept of democracy this study has questioned, whether women’s rights and democracy can indeed be decoupled. As Alexandra and Mohanty (1997) and Young (1990) point out, sexual politics is central to democratisation. The participants of this study confirm this: any democratisation must include women as equal participants in the society before it can be regarded as a democracy.

Some literature on women’s activism in the Arab Muslim world (Moghadam) and in Morocco (Sadiqi, 2003) presents faith-based and rights-based women’s groups as dichotomous of each other. Like Guessus (2010) I also noted the antagonism of the groups towards each other in practice, too. Analysing the referential and linguistic strategies of both faith-based and rights-based NGOs we can see that while the dichotomy is upheld discursively by the actors, it isn’t always visible in the activism. Partly the antagonism can be explained by policies of division and strategic co-optation (Albrecht, 2005) exercised by Hassan II during his rule, where Islamist organisations were encouraged in order to divide the opposition to the monarchy. As the Islamist PJD
and the Leftist USFP are currently cooperating in the coalition government however, it appears that the women’s civil society is particularly divided. Cavatorta (2009) suggests that the reasons behind the division lie on the fact that the discourses on modernity and ideology on national level have strong links to the international dimensions to these discourses. Whatever the reasons for this division, it seems to be hurting women. Activists are struggling to get heard in both Islamist and Leftist political parties and both sides feel that lack of institutionalisation and political will to put women in national agendas is creating a tokenistic equality. Strategic cooperation on single issues could help politicise women’s NGOs campaigns.

8.8 Conclusion

This chapter has brought together the empirical evidence of how women’s NGOs in Morocco use linguistic references in their campaigns with the theoretical literature that can help us further understand these strategies. When asked about referential, women’s NGOs usually begin by defining it in terms of either human rights or religion, or at times a mixture of the two. When we look at referential as a linguistic and strategic tool related to the ideology of each NGO, we see, however, that all NGOs have a more complex referential than one simply described within the dichotomy of rights versus religion. Although older organisations have taken the time to define a referential along this dichotomy, an analysis of the campaigns and activities of NGOs reveals a more fluid and dynamic referential that changes according to the issue at hand and the changing Moroccan society. Traditions and democracy are mixed in regularly with human rights and religion, and national legislation often becomes part of the referential.

This chapter has questioned how useful the theory of translating norms from global to local is within the context of these mixed referential. Translations between local and global as well as between different concepts of modernity are done on various rhetoric levels. NGOs use their referential as a guide to translating norms and laws, but are often
bound also by pragmatism. Referential vary from strict right-based or faith-based to a mix of both, and the choice of referential can also set basic limitations to the possibilities for translation. Instead of mere local and global, as suggested by Merry as the polar points to translate in between, there are various local and global references that remake each other. Social conditions and empirical evidence of real women is used by all NGOs as an entry point to what is local. Religion on the other hand is seen by some as local, and thus an important part of vernacularisation, whereas other actors treat religion as beyond this binary. If religion is personal, instead of societal, it cannot exist in either periphery. Human rights are often the target of translation, especially when talking to the constituencies. When human rights have already been translated into national legislation, NGOs are able to use them as they are without needing to reconstruct them as local. Both the local and the global have become blurred as part of the construction of the modernities the NGOs represent.

These modernities are informed by the referential each NGO represents, but are also situated in their political alignments. In some instances it is possible to trace hybridisation of global and local in NGO campaigns and at times lived experiences are directly used as evidence for the need for national legislative changes. More often however it becomes difficult to point out in the language used by NGOs where the local begins and the global ends. All of the campaigns and narratives the NGOs put forward speak about the modernities they represent, but tracing the translations and the original norms translated through the complexities of “good” and “bad” traditions and different modernities is difficult. This could be due to the difficulty in general of tracing the global and the local, and the more nuanced approach this study has taken to the meanings of “global” and “local” in the Moroccan context. Alternatively, it may be because this study did not remain in the format of Merry’s own studies, which concentrate on gender violence campaigns alone.

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In the interview data the understanding of modernity each NGO put forward became part of the construction of the modernity they represent. Democracy and democratisation are widely discussed in literature about women and gender in Morocco, but few studies have taken into consideration women activists’ understandings of the relationship between equality and democracy. From the empirical evidence of this study we can begin to put together the feminist critique of the liberal democratisation theories that see gender equality policies in Morocco as reinforcing autocratic rule. This is not to say, that any feminist ideal of democracy is in practice in the current Moroccan political system. Rather, the argument is that presence or absence of democratisation should not be measured on institutions alone. Morocco has some way to go yet to democratisation, but liberal democracy modelled on existing democracies in Europe and the US may not be the one to strive for. As a country in the middle of democratisation, Morocco has an opportunity to develop the country’s political system to a more equalitarian, rights-based participatory and deliberative democracy based on feminist critique and located in the “local” and the “modern” of the country. This, however, may depend on setting aside the antagonism between different women’s groups and working together.

Finally this chapter has unpacked the dichotomies between faith-based and rights-based groups. The divisions are located within the political context and nationalist struggles of Morocco, and are thus difficult to overcome, even when NGOs may have the same aims. Referential, language and ideology alone cannot explain the deeply rooted animosity that reigns between the actors of faith-based and rights-based groups, especially those who have been active through the 1990s and lived through the political turmoil that was caused by the introduction of the Plan Action National d’Intégration des Femmes dans le Developpement. Similarly to Guessus (2011) I found rights-based participants’ judgement of faith-based women’s groups disconcerting. Mahmood (2005) tells us that women’s agency should not be judged based on criteria set by European enlightenment and individual freedom. Yet, the rights-based organisations were using these very ideas of emancipation, independence and individual freedoms as the benchmark that in their
view the faith-based women’s organisations are failing to meet. Is my fear of imposing Eurocentric values making me view the faith-based activists through cultural, and even ethical (Fox, 1999) relativism? Or are the rights-based activists indeed imposing Eurocentric understandings of agency in the Moroccan context? Concentrating on single issues, recognising the multiple identities of the NGOs and embracing strategic cooperation can however allow joint action in the future around single issues. Incorporating intersectional feminist theory and understanding NGOs to hold multiple identities also allows a more complex understanding of how vernacularisation works on different levels between NGOs’ referential and their conceptions of modernity, democracy, human rights and religion.
My research question began as simple curiosity as to how do they do it. The women I had met through my work campaigning for women’s rights in Morocco seemed to have faced so many obstacles, and still continued to work tirelessly to achieve further equality in the Moroccan society. What was it about how they organised their campaigns and strategies that allowed them to achieve legislative reforms and to change the opinions and mindsets of authorities, whose cooperation they needed? My interest was also in the actual process that led to the change of the Moudawana. Literature spoke of great divisions between different women’s groups due to referential but also to questions of leadership. The eventual reforming of the Moudawana coincided with the Casablanca terrorist attacks of 2003, emphasising the role of the king in introducing equality legislation. I was inspired by the work of Brand (1998) and her in-depth research with women’s NGOs; her mapping of the actors and activities that were taking place in Morocco in the 1990s. I wanted to explore the very tools and processes the women’s NGOs used in those campaigns, to be able to credit them with the reform.

Coming from Europe and with little previous knowledge if Islam and Arab countries, I had formed opinions in accordance with post-9/11 Western media. Islam and Muslims were in my mind were the antithesis of Islamists, whom I associated with violence and terrorism. As I began following Moroccan politics at work and reading news and opinions by different actors, I came across the persecution organisations such as Justice and Spirituality still experienced, despite their commitment to non-violence. Just as Nadia Guessus (2011) did, I to my great surprise found that most Moroccan “liberals”
with Westernised education and knowledge of wide array of social and political discourses and criticisms were in general brandishing all Islamists as terrorists too, just as the Western media did. The more I found out about the Islamists, the more I began to question them as a homogeneous group who shares their ideas and values. My questioning was echoed by few friends and colleagues. When initially I had planned to speak to the “feminist movement”, which is a code name for rights-based women’s organisations, I realised that showing the similarity between rights-based and faith-based groups was going to be one of the contributions this thesis could make.

This final chapter shows my journey through this research project. It begins by reintroducing the principal aims of the thesis and discussing how these aims were met. How did this thesis succeed in answering the main research questions? How well did it manage to follow the research plan and methodology? How are the findings and analysis this thesis has presented relevant to the sider literature about women’s activism in Morocco? This discussion also importantly includes the pitfalls of the thesis. What were the limitations of the research design? Are there areas where this thesis has not lived up to its aims? What would I do differently, if I was to start again?

I found myself in awe of all of my participants. The women and men I met in Morocco in 2011 were all dedicated to the work they were doing with and for Moroccan women. They all faced numerous obstacles to this work, but continued to work nevertheless. Common obstacles for them all were the lack of institutionalisation of any policies and laws that have been adopted to improve the lives of women. Thus, the actors often rely on personal contacts in local municipalities when providing services for women. Many felt that both advocacy and service provision were acutely needed in Morocco. At first I was surprised by the antagonism rights-based organisations expressed towards faith-based women’s groups, but I soon became intrigued instead where this antagonism came from,
and whether there were indeed such large differences in the referential and activism of rights-based and faith-based groups and the narratives led me to believe. I found my research question: how are linguistic strategies and referential formed relevant to many of my participants. Some had thought about it in detail throughout their activism and others began to reflect upon it during the interviews. Fitting together what I saw in the documents I had collected and what I heard in the interviews was an interesting, although practically challenging task. Many of the linguistic strategies participants referred to in their interviews did resonate with the documents too, when I found a way to discuss these in parallel.

Many of my participants asked during interviews my findings so far, but also my recommendations for them. Instead of recommendations, I was left with several questions about the work of the NGOs. These are merely my personal opinions based on what I have seen and learned. Finally this chapter discusses some ideas for further research. The gaps that have necessarily been left by this, and other research projects before this, evoke several questions of their own, which could be explored in future research.

9.1 Research Aims and how they were met

In the beginning of this thesis the principle research aims were outlined as following:

The *first aim of the study is to understand the NGO campaigns’ engagement with cultural narratives and socially constructed concepts. The research aims to interrogate the constructed meanings of the keywords and categories that intersect the discussions taking place in theory, in the political context and in the data collected from women’s NGOs, namely: democracy and modernity.*
Secondly the thesis looks at the competing modernities in Morocco and how women’s NGOs refer to them.

Finally the interview and document data from Moroccan women’s NGOs is looked at through a prism of vernacularisation of the global in the local context: how are the NGOs using and translating global norms in regards to their own work (Merry 2006a).

Understanding culturally and socially located narratives required an exploration of the Moroccan political system and social context. The main discussions underlined in chapter four were important in understanding which keywords mattered in the collected data and why. All of the participants were involved in thinking about democracy and modernity during data collection in 2011 due to the events in Tunisia, Egypt and also Morocco. 2011 was an important year in political development of Morocco and showed a unique pattern of opposition politics in the country. The election of an Islamist party to government for the first time in Moroccan history preoccupied the minds of some of the rights-based participants, and highlighted the already existing antagonism and distrust between leftist political actors and those identifying as Islamists. These narratives that discussed and emphasised the perceived antagonism between rights-based and faith-based actors were indeed on the surface during field research. This thesis has displayed how these narratives function as constructing the identities of the actors on both sides of the divide, but has also questioned the perceived polarity of values and goals of the groups. Modernity is an example of a concept that is elusive even in a given context. It has also been one of the concepts dividing the rights-based and faith-based actors: whereas rights-based actors refer to modernity as the opposite of bad traditions and the past, for the faith-based activists modernity is a return to the true values of Islam, distorted by post-colonial nation building and patriarchal economic interests. The answer however is similar: moving forward while keeping the patrimony; the good traditions at the basis of the values.
The way democracy became constructed in the words and campaigns of the participants was unique to women activists in some ways. Although the understandings of democracy by the participants were closely linked to the Moroccan political system, the post-colonial nation state and the questions of compatibility of Islam and democracy, another layer could be detected. Political liberalisation and advancement of equality legislation in Morocco has been questioned as a sign of further democratisation (Cavatorta and Dalmasso 2009, Pruzan-Jorgensen 2010a). All of the participants however questioned the common understandings of democratisation, and put forward models and concepts of democracy that paid closer attention to sexual politics and women’s participation. Of course, this thesis does not mean to suggest, that a more equalitarian or a feminist model of democratisation is taking place in Morocco. Instead, even when we consider the possibility of self-censorship by participants who are speaking in their own voices within a coercive political system, the empirical evidence suggests, that women activists are actively seeking their own, more meaningful conceptualisations of what democratisation means, and what kind of democracy they wish to promote in Morocco through their activism.

The final aim, looking at how Merry’s idea of translation of global norms to local contexts – vernacularisation – is taking place, was more difficult than anticipated. In order to trace the channels of translation we needed to decide, what constitutes the local and what makes up the global first. Salime’s (2011) theory of good and bad traditions gives an idea as to why it may be so difficult to separate the two in the case of Morocco. Traditions are not merely associated with pre-colonial golden past and authenticity, but due to colonial policies in Morocco which sought to legitimise the French rule, traditions were also maintained by the colonial governance. Policies such as the Dahir Berber, which privileged Berber languages and culture under the colonial rule, have caused Moroccans to be ambivalent about traditions and their relationship to authentic culture
and modernity. In their discourses participants were easily distinguishing bad traditions as the patriarchal ones which work to keep Morocco backwards and the good traditions that Moroccan patrimony and culture are based on. Good traditions may be used at the basis of vernacularisation. This becomes evident when human rights are explained as stemming from human values, the ones that also underline Moroccan and Islamic values. But the division between good and bad traditions is done ambivalently and unsystematically. Is Islam local or is it global? Patriarchy is global, but does that make equality local? Although the question of translation or vernacularisation cannot be entirely resolved, it provides an interesting framework for discussing these concepts in relation to women’s activism. Putting the theory into the discussion also allows making some rough comparisons with women’s activism in other countries.

The primary research questions this study posed are:

- **What referential and discursive practices are employed by women’s NGOs in Morocco for their advocacy and activities?**

- **How are the referential and discursive practices reflected in the work of the NGOs?**

- **How are NGOs relating universal norms to local campaign and public awareness activities?**

The question of referential was important for most of the participants, and in some of the best interviews it evoked a process of reflection from the part of the participant that may have been helpful in rethinking the issue in the new Moroccan context. Referential divides NGOs in Morocco. Although in terms of linguistic strategies and rhetoric opposing referential are played out sometimes in the exact same words and expressions, the ideology that guides referential cannot be ignored. For rights-based NGOs equality comes first, even if Islam is seen as an integral part of how it is expressed and what values it is based on. For faith-based NGOs Islam comes first and guides which international human rights conventions and global values can be adopted as part of the
referential. Although often undetectable to an outside observer, these differences bear great importance to the actors. Only small village based development associations pay little attention to questions of referential. To them, survival, support of the community and practical actions constitute the most important aspect of their identity. Ideology, politics and referential are questions which promise alienating constituency and other important cooperators, such as local authorities. Actions, for these organisations define the values of the NGO.

Referential is guiding both the activities and the discourses used by NGOs. Chapter 6 explored some of the materials produced by women’s NGOs, showing the main activities and ways in which they are phrased. There is a difference, of course, in the ways the NGOs speak to the government and the ways they speak to their constituencies. Nevertheless, NGOs with only rights referential withhold from speaking about religion with the service users too, whereas faith-based NGOs emphasise Islam in all of their communications. Some narratives are shared as linguistic strategies: examples of such narratives are victim narratives and narratives of scientists. Both are used in convincing both the public and especially political decision-makers of the legitimacy of the cause and validity of the claims made by the NGOs.

Local and global are transposed in the activism and linguistic strategies of NGOs. Women activists study transnational feminist campaigns for inspiration and think of ways to incorporate lessons learned by women activists in other countries to their own advocacy and activism. Some strategies and causes, such as violence against women and women’s courts can be adapted almost directly, others, such as Slutwalk require careful adaptation and translation. The adaptation and translation are done through experience and trial and error: Marche des Salopes (Slut Walk) was not going to gather support even from the women who endure sexual harassment on a daily basis and wish to challenge it; instead, the group that began as SlutWalk Morocco quickly heeded to criticism and translated their name using a Moroccan slogan often used in sexual harassment
manshoufouch – meaning “invisible”. The group twisted this slogan to Women Shoufouch – making women visible again. Although victim narratives can in this sense be seen as a translation to local context, they are not however inherently Moroccan. Thus, local and global become intertwined and inseparable, continuously reconstructing each other and the modernities they represent and respond to.

This thesis has explored the research questions through a wealth of empirical evidence of women’s NGOs campaign and public awareness materials as well as through the 24 research interviews conducted for the study. Chapter 8 has discussed in detail the meaning afforded to democracy, modernity and as its countenance the traditions that oppose and remake modernity in the discourses of women’s NGOs in Morocco. Merry’s theory of vernacularisation has been helpful in thinking about the relationship between local and global, however it has proven difficult to trace the exact routes and connections of translation taking place in the design of referential and the narratives used for NGO activities. Local and global are both fluid, changing in relation to the contexts in which they are situated and constantly constructing each other. Further work may be needed to critique the concepts of global and local before the process of translation can be fully comprehended in the context of Morocco.

9.2 Limitations of this study

An obvious limitation to this study was my limited language capacity. Although it was possible to conduct most of the interviews in French, a wealth of literature on the topic was available in either French or English and a great deal of the materials produced by the NGOs was also available in French, my limited Arabic language capacity created some obvious and important disadvantages. Although I kept studying the language throughout my research process, I never achieved the level of fluency necessary for in-
depth analysis of Arabic language documents or for conducting interviews in Arabic. Analysing the Arabic-language documents, videos and audio materials was extremely difficult and I cannot pretend to have captured many of the nuances. Quality of translation in the two interviews conducted through an interpreter was difficult to ascertain. Asking all of the participants to express themselves in French also meant that what was being represented were their Francophone selves, which for all would differ slightly from the selves represented in their mother tongue, regardless of their level of fluency\textsuperscript{104}. What this study has captured then is Moroccan women’s NGOs referential and linguistic strategies as expressed in French.

This question of representation of the other is of course a familiar issue in researching post-colonial situations and not limited to language alone. Although wrought with complexity, as a researcher I must be able to rely on my ability to talk with, rather than talking for the other (Gandhi 1998) and continuously question my Eurocentric understanding of concepts such as agency, modernity and progress. Equipped with a reading list of postcolonial feminist critique such as Mohanty (2003), Spivak (1987) and importantly, Saba Mahmood’s (2005) work on Islam as the basis of agency, I quickly found myself in the middle of Moroccan women’s NGOs’ antagonistic battles for meanings of those very terms. Leftist politically aligned feminist organisations, as noted above and discussed at length by Guessus (2011) displayed what I had taken to be a Eurocentric understanding of Islamist women as submissive to patriarchal norms. After positioning myself so carefully as non-judgemental of the different forms of agency displayed by different actors, I found it difficult not to dismiss the opinions of those leftist feminists as “Western”. In fact, with by carefully listening to the positions of those activists, whose lives had previously been threatened due to their activism and

\textsuperscript{104} I discuss this question in detail in a forthcoming article, Brannlund, Kovacic and Lounasmaa (2013), “\textit{Narratives in/of Translation: A Triologue on Translating Narratives Cross-Culturally}”, Narrative Works 3(1)
familiarising myself with the political history of Morocco, and how the Islamist organisations were supported by the regime as a polar force to the leftist opposition, I understood both positions to be contextual and local. Whatever position I was to take however was always going to be that of an outsider. I have no answers to this dilemma of representation in a postcolonial situation. I can merely refer to those participants, who assured me that the outsider view is valid and important too.

In addition to issues of language and outsider status, when researching the unknown one always feels more time was needed to familiarise oneself with the place, the people and the topics researched. I spent altogether 17 months in Morocco between 2007 and 2011. I met most of my participants only once. Communication is difficult due to changing staff and email addresses, websites that are not updated and the distances and the time it takes to travel in Morocco. I nevertheless covered more areas both geographically and ideologically than many of the other studies into women’s NGOs in Morocco have. My limitation in depth regarding each researched NGO becomes strength in regards to scope. And yet no NGOs from the East and South-East of Morocco were included. In two more months I could have travelled east to find out about regional differences there. But there certainly isn’t a shortage of data for this study. It wasn’t possible to include all of the documents collected for the study into the findings. The interview data began to show patterns when only half of the evidence was put together. One could always do more, but then the empirical evidence gathered and exhibited in this thesis makes a significant contribution to the knowledge of Moroccan women’s NGOs struggles, strategies and narratives.
9.3 Contribution

This thesis has made an original contribution to the literature about women’s NGOs in Morocco due to the wealth of the empirical evidence it has presented as well as by bringing the theory of vernacularisation by Merry (2003) to a context where it has not previously been discussed. There is another kind of contribution I wish to discuss at this stage of the writing process. All of the participants who kindly contributed their time and knowledge to this project asked for my feedback. They wished to know, what my findings were; what I had learned, and what there was for them to learn from the other NGOs I had spoken to. Certainly the problems faced by the NGOs were similar in all regions and regardless of the ideology or referential the NGO represented. As Berriane (2010) has noted in her research into NGOs benefitting from the INDH funding, lack of institutionalisation of how local and national authorities deal with the demands of civil society organisations can cause great difficulty to daily operations as well as wider advocacy projects. Personal relations play a major role in all political and administrative transactions in Morocco. Although this may have short-term benefits to those NGOs, who have good working and personal relationships with the decision-makers they operate with, in the long term lack of institutionalisation hinders the work of all NGOs. As personnel changes, the achievements made with the last administration can be entirely lost and work has to begin from scratch. This effects NGOs’ funding, permissions to organise events, access to locales and other resources, support for the NGOs from local authorities such as the police, hospitals and courts and legislative reforms. Lack of institutionalisation is not the same as lack of bureaucracy: bureaucracy is in place, but can be used for either supporting or for blocking actors. Whatever view of democratisation is taken, institutionalisation of equality and civil society cooperation must be part of it.
As NGOs everywhere, women’s NGOs in Morocco struggle with funding and volunteers. Attracting especially young members to most NGOs is challenging. This is due to issues of class on the one hand, as one must be financially secure in order to take the time to volunteer in the non-profit sector. The issue of attracting young people may be caused by the youth’s general lack of trust and interest in political affairs and actors or due to the issues campaigned for and the way in which campaigns and activities are run. Many NGOs are incorporating activities thought to appeal to young people, such as theatre and music production and increasing their visibility on the internet and especially social media. The ones already struggling with lack of human resources however there are few opportunities to develop such activities. Supporting groups formed by young people, such as Women Shoufouch, as Union de l’Action Féminine is doing, can be an effective means of making the interests meet and pass on the experience of the women’s movement to new group of actors.

Several channels of funding are available to women’s NGOs in Morocco. Government funding passes mainly through the INDH which is allocated and managed by local and regional authorities. There are no general calls for funding; money is allocated on a project basis when applied by NGOs. The same is true for most of the funding available through foreign embassies and INGOs such as Oxfam and different UN agencies. NGOs with more experience in applying for funding stand a better chance of receiving it. As noted by Jeffrey (2007) in relation to international funding in Bosnia, special rules and language of funding application can influence not only who receives funding, but kinds of activities funding is given for, too. All of the funding is project-based, which means that continuation of services can be difficult to guarantee. Indeed, some new centres funded with INDH money have already run into difficulties. Applying for project funding, running the projects and reporting on them takes staff away from daily running of the NGOs. Small associations with less capacity for applying for project funding rely
on local NGOs to run activities they in turn have received funding for, and thus have little say on what type of activities are realised.

When asked for my recommendations for NGOs in their work I was mainly able to ask them a question: would you not feel that cooperating with all those who support the cause of women would give you a greater force to make your point? When rights-based women’s NGOs are confronted by not representing the majority of Moroccan women in their advocacy, it is assumed that Islamist women do not support the causes. I found through talking to many of them and reading the materials and texts produced by them, that they do. All women’s NGOs oppose violence against women for example. Rights-based organisations certainly do not think so, and few faith-based organisations do either. For the generation who were pitched against each other in the wider political context as rights-based women’s NGOs supported the initiative of the government for the inclusion of women into development (PANIFD) and faith-based organisations opposed it. Some activists of the younger generations are less adamant about their opposition to each other. The younger actors are also more fluid in regards to their referential and more concerned about the goals than the coherence of their strategies to get there, rather than referential based on ideology. These activists are operating in a different political context, where civil society is liberated, new technologies are available and some of the political binaries have begun to dissolve. The irony of rights-based and faith-based organisations supporting the same causes is not lost on the public and the media either. The magazine Actuel 50 reported on PJD and an NGO supporting freedom of religion both campaigning against sexual harassment in 2010. In a comic strip at the bottom of the page 41, two demonstrators with the same slogan, both blushing have the following exchange:

-Aren’t you the ones who had lunch during Ramadan?
-Yes. Why?
-Oops.
If I was asked to cooperate with people or organisation whose other campaigns I had moral or political aversion to, such as the Youth Defence, a conservative Catholic organisation in Ireland campaigning against legalisation of abortion, I too would find it difficult and contradictory to do so. Thus my recommendation to the NGOs in Morocco is not that they must cooperate despite their differences, but rather that they get to know each other’s positions a little better, and perhaps begin a dialogue. What Guessus (2011) has found, and what my own research confirmed, is that both sides have assumed the other to be a homogenous group with shared opinions on all issues. In fact, as this study has shown, both the “feminists” and the “Islamists” are a diverse group with different opinions and values. Very often rights-based and faith-based groups speak of the same issues using the same terminology. Knowing what the other stands for could be a beginning of a dialogue, which in turn could lead to more Moroccan women standing up to support equality together against the conservative forces who currently stand to gain from women’s subjugation both economically and politically.

9.4 Future research needs

This thesis has opened up an important discussion about the differences and similarities of the referential and discursive practices of faith-based and rights-based organisations. The discussion continues the findings of Guessus (2011) on the antagonism between the two types of women’s groups in Morocco. More in-depth analysis of the differences and similarities could help understand how the competing ideas of modernity and the political context of Morocco have shaped the polarity of the groups and continues to construct them in relation and opposition to each other. This study proved inconclusive of how exactly vernacularisation works in the context of Morocco. It showed, how the good traditions are used as the basis of vernacularisation, but was inconclusive about the role played by human rights and religion. This is mainly due to the complexity of the
competing referential between groups. What constitutes local and global is difficult to determine and fluctuates according to changing political situations. PhD research is currently taking place in Morocco on single mothers and divorce. Hanane Darhour wrote a doctoral thesis on political quotas in Morocco and has published her findings from the 2002 elections, opening an interesting debate about gender parity in Moroccan political system (Darhour, 2012). The new constitution and its application as well as the on-going campaigns for medically assisted abortion and decriminalisation of extra- and pre-marital sexual relations will also provide interesting material for future research into Moroccan women and women’s rights activism.
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291


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Inquiry, 178-200.


Appendix A

Women’s Organisations in Morocco

This document maps all the NGOs included in this research according to their aims, size, liaisons, referential, political connections and ideology. The document does this according to the information available from the NGOs themselves, from sources on the internet and other media and based on accounts by social actors in Morocco. Often the accounts and descriptions of NGOs are varied and contradictory depending on which source is being used, and thus the following descriptions are a result of careful interpretation of these competing accounts, aided by the researcher’s modest knowledge of Morocco and Moroccans. Most of the NGOs operating in Morocco, whatever their area of specialisation, are listed in the internet portal www.tanmia.ma\(^{105}\) which aims to reinforce NGO capacities through use of communication technology. Tanmia lists 1021 organisations under “women and development”. Many of these organisations concentrate on only one of the themes, many are small local organisations and for most it is difficult to ascertain whether they are still active. Tanmia portal does not provide a comprehensive list of all the actors involved in improving women’s life however, nor is it regularly updated. All the information is input by the NGOs themselves and is thus self-representation of the aims and activities. In addition to the Tanmia portal, information is gathered from Moroccan and international press, Facebook, NGOs’ own webpages and through conversations with NGO representatives and outside social actors.

Organisations are categorised loosely according to their referential. As is evident from outsider reports on political alliances however, this categorisation does not automatically mean, that the NGOs in the same category are willing to work with each other. The first category are those NGOs, who according to their self-definition base their work on

\(^{105}\) Accessed (closer to the date)
human rights and equality, such as they are defined in international conventions. The interpretations of different NGOs as to what this may mean in practice vary, somewhat, but this discussion will be elaborated in more detail in the findings, where the referential and actions are analysed in more detail. Older, more experienced and especially the politically linked out of all the rights-based organisations have the most clearly defined referential and aims. Smaller, locally based organisations may use human rights and equality as their referential when asked about it without the referential as such interfering with daily activities. Common to all these groups is their refusal to engage with faith-based organisations. Nevertheless some of these groups do use religious references in their own work.

The second group are the faith-based organisations. These are often treated by the rest of the population, and especially by the women’s rights groups as all the same, unreliable and untrustworthy. Rights-based NGOs regard the rhetoric of the faith-based organisations around equality, parity, democracy and women’s rights as hypocritical. They openly criticise this as double language not to be trusted, and cite the example of the inheritance law, which no faith-based organisation wishes to change, as proof of this hypocrisy. In reality faith-based organisations are also divided to politically linked ones and independent organisations, and the interpretations of women’s role in the society vary between the groups.

Finally there are some organisations whose main role is to work with women in their immediate surroundings, who are not, by their own admission, concerned with referential or ideology. Many of these would call themselves associations and make a difference between themselves and the NGOs, who are considered to be closer to power structures, able to approach and gain funding from governments and international actors, and more bureaucratic. These associations are often run by one person or a handful of people and consider themselves to be the closest representatives of the people. NGOs met for the
purposes of this study, both rights-based and faith-based, have also made references to associations they work with, where they may go in to do literacy or other classes.

**Alliance des Femmes du Maroc pour le Développement et la Formation** is an independent rights-based organisation in Tetouan. The NGO provides literacy and rights training to women and runs a support centre for women victims of violence. Based on their work with the victims they also give recommendations to authorities in treatment of victims in legal instances. Their awareness courses also take place in local schools. The organisation is a member of Anaruz network as they were asked to join it. The director was interviewed for this study.

Email: mwafdt@yahoo.fr

**Anaruz, Reseau National des Centres d’écoute des femmes victimes de violence** is a national umbrella organisation of several domestic violence service organisations and centres. Moroccan law is ambiguous about a married woman’s right to reside outside the family home, and thus domestic violence centres operate on day-centre and phone-line basis. Anaruz was founded in 2004 and all its activities are coordinated from Casablanca. There are approximately 40 domestic violence centres listed under Anaruz. Anaruz has a comprehensive resource centre with studies and reports by of their own but also including studies commissioned by member organisations, such as Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM). ADFM coordinates most of Anaruz’s actions, and thus the network and its member organisations, although officially politically independent, suffer slightly from the close links ADFM has with the (check this) party. ADFM uses the network for coordinating some of its national advocacy campaigns. Some NGOs ask to become members of the network in order to benefit from the nationwide experience and advice available to NGOs and others are recruited by Anaruz, for who having a national constituency is important in regards to the advocacy and research activities. Anaruz
coordinates annual studies into service provision to victims of violence around the country. No member of the Anaruz office was interviewed for this study, but many of the NGOs included are members of the network. The network’s own website is updated daily and includes variety of campaign materials and publications.

Website: www.anaruz.org

Email: contact@anaruz.org

**Aspirations Féminines** is an independent rights-based organisation in Meknes. The NGO was founded in 1999. In 2010 it received financing from INDH for a new support centre and shelter for women victims of violence. The NGO is a member of the Oyoune Nissaiya network and have participated in advocacy in the Spring of Dignity and Spring of Equality and Democracy. The centre where the NGO operates also has facilities for professional training, such as cookery and sawing classes. The director was interviewed for this study.

Email: aspirations_feminines@yahoo.fr

**Assaida Al-Horra** is a rights-based organisation in Tetouan. It was founded by women activists in 1990 and for nearly a decade was the largest service providing organisation in the region. The NGO ran medical services, a support centre for women victims of violence and literacy and professional training for women. Assaida Al-Horra produced numerous studies of women’s concerns in the Tetouan region and of the service users in early 2000s. Some of these studies have been included in the thesis. In recent years the service provision of the NGO has ceased and they are allegedly concentrating in advocacy alone. The director has also been nominated to a Royal Committee.

Email: ass.alhorra@menara.ma

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106 In Morocco NGOs are still using the term “victim” in connection to domestic violence survivors. This is a conscious choice which is considered to have a powerful impact in the efforts of the NGOs to lobby up towards the government. Talking about “survivors” could undermine the problem of violence and its impact to the women who experience it.
Assanaa Annissayaa is an independent rights-based organisation in El-Jadida. It was created in 1999. The organisation runs a support centre for women victims of violence and is a member of the Oyoune Nissaiya network run by AMDH. The association also organises literacy courses and professional and legal training for women. It has a separate centre for cookery, hairdressing and sawing classes. Through the network the NGO participates in national studies on violence against women. Three of the members of the office of the NGO were interviewed for this study.
Email: assanaa@menara.ma

Association Amal Tagoudicht is a village development association in the region of Taznakht. The director, interviewed for the study, also works for another organisation in the village of Taznakht, Dar al Oumouma. Dar al OUmouma is a maternity hospital in the village and caters for the entire area. It also provides sexual health education to the women of the area. Association Amal caters for the immediate community only, working on small scale development projects such as carpet weaving, well building and other activities directed at improving living conditions in the community.
Email: a.amal@tagoudicht@gmail.com

Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) was founded in 1985 right before the end of the UN decade for women and the conference of Nairobi. At present it has offices in Rabat, Casablanca and Marrakech each with their own areas of speciality. National advocacy campaigns are coordinated from Casablanca, work on violence against women from Marrakech and political parity campaigns from Rabat. The organisation defines itself as politically independent feminist non-profit organisation and its actions and campaigns are based on women’s human rights as they are universally recognised. ADFM’s own representatives are keen to emphasise the political independence of the NGO, but seem to be the only people in Morocco to truly believe in it. The organisations
ex-director Nouzha Sqalli became the minister for family, solidarity and social affairs in 2007 and several other members have also been recruited by the (which is it?) party to the government and to different royal commissions. While all of these people have since resigned from the committees of ADFM, the NGO’s close link to the party cannot be denied. The aim of the organisation is to promote equality within public policies, the national legislation and public practices and does this through political lobbying, capacity building and reporting. ADFM has coordinated three shadow reports on the CEDAW, the women’s movement’s manifesto on the constitution, which was campaigned for under the name *Printemps de démocratie* and is currently coordinating the *Printemps pour la dignité*, which lobbies for changes in the penal code. The organisation publishes regular studies into legislation and women’s rights and equality and maintains a resource centre as well as a legal aid service for women. Recent programmes and campaigns have previously been conducted on issues such as: gender and budget, women’s leadership, violence against women, sexual harassment, capacity building for women MPs and campaign to lift the CEDAW reservations in Morocco. The director of ADFM was interviewed for the study. Website is updated daily and includes variety of campaign materials and publications.

Website: [www.adfm.ma](http://www.adfm.ma)

Email: [adfmcsa@menara.ma](mailto:adfmcsa@menara.ma) and [contact@adfm.ma](mailto:contact@adfm.ma)

**Association Femmes Démocrates** is a rights-based feminist organisation affiliated to a leftis trade union and based in Rabat. The organisatin was founded in 2007 by women activists in the trade union. The association still collaborates with the trade union ODT and participates in a European Union initiative for women’s rights. They organise training for women on labour law and women’s rights to maternity leave and equality of salaries. The director was interviewed for this study.

Email : [afid.fatna@gmail.com](mailto:afid.fatna@gmail.com)
Association des Femmes du Quartier Assalam pour le Développement et la Communication is a small independent faith-based organisation working in a suburb of Agadir. The organisation is auto-financed by the director. It runs literacy and professional training for women in a purpose-built centre. The association was founded in 2004. In addition to courses the association provides financial assistance to poor families during religious holidays.

Email: aichaleyoussi@hotmail.com

Association Marocaine de la lutte contre la Violence à l’égard des Femmes (AMVEF) is the first domestic violence service in Morocco, founded in Casablanca in 1995. Fatima Mernissi and Omar Azziman, the current minister for justice, initiated a meeting with several women’s organisations in 1993. It took another two years before the centre opened, as the initiative met with great deal of resistance, and required the support of what the organisation calls “a known and trusted public figure” until the centre was allowed to open. The centre was based on experiences of a Tunisian organisation and the international organisation SOS Femmes en Détresse. The founding organisations were ADFM, AMDF, OMDF (Organisation Marocaine des Droits de l’Homme, a human rights organisation aligned with the government). The objectives of the organisation are to support women victims of violence, make domestic violence a public concern, reform laws unequal to women and to help create a strong women’s movement. In addition to providing domestic violence services (a walk-in service and a help-line) the organisation holds meetings, round-table discussions, formations and participates in reporting on domestic violence. The organisation has also participated in CEDAW shadow reporting. AMVEF too makes claims of political independence, but the director (what’s her name?) in an interview conducted for the study expressed her awareness of the perceptions of outsiders in regards to their position vis-a-vis the government. AMVEF often cooperates closely with Anaruz and ADFM, but maintains their independence of both. Director of the organisation was interviewed.
Association Marocaine pour les Droits des Femmes (AMDF) is an organisation based in Casablanca and was founded in 1992. The main objective of the organisation is to prevent violence against women. The organisation runs its own domestic violence centre (Centre Fama), organises round-table debates and publishes guides and reports on domestic violence, the family law and sexual harassment among other issues. Founder of the violence against women network Oyoune Nissaiya. AMDF participated in the campaign to change the Moudawana and has also been involved in the CEDAW shadow reporting. The last time the website has been updated was in 2004 and so information about the organisation is difficult to find online. AMDF has close links to the Association Marocaine des Droits de l’Homme (AMDH) and some members have links to leftist political parties. AMDF’s director was interviewed for the study.

Website: [http://amdf.over-blog.com/](http://amdf.over-blog.com/),


Email: amdf-fama@iam.nte.ma

Arfedec is an independent rights-based organisation in Tetouan. It was founded in 1996 by women who came from human rights and student organisations. Their support centre for women victims of violence opened in 2000. The organisation also runs literacy courses and legal and professional training for women and information caravans in the nearby rural villages. The organisation is a member of the violence against women cell in the municipality of Tetouan and cooperates with local and regional authorities. Director interviewed for the study.

Email: arfedec@yahoo.fr
Association Sidi Hssain pour le Développement Rural is a small village association in the region of Tazhakht run by the founder Sfia Aminotrassse or Amina. Association receives funding only from the municipality or larger NGOs. Gives training on literacy and health and also runs a cooperative for women carpet weavers. Director interviewed for the study.

Email: jihad.22@hotmail.fr

Association Ennakhil is the largest women’s organisation in the region of Marrakech. The rights-based independent organisation was founded in 1997. The NGO does have links to politics however as the ex-director was nominated to a Royal Committee in 2010. The organisation has a support centre for women victims of violence, a legal section advocating for changes in family law and other equality legislation, a political section which advocates for women’s political participation and trains women politicians and an economic section which provides professional training for women and runs a women’s handicraft cooperative. The NGO organises seminars on the issues it advocates for. It is run from a large office outside of the centre of Marrakech. The director of the economic section was interviewed for the study.

Email: aefe@iam.net.ma

Comité Nationale de la Scolarisation des Filles Rurales is a national network coordinating smaller local organisations that work to improve access of girls to secondary level education. The network provides support and financing for organisations and conducts annual studies on numbers of girls reaching secondary education. The director was interviewed for this study.

Email: cssf@mtds.com

Femme pour le Développement et la Culture is a small organisation mostly involved in training and education in a poor neighbourhood of Agadir. Founded in 2002 by women
who were previously involved in other women’s organisations, such as the UAF section in Agadir. Feminist rights-based organisation, main activities literacy, legal and professional training. Founder interviewed for the study.
Email: lmanouzi@yahoo.fr

**Forum (Mountada) Azzahrae pour la Femme Marocaine** was founded in 2002. It is a network of faith-based women’s organisations affiliated to the political party PJD. The network operates from Rabat and unites over 60 organisations across Morocco. The network organises caravans on specific themes, supports the activities of its member organisations and commissions studies into the problems faced by Moroccan women. The network participated in the consultation process for the constitutional reform. The director of the network was interviewed for this study.
Email: mzahrae@yahoo.fr

**Le Forum de la Femme** is a small organisation in the town of Taroudant in the South of Morocco. Founded in 2003. The association cooperates closely with Association Belgo Marocain, which works with mothers. Objectives are elimination of violence against women and the improvement of women’s legal, medical and cultural status. The association organises professional and literacy training and runs a support centre for women victims of violence. No strict referential. Director interviewed for the study.
Email: norazahr@yahoo.fr or forumfemme@yahoo.fr

**Institution National de Solidarité Avec les Femmes en Détresse (INSAF)** was founded in Casablanca in 1999. The organisation concentrates on fight against poverty and exclusion of women and children, against abandonment of children and child labour and for reintegration of single mothers into the society. INSAF runs a support centre for single mothers with a day care centre and training facilities. Not interviewed.
Email: insaf123@wanadoo.net.ma
Initiatives Pour la Protection des Droits des Femmes (IPDF) was founded in Fez in 1998. The aim of the organisation is to bring about equality between the sexes in legal texts and in everyday life through the defence of women’s universal rights. The organisation runs a centre for women victims of violence which provides legal aid, counselling, capacity building and training for women victims of violence, conducts legal research and coordinates programmes to initiate change in legislation with other organisations. IPDF is also concerned with women’s economic equality and is organising continuous professional training courses for women in Fez as well as helping in forming women’s cooperatives to encourage economic activities. IPDF is planning to open a second shelter in Morocco for women victims of domestic violence, and are hoping for the support of the local council to ensure legal protection. No active website. IPDF is a member of Genre en Action, a network on women and development founded by the French foreign ministry in 2003 and has participated in the CEDAW shadow reporting process.

Email: elmehdiasma@yahoo.fr or ipdf2@yahoo.fr

Initiatives pour la Protection des Droits des Femmes Meknes was founded in 2002 by women who were previously active in leftist politics. The NGO runs a support centre for women victims of violence. Due to the short duration of project funding the NGO also runs a café in its centre to try to partially auto-finance its activities. The organisation provides literacy and professional training for women and public awareness and sexual education in schools among other things. The NGO is independent of IPDF Fez. The director was interviewed for this study. IPDF Meknes is a rights-based organisation that doesn’t mix religious referential but bases on international women’s rights conventions.

Email: moubadarat@yahoo.fr
**Jossour Forum des Femmes Marocaines** was created in 1995 in Rabat. The organisation aims to promote women’s legal, economic and social rights, women’s participation in politics, action against violence against women and democratisation. Jossour organises development projects, professional and literary training and teaches women about their legal rights through formal training and other medias, such as theatre. The organisation runs a family support centre in Rabat’s old city centre. Jossour also holds seminars and round table discussions on women in Moroccan society and women’s role in Islam, for example. Other activities concentrate on women’s political participation, such as formation of election candidates and campaigning for increased numbers of women’s quotas in cooperation with other women’s NGOs and political parties. No active website. Not interviewed. Email: jossourffm@yahoo.fr

**Justice and Spirituality – Al Adl wa al-Ihsan** women’s section was founded in 1980 by the daughter of the movement Nadia Yassine. The women’s section is greatly supported by the founder Abdessalam Yassine. Nadia Yassine has since become the general spokesperson of Justice and Spirituality. As the movement still operates illegally, there are no official membership charts. Estimated number of followers is 200,000 all over Morocco, but especially in poorer areas of large cities. The movement organises gatherings where the teachings of Abdessalam Yassine on the Koran are discussed. The women’s section discusses women’s political participation and role in the society and runs a large number of small associations where women can avail of literacy and professional training as well as religious teaching. The women’s section is mostly concerned with ijtihad and challenging the idea that women should be secluded in the private space. Email: nd_yassine@yahoo.fr
Ligue Démocratique pour les Droits des Femmes (LDDF) was first established in Casablanca in 1993 and now comprises of 14 regional sections throughout Morocco. The organisation promotes women’s rights and fights discrimination in the society based on the principle of equality between women and men on two fronts: firstly, through education and formation, and secondly through lobbying activities. It aims to change local legislation based on international statues on the right of women and educate and empower women to be able to defend their rights and improve the conditions of their lives. The organisation provides legal aid and formation for women and organises annual “solidarity caravans”, tours of marginalised areas of Morocco where women have access to healthcare and education, formation on legal rights, legal assistance and material aid. These solidarity caravans have also travelled to France and Spain to reach migrant Moroccan women and inform them of their rights according to Moroccan law. In Rabat the organisation also runs professional training programmes, literacy programmes and human rights training for women. The advocacy work includes organisation and participation in demonstrations, research activities, seminars and discussions. The organisation has one of the rare women’s shelters for victims of violence in the country, opened in 2006 and working despite the legal risk to the organisation. Director of campaigns in the Casablanca office was interviewed.

Website: [http://perso.menara.ma/~lddf/](http://perso.menara.ma/~lddf/)

Email: lddf.rt@menara.ma or lddf5@menara.ma

Association An-Nahda pour la scolarisation des Filles Rurales is a small faith-based organisation in El-Jadida working only on schooling of rural girls. The association provides housing for girls who would otherwise have to travel to secondary school from distant villages. The organisation is supported by the National Committee on Schooling of Rural Girls and financed by the Embassy of United Arab Emirates. Director and treasurer interviewed for the study.
Solidarité Féminine is an organisation in Casablanca specialising in the rights of single mothers. The organisation provides professional training, accommodation, child care, schooling and legal aid to single mothers who have been rejected by their families, lost their jobs or have otherwise become marginalised in the society. It was founded in 1985. The organisation has produced and commissioned studies into single mothers’ lives in Moroccan society, lobbies the state actively to change discriminatory legislation through the press, public seminars and international cooperation. The founder, Aicha Ech-Channa identifies herself deeply as a devout Muslim and the organisation is based on Muslim values, although faith is not explicit in their programmes. The founder has received several international human rights prizes. No active website and no email address available in the internet. Not interviewed but some documents of the NGO used for document analysis.

Email: solidaritefeminine@atlasnet.net.ma

Tawaza is an independent rights-based organisation in Martil in the North of Morocco. The NGO was founded in 2007 and most of its members are university students. The organisation runs literacy and human rights training to smaller women’s groups in the area and does public awareness campaigns on the issues of equality and women’s rights. The NGO is a member of Global Rights organisation’s network of advocacy and director Miriam Zemmour has for example participated in the UN conference on torture in 2011 to discuss violence against women. The NGO travels around Morocco with plays written and performed by members of the organisation. The director was interviewed for this study.

Email: asso_tawaza@yahoo.fr

Union de l’Action Féminine (UAF) was founded in 1987 and currently has 33 regional offices around the country. The aims of the organisation are to promote the social situation of women in Morocco and eradicate all forms of discrimination against women. UAF provides and legal aid and counselling to women victims of violence,
promote women’s legal and economic status, fight illiteracy of women and promote women’s political participation. UAF was the initiator of the one million signatures campaign in 1992 to change the family law. One of the ongoing campaigns for fight against violence against women employs the use of symbolic tribunals where women victims of violence are invited to give their testimonies to educate the public and the politicians about violence against women and its costs. UAF also organises seminars, round-table discussions and open days as part of their campaigns. Director interviewed for the study.

Email: uaf@mtds.com

**Women Shoufouch** facebook group founded by three Rabat-based students in August 2011 to challenge sexual harassment on the streets. Initially the group was modelled on the global movement Slutwalk, but the founders soon realised that the name and the concept were unsuitable to Morocco. Nevertheless initially calling the group Slutwalk Morocco gave it media attention in its first months of existence. The group organised a march against sexual harassment together with UAF in April 2012 and continues to post on Twitter and facebook. Two of the founding members were interviewed for the study.

Email: slutwalkma@gmail.co
Appendix B

Key Informant Interviews

**Mohammed:** A man in his 20s, member of the M20 revolutionary group from South of Morocco. Involved in public demonstrations from 2010 onwards. Research assistant in environmental research projects.

**Dr. Julie Pruzan-Jorgensen:** Danish researcher with the Danish Institute for International Studies with expertise on Middle East, especially Morocco and gender issues in Islam.

**Prof. Fatima Sadiqi:** Professor of linguistics at the University of Fes. Has written extensively on Moroccan women’s NGOs and hosts an annual gender conference in Fes.

**Stephanie Willman-Bordat:** Director of Global Rights for Maghreb. Global Rights works as a networking organisation for independent, non-politically aligned rights-based women’s organisations in Morocco. The network has put forward proposals for legislative reforms and educational programmes about the new Moudawana.

**Adil:** A gynaecologist working at a private practice in Rabat. Educates patients about contraception and reproductive rights. Performs abortions at his clinic.

**Hafsa el Alaoui:** Employee at the Finnish Embassy for 18 years. Responsible for political, diplomatic and cultural affairs.

**Sami:** Local councillor in the South of Morocco.
Dr. Souad Slaoui: Lecturer in linguistics at the University of Fes.

Hasnaa Chraibi: Young woman living in Casablanca, working for a children’s charity.
Appendix C Timelines
TIMELINE OF MOROCCAN POLITICAL HISTORY

1992-1995
- First attempted government of alternance
- Hassan II's memoirs
- AMDF (Battered Women's centre in Casablanca)
- La Ligue Democratique des Droits de Femme
- Association Marocaine des Femmes Progressistes
- Association al-Jusur
- 1 million signatures campaign

1996-2003
- 1 million Islamists march in Casablanca against family code reform
- Rabat demonstrations for family code reform
- IPDF Fes
- INSAF
- Association AMAL
- Second CEDAW report
- CEDAW report and shadow report

2004-2010
- Death of Hassan II
- Accession of Mohamed VI
- Reform of the family code
- Instance equité et justice
- INDH
- Casablanca terrorist attacks
- Nationality code reform
- General elections
- PAM
- Constitution reform
- Government of alternance
- First opposition government
- General elections
- Local elections, PAM
- Morocco lifts reservations on CEDAW
- 978 organisations listed under women and development