

The Viability of Islam in the Inclusion of Women in
Development: A Case Study of Moroccan Informal Islamic
Education Networks

By

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A Thesis Submitted to
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts

September 2008, Halifax, Nova Scotia

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Date: September 26th, 2008



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ISBN: 978-0-494-44658-4

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ISBN: 978-0-494-44658-4

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SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY**ABSTRACT****The Viability of Islam in the Inclusion of Women in
Development: A Case Study of Moroccan Informal
Islamic Education Networks**

By Nadine Miville

September 2008

Muslim women have long been at the centre of an uneasy relationship between religion and development. Gender stereotypes, from both Muslim and Northern states, have systematically excluded women, especially religious women, as agents of development. On the one hand, Muslim nations have used Islam as a legitimizing force to exclude women from public life; on the other hand, Northern development initiatives have identified religion as women's impediment to full participation in the development process. Understanding what has kept women outside of development efforts is fundamental to many mainstream development organizations which deem themselves to be gender conscious.

Grassroots initiatives have proven that women are using Islam as a holistic liberatory tool. Understanding the literature and the data from this research on Moroccan Muslim women's initiatives to harness Islam in their worldview for development enables a conversation on alternative gender paradigms in the field of development.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the diligent efforts of many. First I would like to acknowledge the constant support, guidance and constructive feedback provided by Dr. Anne Marie Dalton who supervised this work. You have been a true mentor. Thank you. I would also like to thank Dr. Jamal Badawi for his great insights into Islamic issues. His work was foundational to my understanding of women's rights in Islam as well as personal intellectual and spiritual growth.

I would also like to acknowledge the unconditional support provided by my husband Mohamed for his great effort in helping me translate from the Arabic interviews and who constantly encouraged me in all of my work, what a great blessing. The support provided by my mother-in-law, Nouzha has been amazing, without her help I would not have been able to locate the right women, distribute my surveys and gain inside access to the lives of the few selected for this research. She has been an inspiration.

The generous insights provided by the Moroccan women interviewed for this thesis were truly a privilege to obtain. Their stories were inspirational and generated much food for thought and personal intellectual growth. Without their trust I would have never been allowed into their personal worlds, for this I am truly thankful.

I appreciate equally the efforts of both Professor Perwaiz Hayat who provided insight into this work as a reader and to Dr. Azza Anis as the examiner.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the encouragement and support provided by many most importantly my parents. Many others go unnamed for lack of space and who journeyed with me through this degree and enabled me to grow intellectually. You all know who you are.

INTRODUCTION

Muslim women have long been at the centre of an uneasy relationship between religion and development. Gender stereotypes, from both Muslim and Northern¹ states have systematically excluded women from the equation. On the one hand, Muslim nations have used Islam as a legitimizing force to exclude women from public life; on the other hand, Northern development initiatives have identified religion as women's impediment to full participation in the development process. Understanding what has kept women outside of the development equation is fundamental to many mainstream² development organizations which deem themselves to be gender conscious.

Grassroots³ initiatives have proven that women are using Islam as a holistic liberatory tool. Understanding the literature and the data from this research, surrounding Moroccan Muslim women's initiatives to harness Islam in their worldview for development enables a conversation in the field of development on alternative gender paradigms.

¹ Terms such as northern or western are used interchangeably to discuss developed nations of Europe and North America.

² The term 'mainstream' will be used to refer to dominant Northern literature surrounding development studies and practice as well as those organizations which promote similar ideologies.

³ The Moroccan mosque movement is considered a grassroots movement in this research due to its openness to all sectors of society as well as being a local initiative by religiously committed women.

Chapter 1

CONTEXTUALIZING DEVELOPMENT THEORY

To understand the current theoretical context of international development and the role both women and religion may play in this conceptual framework, it is necessary to understand the evolution of mainstream development thinking. To trace the roots of mainstream development's worldview allows for critical examination of the current state of development theory.

Development theory is thought to have officially appeared in the 1950s with the reconstruction of European industry and society post World War 2 (Willis, 2005). It was assumed by development thinkers and practitioners of the global North that all countries would prosper by following the European blueprint of economic development. Early modernization theorists, of the 50s and 60s focused exclusively on economic growth as the fundamental indicator of successful development. The ideas of this paradigm were a reflection of a worldview which had been internalized by European or Northern academics and practitioners, one which was deeply rooted in the ideas of the Enlightenment. Moore, quoted in Gardner (2006), argues that:

Information, research, evidence, reliability- these are the measures of our intellectual life. Like our Enlightenment ancestors, we don't trust the reality of a thing unless we can kick it and measure it. We hope for a perfected world that we will fully understand and control (p. 17).

The ideas dating back to the 17th and 18th century fundamentally influenced and continue to influence development thinking. They are founded on the importance of rational and scientific approaches to understanding the world in which we live and the measurement of progress which excludes the lens of religion as is explained by Gardner

(2006). Verhelst and Tyndale (2005) argue that this led to a dualistic view of the world, separating material from spiritual (p. 2). Nevertheless, this shaped not only society's worldview but also how the rest of the world should 'progress' or, how development should be done.

The European Enlightenment experience which was intertwined with the Judeo-Christian tradition was assumed universal; the separation of 'church and state' was thought to be necessary for true rational, progressive thinking. This of course led to what is famously called the secularization thesis (Hanson, 1997; Swatos and Christiano, 1999). Berger (2007) argues that early theorists such as Max Weber wove secularity, which was assumed to mean rationality and an escape from the "magical garden of premodern views", with progress (p. 23). However, this assumed that religious thinking was inherently irrational and anti-science. Religious faith, as the Harvard International Review clearly states it, "cannot survive in the face of pervasive scientism" (p. 32). Interestingly development thinking assumed universality as did the secularization thesis, although it was recognized by Tocqueville over 150 years ago that "the facts by no means accord with [the secularization] theory" (quoted in Stark, 1999, p. 249).

Towards the end of the 1960s, the modernization paradigm, which was axed on economic growth (Rostow, 1960), and espoused the Enlightenment worldview, was contested by scholars who took on Marxist approaches to development theory. This is also known as the dependency school of thought. The dependency school argued for radical revolutionary change, questioning the development project as a whole. It brought forth the linkages between development and under-development, the relationship between the developed nations of the North and the dependence of the Southern nations on them

(Parpart and Veltmeyer, 2004, p. 42). Although development's universality was questioned, the focus was on power relations between the North and the South, reflecting on the neo-colonial practices of the North.

Development in the 1970s is often characterized solely by dependency theory, but it is important to note another relevant shift in development thinking. Economic growth was beginning to be questioned from a basic needs approach which gave birth to neo-Malthusians (Willis, 2005). They argued that the world's resources were insufficient to support the growing population and thus economic growth needed to be controlled. Although this was an interesting shift in thinking the debate still hovered around growth vs. controlled growth.

The late 1970s introduced a critical study by Boserup on women in development. Boserup's work focused on the differential effects development had on men and women and opened up a new space in development theorizing. Rooted in the modernization paradigm, Boserup's work and theoretical approach came to be criticized due to its heavy reliance on this approach and its largely ethnocentric view of the world. Nevertheless, it brought women to the stage in development theory. Further attention to the development of gender theories alongside international development paradigms will be given in the following section.

The 1980s and 90s saw the rise of neo-liberalism which focused on the role of the market and retreat of state governments. However, in the mid-80s a famous article was published by Booth (1985) discussing what he called the development *impasse*. The new idea of an *impasse* generated much debate and opened space for rethinking development theory. The crux of Booth's (1985) essay was a "formidable critique challenging the

epistemology, essentialism, and economism of Marxist development studies coinciding with the rise of post-structuralist and post-modern critiques in the academy” (Angeles, 2004, p. 62). This critique gave rise to grassroots approaches to development, the importance of local contexts and indigenous knowledge systems. Discussion about sustainable development took shape and steered mainstream theory into a new realm which was no longer dominated entirely by economics.

The 1990s saw greater critiques of mainstream theory and practice. Critiques focused on the Eurocentrism of development discourse. Among the critics of mainstream theory are two groups which have been classified by Angeles (2004) as post-economists and the post-developmentalists. The post-economists, Angeles (2004) argues, recognize the economic challenges the world faces and try to conceptualize how development can improve the quality of life of peoples in developing nations through economic means. The break with traditional economics is seen in questioning by economists of their own policy, and institutional as well as practical failures (p. 63). Famous thinkers in this camp include Amartya Sen, Robert Chambers, Davide Hulme and many more. Among these intellectuals one finds post-economics feminists such as Irene Tinker, Naila Kabeer, Caroline Moser to mention a few, who have made tremendous contributions in rethinking the role of women and gender in economics and the economy (p. 63).

The second group which Angeles (2004) labels as the post-developmentalists are influenced by a variety of assumptions and epistemological traditions such as post-modernism, post-colonialism, post-structuralism, all having a “common disenchantment with grand narratives and a penchant for the ‘deconstruction’ of language, meanings, and interpretation” (p. 63). Angeles (2004) argues that both the post-economics and post-

development groups have contributed to the creation of the “development and...” focus which she describes as being “more contextual, culturally specific and historically grounded” (p. 63). Post-development echoed the post-modernist concern with discourse and language used in the field of development; Willis (2005) argues “the way different parts of the world are described can tell us a great deal about who has the power to decide what should be valued and what denigrated” (p. 13). It is within this framework that new possibilities in development theory have emerged; “intellectual hybridity” as Angeles (2004) has cleverly labeled it, is vibrant and opens new doors of discourse and analysis.

Post-development as a whole has not escaped criticisms. Most critiques point to the fact that no real solutions are offered in this school of thought. Corbridge (1998) argues that post-development’s use of superficial and unhelpful binaries such as modernity as bad and anti-modernity as good exemplifies post-development’s “poverty”. There is also an overwhelming number of false deductions, romanticism, self-righteousness and implausible politics (Corbridge, 1998, p. 139). Although the critiques are valid and important to be mindful of, one cannot ignore the important arguments post-developmentalists have made; they contribute to alternative paradigms of development, a fact which even Corbridge (1998) recognizes. He argues that “post-development puts us in touch with the victims of development in a way that escapes the under-socialised accounts of human action that find favour in development economics” (p. 143). As Pieterse (2001) states, a productive position to take with regards to post-development is to “qualify the crisis, acknowledging failures of the development record but also its achievements, avoiding simplistic, one-sided assessments” (p. 1). It is necessary to view development as “ongoing questioning, critique and probing alternative options.

Development is a field in flux, with rapid changes and turnover of alternatives. Precisely because of its crisis character and predicament development is a high energy field.” (Pieterse, 2001, p. 1).

Although neo-liberalism has moved into the 21st century, it is also being challenged more intensely by alternative development thinking, despite its adoption of many alternative theories such as sustainable development, empowerment and gender equality to name only a few. Mainstream development theory has “softened”, according to Haar and Ellis (2007) moving away from the strictly economical to a more human-centered approach, including more qualitative indicators. Despite the theoretical debate that exists, the mainstream theory which is a neo-liberal development agenda continues to reflect a worldview inspired by the early days of the Enlightenment and all which it encompasses. Because of this fundamental thread in thinking, important elements of analysis such as culture and religion have been either sidelined or completely ignored. It is understandable that little space has been made in the intellectual world of rationalism motivated by secular frameworks. However, it has ignored the reality, as Tocqueville so rightfully stated, of the rest of the world.

Religion as Culture

The introduction of culture, as a worthy intellectual pursuit in development theory is relatively recent (Bhavnani et al, 2003). Although the realm of culture is often associated with the work of anthropologists, ignoring the way people perceive the world around them and how they organize within that world is detrimental to development. Ignoring culture has rendered mainstream theory susceptible to accusations of neocolonialism or

cultural imperialism (Willis, 2005). Culture, as a grand topic has often been addressed through the worldview of the aforementioned Enlightenment: as an obstacle to development in need of reformation. Within the large spectrum of culture, the field of religion has been excluded completely as it was deemed irrelevant to the worldview the Northern scholars and practitioners officially espoused.

Selinger (2004) argues that the continuous ignoring of culture and religion in development has contributed to its ultimate disenchantment and failures. Development's historical disconnect with religion is one which is deeply rooted within the paradigm of modernization which argues for economic growth, rationality, progress and secularization. This is juxtaposed with traditional, irrational and religious ways of existing. Because of the seeming contradiction between development and religion, religion has often been seen as "an institutional structure to be used to further the aims of a project, as an element of culture, "impeding" development. It is also viewed as a personal motivation, a force development can harness to support ideological aims" (Selinger, 2004, p. 525).

This failure to effectively incorporate religion into development does not seem viable for the future. According to Marshall (2005) religion is on a rise rather than decline in the developing world. Due to the noticeable increase in religious adherence as well as insistence on cultural considerations in development, religion is slowly but surely being considered in development discourse (although often at the fringes). Mainstream development has been slow to incorporate any discussion of religion in projects. However, space is slowly being made through a variety of relatively recent initiatives. One of such initiatives is the World Faith's Development Dialogue (WFDD), created by

the World Bank as a forum to discuss a variety of faith related issues in relation to development. Although scholars such as Selinger are critical of such efforts due to the WFDD's insistence on religion as a personal rather than a communal activity (again a reflection of the Northern worldview shaped by the Enlightenment), their existence must be recognized as an attempt to create a dialogue between religion and development.

Gardner (2006) argues

[T]he world's religions have many assets to lend to the effort to build sustainable progress, including moral authority, a long tradition of ethical teachings, and the sheer political power that comes from having so many adherents. In an era of extensive individualism, the community-centered concern of many religious traditions is especially valuable (p. 17)

Verhelst and Tyndale (2002) argue that there is increasing awareness of the need to acknowledge the central role of people's attitudes, mentalities, values and beliefs along with spirituality as a prerequisite for successful development programs (p. 2). Ver Beek (2002) argues that the silencing of religion in the development world has contributed to failure in understanding how people view the world and in turn reduces the effectiveness of development research and interventions (p. 60). When seeking to answer why it has been systematically excluded from development theorizing, Ver Beek (2002) draws on Northern weariness of religion as a whole, labeling it a sensitive matter which has often been misused in the pursuit of fanatical ideals (i.e. the Crusades and in the modern day context, Islamic fanaticism, to name only two). At the same time he argues that the scientific/materialistic bias of the development worldview made it extremely easy to turn a blind eye to realms of spirituality. What is perhaps most important in Ver Beek's quest to understand the exclusion of religion is the lack of precedent models for addressing spirituality and faith of the people of the world (p. 71). This clearly indicates that opening

the door to religion is exposing uncharted terrain and puts into question the very fundamentals of the mainstream worldview, i.e. the separation of religion from the scientific (which speaks to the weariness). However, half of a century has passed without real development progress; in fact, the dominant models have only exacerbated the condition of the world's poor and put into question the underlying motivations of this endeavor as it is clearly seen. Economic globalization has polarized segments of society and even parts of the world, neglected human suffering and done away with the global good argues Falk (2001). He also argues that the focus on economic success, consumerism and materialistic lifestyles has on the one hand increased economic growth but decreased the quality of life of peoples around the world through their struggle to maintain higher living standards.

Although the incorporation of religion and culture into development thinking is essential for a holistic approach, it is not lacking precaution. Verhelst and Tyndale (2002) raise three caveats when thinking about culture and it speaks rightly to the theme of religion as well. The first point is to avoid romanticizing culture and for that matter religion. There is no 'ideal' nor static culture or faith system according to Verhelst and Tyndale (2002, p. 13-14). In fact, cultures and religions are constantly adapting to modern day challenges, reinventing themselves yet working within the legitimate framework of their worldviews and guiding principles. If changes are to surface, they argue, they must come from within. The second caveat is to avoid isolating cultures from economics and power relations (p. 14). Disassociating culture and religion from economic contexts and the broader social picture will encounter the same pitfall as mainstream theorizing: not seeing the big picture. Finally, they warn against generalizing

cultures, and this is especially relevant in the realm of religion. Although members of a particular faith may adhere to the same principles which they characterize as universal, they may express their religious adherence in multiple ways, just as historical and cultural contexts vary widely. To 'essentialize' would defeat the purpose of looking at factors which shape the lives of people in different contexts.

Marshall (2008) argues that development has thought of religion in four general ways (Marshall uses an acronym DDDE for development's view of religion and the acronym EEED in analyzing religion's view of development.) The four categories when looking at religion from the mainstream development lens are: Divisive, Dangerous, Defunct and Emotional (DDDE). Religion is considered dangerous because it is often viewed as anti-modernization, patriarchal and traditional; in brief the antithesis of the mainstream development agenda. Because of its personal nature it is often a highly charged and emotional subject to address. However, Marshall (2008) argues that one often finds such emotional tones when discussing gender. To look at the other side of the debate, how religion views development: as an Empire, religion critiques the Effects of development, it is seen as an Enigma, with overly technocratic language to describe human social interactions, and finally development institutions are considered to be Dangerous (EEED). Interestingly, both sides see the other as potentially dangerous and reflective of what the one rejects. Marshall (2008) argues that polarization and animosity are both dangerous and they both over-simplify the complexity of both development and religion. Instead, she argues, a dialogue along with new alliances must exist as both sides recognize the common values of both general worldviews.

Sardar (1997) argues that non-western civilizations must re-discover and put into practice their own ways of existing in the world, their own indigenous ways of thinking and of knowing. This would imply a unique vision of development among the nations themselves each moving forward and creating a more “humane, economically viable and socially just society” (p. 36).

Young (1991) argues that

Development is... a complex process involving the social, economic, political and cultural betterment of individuals and of society itself. Betterment in this sense means the ability of the society to meet the physical, emotional and creative needs of the population at an historically acceptable level (quoted in Moffat et al, 1991, p. 20).

As the literature suggests there is a shift in thinking which is open to including religion in development theorizing. The integration of religion in the field of development is an attempt, as Ryan (1995) states, “to better integrate human values and belief systems into the modern economic development paradigm”, (p. 3) that is the mainstream. Nevertheless, Traer (2001) warns against the use of “religion and...” as a category which simply sees religion abstractly instead of challenging the engagement of communities of faith that shape the lives of religious people (p. 79). There is a deep-seated problem in language that “has ‘us’, as observers, looking at the religions of ‘others’ to discover ‘resources’ for solving the world’s problems” (Traer, 2001, p. 79). He argues that a dialogue which “encourages the sharing of stories and teachings of faiths, with all their particularities” including faith which is not of a religious nature, is essential if religion is to be viably incorporated into the flawed development paradigm. This demands universal dialogue that recognizes all ways of thinking, without excluding Northern or Southern worldviews.

If one looks more closely at the field of women, religion and development (and any dialogue opportunities presented in these potentially “emotional” subjects according to Marshall (2008)) one is hard pressed to find work which looks at the grassroots. However, the continuous growth of post-modern gender theory allows for creative methodologies and frameworks which help us understand the lives of women in the South and their grassroots contributions to development within the context of religion. The emergence of this strand of thinking, although still in its beginnings is the product of gender theorizing from both Northern and Southern women and men. Similar to the critiques of mainstream development theory, the emergence of women and development theories have largely reflected a Northern Euro-centrism which also deserves serious attention.

The Weaving of Women into Development Theory: Moving Towards New Spaces

A secular worldview often assumes that religion and more precisely, Islam, is the primary cause of the exclusion of women from power in society. As it will be exemplified in the United Nation’s statistics, development is primarily measured through public participation as well as public visibility. This analysis has its roots in the mainstream gender theories of Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD) which are offshoots of Western feminist discourse. A brief review of the evolution of feminist theory which shaped these paradigms will help situate the subsequent emergence of alternative gender theories.

The integration of women into the field of development is generally perceived in the North to have emerged in the 1970s with Esther Boserup advocating the recognition

of women's presence in development. She argued that development projects ignored the needs and rights of women and encouraged women's integration into national economies. Although Boserup's work is often seen as a landmark in women and development discourse, it has also been criticized for its continued focus on modernization as the ultimate development solution. This implied the adoption of Western technologies, values, institutions, in brief the Northern 'package' in order to progress (Reddock, 2000 p. 57). However, what was central to Boserup's message was the need for both men and women to be liberated from poverty and have the opportunity to contribute and equally benefit from development. This shift in thinking, which was inclusive of women and their rights, was a direct result of the Western feminist movement of the late 1960s (Connelly et al, 2000).

The orientation of the mainstream movement was one of liberal feminism which had its roots in 16th and 17th century liberal philosophy (Connelly et al., 2000). The focus of this ideology was an ideal of equality and liberty according to which all men and women would have the potential to be rational beings participating in public life (Connelly et al., 2000). This is again a reflection of Enlightenment values which focused greatly on rationality and the separation of church and state, which on the feminist agenda translates as separation of private from public domain. The ideals of liberal feminism paired well with the modernization agenda and focused largely on having women represented in the structures created by mainstream development. This approach to development became known as Women in Development (WID). Evidently, the WID paradigm failed, just as the modernization paradigm failed, to advocate adequately for structural change. It also ignored fundamental issues of subordination, the impact of

global inequities on women of the South as well as issues such as ethnic division and class (Connelly et al., p. 59). Instead, much of the focus was on equity and legislative changes (Moser, 1993 quoted in Willis, 2005). This was coupled with the UN decade for women in 1975 which had a mandate to look at women's strategic needs by eradicating obstacles in the public sphere (Moser, 1993, quoted in Willis, 2005). Among the contributions of WID theory is the fact that women's concerns became visible in the arena of development theory as well as in practice. As time passed, gender theory evolved, alongside other mainstream development paradigms.

As the modernization paradigm came under question by the dependency theorists, feminist theories also began taking different shapes. Marxist feminists began analysing women's roles in modes of production, emphasizing women's subordination to men as a result of economic dependence. They argued that capitalism made women dependent on men as they engaged in unpaid and often unrecognized labour in the private sphere (Connelly et al., p. 120). The focus on modes of production was quite limited looking at the capitalist system in particular, i.e. the economy. This was congruent with the dependency theorists which also largely criticized the capitalist system.

A more radical feminist expression, inspired by Marxist theory in the 1960s, felt Marxism to be fundamentally sexist and negligent of patriarchal structures which they argued existed in all societies (Connelley et al., p. 123). Gender equality came before class equality. The radical agenda of these feminists, argued for a new age for women free from dependence on men, as well as sexual and reproductive freedom through medical technologies focusing on bodily self-determination (Firestone, 1970). Once women gained full independence their psyches were apt to change and would be released

from male control. What is most noteworthy is the radical shift from the liberal feminist's view which separated the private from the public, in the radical feminist's claim that "the personal is political".

The radical feminists were not the only group which did not fully embrace Marxism, in fact, socialist feminists were largely dissatisfied with traditional Marxism in the second half of the 70s (Connelly et al. pg. 126). What was different in this feminist expression was the equal importance they believed both class and subordination had on women's lives. Their attempt was to revise Marxism and provide an historical perspective of patriarchy. Women's reproductive roles as well as their roles in commodity production were considered equally important, attempting to provide a fuller picture of women's lives. Mitchell (1984) argued that women's production, reproduction, sexuality and child-rearing were all interlocking structures in their subordination.

These analyses formed the theoretical perspective of Women and Development (WAD). Much of WAD's focus was on structures of production institutionalized women's inferior status, according to Jaquette (1982). The capitalist system was the unit of analysis, just as the dependency school of thought argued that the capitalist system was ultimately faulty and the principal perpetrator of 'under-development'. This was a contrast to WID, which according to Bandarage (1984) focused narrowly on the sexual inequality of women and ignored the structural as well as socio-economic factors which shape women's lives. WAD also focused on the relationship between women and the development process as a whole. The contributions of WAD are considered numerous as women were motivated to be important economic actors in their societies, women's work within the private and public spheres were seen as central to their societal structures.

Kabeer (1994) argues that WAD and its Marxist tendencies did not give enough attention to the reproductive sphere and household level relations between men and women. Although much of this analysis was found in socialist feminism, it did not form the bulk of WAD theory. Other critiques of WAD have addressed its failure to analyze the relationship among patriarchy, differing modes of production and women's subordination and oppression. Because of WAD's obvious focus on class, it failed to address ethnic and racial issues that were just as relevant to women's lives. Connelly et al, (2000) argue that many feminists remained unconvinced by WID and WAD's lack of critical analysis of the social structures which maintain gender inequalities (p. 62). This group of scholars, the critics of WID and WAD in turn focused on an alternative gender paradigm which they called Gender and Development or (GAD). Connelly et al. (2000) explain that this framework emerged from the experiences of Western socialist feminists which had a particular interest in development issues. The framework drew on a variety of feminist ideologies, including the radical feminists' interest in the overarching oppressive structure of patriarchy. Connelly et al. (2000) argue that GAD emerged also from "the organizational experiences and writings of Third World feminists" (p. 62), thus combining both Northern and Southern perspectives. The shift from using the term 'women' to 'gender' clearly implied a shift in thinking, incorporating both men and women in the analysis of women's inferior social status or exclusion from the development process. The approach GAD espoused was largely based on an empowerment framework. Dimensions of power were analysed, ranging from power over, power to, power with and power within (see Rowlands 1997, p. 13). What is important is the complex nature of analysis GAD promoted.

GAD claims to be a more holistic approach to the themes of gender and development. It seeks to question specific gender roles assigned to different sexes and their bases. One of the largest differences lies in the recognition of women's contribution inside as well as outside of the household including non-commodity production. GAD stresses the need for women to organize themselves for a more effective political voice in order to fight patriarchy; it assumes that patriarchy operates within and across classes to oppress women. Although GAD has been considered a product of grassroots Southern feminists alongside Northern feminist struggles, it has easily been adopted by mainstream neo-liberal development theory. The roots ultimately remain secular, although space has been provided for new interpretations of women in development. Nevertheless, critiques of such theoretical approaches insist that WID, WAD and GAD are nothing short of neo-colonial discourses on women.

Criticisms of Mainstream Gender Theories, Opening up the Debate

The dominant theories have not been left unquestioned as Southern theoretical perspectives have emerged.

Sen and Grown (1987) have argued that WID, WAD, GAD represent Northern scholars' and practitioners' worldview and those institutions in the South who ally themselves with Northern institutions. As mentioned earlier, most Northern feminists view Boserup's publication as marking the birth of the women and development movement. However, Snyder and Tadesse (1995) argue that pre-colonial traditions of economic as well as social activism among women in the South as well as women's independence struggles predate the Northern initiative.

Women participated actively in public in the 1940s and 1950s in Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Uganda. These women resisted the introduction of a variety of cash crops whereas women in Kenya protested against unjust labour regulations as early as 1902 (Snyder and Tadesse, 1995). Furthermore, in many nations' independence struggles women in countries such as Algeria, Angola, Zambia, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau fought side by side with men and have become legendary in their respective countries and internationally.

Within the alternative debate on gender theories are the post-modern criticisms. Arguments include criticism of terminologies and categories embedded in the development literature of Northern feminists who often try to represent women in the South and paint pictures of their lives. Apffel-Marglin and Simon (1994) argue that the image of the "third-world woman is a contemporary version of the 'uncivilized' colonized woman" (p. 26). As the authors draw on visions of women during the era of colonization, modern day development discourse replicates such depictions. Apffel-Marglin and Simon (1994) argue that in colonial narratives women have been portrayed as passive beings, often considered helpless and suffering from the "backwardness, savagery and wretchedness of their own cultures" (p. 27). Muslim women, they argue, are viewed in colonial narrative as suffering behind veils of segregation, isolation and seclusion (p. 27). What has changed is only the context, they argue; 20th century development discourse has been shaped by Victorian culture and the feminism which informs the discourse of women in development also descends from Victorian colonial discourse (p. 31).

Social practices, culture and tradition have all been identified as barriers to women's access to the market in recent women and development discourse argue Apffel-Marglin and Simon (1994 p. 32). It becomes impossible to separate mainstream development theory and the interwoven gender theories which have emerged from the original worldview of development discourse and theory. Despite the evolution of theory, the worldview remains that of linear progress and is influenced by overriding notions of rationality and consciousness (Kumar D'Souza, 1994)

Mohanty (1991) argues that Western feminist scholars assume themselves to be the primary referents in theory and praxis; in fact Western women are seen as the standard bearers of liberation and emancipation. This is reflected in the language used to describe Southern women as one large homogenous group of victims. Historical differences and constructions are not addressed nor considered in any analysis of Southern women according to Abu-Lughod (2002). Western feminists have tendencies "to plaster neat cultural icons like Muslim woman over messy historical and political dynamics. Then, calling attention to the resonances of contemporary discourse on equality, freedom, and rights with earlier colonial and missionary rhetoric on Muslim women" (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 783). Images of superiority and dominance are established through such literature once its foundations are unravelled. Ong (1988) criticizes the use of gendered division of labour as the yardstick used to assess women's status in the South; this she claims is a practice of liberal and left-leaning feminists. She also argues that Western feminists make use of colonial forms of discourse in presenting Southern women through negative stereotypes and imply that Western women are superiorly positioned. Hirshmann (1996) argues that these are Eurocentric biases which

imply that Western feminist values demarcate and define the terms of women's empowerment.

As illustrated in GAD theory, patriarchy is considered to be the structure which needs reform and is innately oppressive to women. However, Kandiyoti (1988), in her work argues that despite the prevalence of patriarchy in many parts of the world, women are not necessarily oppressed in these contexts; rather they have methods of harnessing power through the social structure. It is an assumption based on Western values that patriarchy is harmful and destabilizing to any given society. Mahmood (2005) in her case study of the Egyptian mosque movement argues that women in fact re-enforce patriarchal gender norms as defined by Western feminists to become empowered. Adoption of *hijab* (the veil which covers fully the hair and long clothing which covers a woman's body with the aim of concealing her beauty or her bodily curves) along with submissive public behaviour are among the most obvious changes in Egyptian society Mahmood observes throughout her study. Although these changes re-enforce Western perceptions of patriarchy, they have a different meaning for the women who adopt these outward signs of apparent submission. She argues that such women in fact felt empowered and in control. Mahmood (2005) argues women's "subordination to feminine virtues such as shyness, modesty, and humility, appears to be the necessary condition for their enhanced public role in religious and political life" (p. 6) The strategic uses of societal values as exemplified in Mahmood's work increases women's agency. Other women according to Winter (2001) participate in fundamentalist religious movements, conforming to traditionalist and patriarchal gender norms, and can develop areas of influence within such religious movements. Contrary to popular stereotypes she argues, such women are

frequently highly educated, very articulate and vocal in their defence of women's rights conceptualized in Islamic terms (p. 16). These arguments reflect the diversity of thought and life experiences among women of the South which contradict or at least complicate feminist notions as well as mainstream gender theoretical ideals of gender equality.

Critiques of post-modern feminism are also present and point largely to the lack of practical solutions. Udayagiri (1996) points out that postmodernism contributes positively to crucially assessing mainstream theory and practice but remains lacking in action. Another problem area of post-modern feminism is its sometimes extreme tendencies towards cultural relativism which has the potential of ignoring critical issues relating to women (Badawi, 1999; Abu-Lughod, 2002). Moghissi (1999) argues that postmodernism contributes to the attitude of the 'exotic' other which is viewed and celebrated as 'authentic' by Western scholars and practices are often excused as 'inevitable' because they 'fit' with the culture" (p. 6).

Within the post-modern feminist school of thought that has emerged a group of scholars which identify a new stream of thinking called women, culture and development (WCD). They argue that when the voices of Southern women are placed at the centre of development and global processes, projects are then transformed as is the mainstream development discourse (Bhavnani et al., 2003, p. 4). They also argue that the discourse of Southern post-modernism still needs to integrate issues of gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Escobar and Harcourt (2003) argue that WCD is shaped by "women's groups who are responding to and shaping resistances to dominant neo-liberal capitalist discourses" (p. 178). The theorizing about women, development and culture as a relevant determinant to developmental success is a breakthrough from the mainstream gender theories which all

are within the Northern worldview which views culture as inherently problematic and as a barrier to women's full participation in development. Instead WCD reinforces the use of cultural norms and women's expressions of tradition as an empowering process, necessary for true empowerment. It is within this framework that one should consider religion and its meaning to the lives of women. The development framework needs to shift from teaching to learning as Traer (2000) argues. To fully hear the voices of all peoples as equally legitimate and coming to an understanding that development can occur through various worldviews, not only through the Northern embedded secularist worldview. In fact, it is recognized by the WCD paradigm that there are many roads to development, as the post-development school of thought similarly argues. The challenge which remains is opening the minds of the mainstream development practitioners and theorists to hear different voices. An attempt to uncover the worldview of Muslim women, who are committed to their religion as a valid development model will be presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 2

LANDSCAPE OF THE DEBATE

The following section will review the literature on the following topics; what is the status of women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as observed by development agencies such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)? What are the indicators used to establish that women have ‘inferior’ status? Following an overview of some statistics the question which is raised is why are women systematically excluded from development according to such figures? A number of scholars have focused on Islam as the primary reason for women’s exclusion and thus their arguments are examined. What the major Islamic text, the Qur’an says about women’s roles in society; what justifications are provided for either engagement or non-engagement with society? How do Muslim women perceive their role within society in terms of gender equality? What is the historical evidence supporting the gender ideals as outlined by scholars?

Review will be done under the following headings: The Status of Arab Women in Development; Criticisms of Islam and Gender; Notions of Gender in Islam; Women in the Early Communities; Reasserting Islam: Changes from Within; The Islamic Revival and Women’s Informal Groups. The literature which will be explored will set the context for the case study of Moroccan women.

Women’s role within Islam has been explained in many different writings; books written primarily for a Muslim audience, scholarly works which are either favourable or apologetic and then there is also scholarly work which strives for a middle-ground

understanding of the topic. All of these writings are useful to understanding the diversity in the debate around gender equality in Islam. A reading of the primary texts: the Qur'an which is considered to be a direct revelation from God to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)⁴ therefore infallible according to Muslims, and *ahadith*⁵, the traditions or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) which serve as concrete examples of the Qur'an's commandments cannot be ignored and also provide vital background information to the debate.

The holy text of the Qur'an is considered by Muslims to be a divine revelation and therefore infallible. The *ahadith* however are recordings (which have gone through rigorous and strict methodology to ensure authenticity) of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and are therefore a secondary source which informs rituals and practices of Muslims worldwide⁶. Both texts together form the basis of Islamic belief and practice, with priority given to the Qur'an in all matters. The Qur'an is a text which addresses multiple aspects of a believer's life and therefore forms the basis of the Islamic worldview. Just as Western societies have used and continue to use Christianity or the Bible as foundational, in the United States constitution for example, Muslim societies use the Qur'an as the unaltered word of God and *ahadith* or sayings of the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) as social foundations.

⁴ Peace be upon him (pbuh). This is said after the mentioning of any Prophets of Islam as a sign of respect.

⁵ Singular: *hadith*. "In Islam *hadith* is the term applied to specific reports of the Prophet Muhammad's words and deeds as well as those of many of the early Muslims; the word is used both in a collective and in a singular sense. After the Prophet's death, his companions collected reports of what he had said and done, and they recounted reports among themselves in order that the living memory of Muhammad's example might influence the community of believers. (Speight, 1995, p. 87)

⁶ Ahadith are used to broaden the understanding of Muslims through the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)

*The Status of Arab Women in Development*⁷

The United Nation Economic and Social Commission of Western Asia (ESCWA) 2004 report on the status of Arab women in the development process identifies trends in relation to women's public participation. The indicators used to define development in this study are (as in other studies such as the UNDP Arab Human Development Reports 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005) levels of education, health, economic and political participation. The overall finding of the 2004 report is that Arab women from the MENA are lagging considerably behind other regions of both the developing and the developed world. This is the general finding; however, it is noted that women have made considerable gains since earlier UNDP reports, in the area of health and education.

In terms of healthcare, there has been an overall decrease in maternal mortality rates as well as an increase in percentage of births attended by skilled health professionals (ESCWA, 2004, p. 4). Although some countries of the MENA region such as Yemen and Morocco are lagging behind in respect to these two health indicators, slow progress can still be observed.

The education sector is also one in which women have been making large strides. Although illiteracy is still a phenomenon which is plaguing the region with an estimated 44 million adult Arab women illiterate in 2003, literacy rates have been on the rise (ESCWA, 2004, p. 5). Literacy rates for Arab women rose from 35% to 47.5% between 1990 and 2000; the rate of male literacy surpassed female literacy with 71% to 63.5%, it is clear there remains a gender gap. However, the gender gap seems to decrease as women enter into tertiary education, in some instances surpassing men in literacy rates in

⁷ It is important to note that Arabs comprise a minority of Muslims worldwide. In fact Asia has the highest concentration of Muslims in the world. However, for the purpose of this study, which will focus on Morocco, the status of Arab Muslim women will be considered as opposed to Muslim women in general.

countries such as Lebanon, Oman and Qatar. Surprisingly, such increases in education have not had the expected result: increased employment.

The findings of the UN report state that 29% of Arab women participate in their national economies; even fields such as agriculture have low female representation (ESCWA, 2004, p. 12). Low economic participation is coupled with extremely low political participation. In 2003, 5.3% of Arab women had seats in national parliaments, an extremely small percentage (ESCWA, 2004, p. 17). Such reports give rise to the question: why? What has lead to the exclusion of women in these areas? The ESCWA report mentions “prevalent social and traditionalist perceptions of men as the sole breadwinners or as the most suited for specific jobs, which significantly disadvantage female job applicants” (p. 16). The remainder of the report attempts to identify ways in which traditionalist perceptions of both male and female roles in society can be changed to emulate ideal Western gender roles.

Other reports such as the UNDP Arab Human Development Report for 2005, which was entirely devoted to “The Rise of Women in the Arab World” relate similar statistics, continued low economic and political participation. However the document hails improvements which are consistent with the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), such as secular strides in the realm of family law (Abul Fadl Farag, 2007). Abul Fadl Farag (2007) in his article argues that the report has methodological failings and fails to connect women’s poverty along with their families’ to their lack of or low participation. He also states that there are serious shortcomings in the recent report as it insists on blaming society which is said to have inherited ‘backward’ traditions rather than taking a closer look at the governments and

their responsibilities. The report is largely political and should not remain unquestioned according to Abul Fadl Farag (2007). The fundamental factor which is considered to be an impediment to women's inclusion in the development process is blatantly pointed out: religious culture.

These analyses are purely statistical and seek to understand women's engagement within society solely through numbers in official public participation. The usual conclusion is that Islam or traditional forms of culture are responsible for women's exclusion. Although the analyses done by major development organizations such as the UNDP are quantifiable whereas engagement with religious and spiritual endeavours are qualitative, the results of women's engagement with religion, as will be outlined in the following section, lead to outcomes that can be measured and support development.

Criticisms of Islam and Gender

White (1978) argues that poor participation of women is a typical feature of Muslim societies and the more 'traditional' a nation is the more excluded women are. Huntington as quoted in Moghadam (2004) blames what he believes to be 'Islamic' ideals of female seclusion and domesticity as well as male guardianship for the underdevelopment of the MENA. Moghadam (2004) argues that the Arab world is known for its attachment to religious and cultural traditions which impedes women's access to development initiatives such as participation in the economic sphere. Women in MENA are seen as standard bearers of honour and men are given legal rights, said to be based in *shari'ah*⁸ law to protect this honour through, for example, restricted travel, denial of employment

⁸ "The idea of divine law in Islam is traditionally expressed by two words, *fiqh* and *shari'ah*. *Fiqh* originally meant understanding in a broad sense... By contrast, *shari'ah* refers to God's law in its quality as divine." (Calder, 1995, p. 450) See Eissa (1999) for a detailed discussion on *shari'ah* and *fiqh*.

or seclusion and forced veiling, all of which are perpetrated in the name of Islam, according to Afshar (1993). Women are also granted half the inheritance of their male partners and are systematically discriminated against in the realm of law, Afshar (1993) argues. White (1978) argues similarly that legal restriction along with inequalities which are inherent in the Qur'an, *hadith* and *shari'a* law all promote this exclusion (p. 53). She also argues that a restriction, such as seclusion, which is common in many Muslim states, also keeps women out of meaningful visible social roles.

Religious fundamentalism, which is defined by Voll (1995) as “[t]he activist affirmation of a particular faith that defines that faith in an absolutist and literalist manner”, (p. 32) is considered to be at the root of such practices. Moghissi (1999) states that “the more unreformed or more unevenly developed and more traditional a society, the more fundamentalists can speedily put into practice the backward, religiously conformist notions which they preach” (p. 11). A major focus of the critics of Islam in the area of gender focuses on women’s restricted roles in public life and the apparent support of this restriction in the religious texts. *Shari'a* law is deemed to be unfriendly to women as interpretations are often rigid and favour men over women (Moghissi, 1999, p. 7). States such as Afghanistan and Sudan, which have adopted strict interpretations of Islamic *shari'ah* law have all seen devastating effects on their female populations⁹. However, Moghissi (1999) argues that the lack of outrage in academic literature regarding crimes committed under the name of religion against women is intolerable (p. 7).

⁹ Moghissi’s argument is particular to the regions she describes and are often considered politicized forms of Islam rather than *shari'ah* law.

Ahmed (1986), in her work on pre-Islamic practices in comparison to practices related to women during the spread of Islam, argues that through time Islam has enforced patriarchy, female seclusion and has gradually removed women from public life. Her arguments are based on an unconventional historical analysis of pre-Islamic Arabia. Ahmed argues, based on preexisting arguments made by Watt (1953) and Chelhod (1981), that pre-Islamic Arabia was governed by a matriarchal social structure. She suggests that practices of uxori-local/ matrilo-cal marriage as well as polyandry were common and began to change around the time of the Prophet's birth (p. 667). This change she argues was a result of Mecca's commercial growth and progressive sedentarization (p. 667). Islam emerged within this context she argues and reinforced the marginalization of women.

Most of the criticisms by White (1979), Afshar (1993), Moghissi (1999) and Ahmed (1986) are launched against cultural practices which use religion as a legitimate vehicle for justifying oppression and the limitation of women's roles in society. Attacks made against "inherent" injustices in the Qur'an itself also draw attention to cultural interpretations of the religious text which limit its interpretation to one cultural/ societal context. These issues will be explored in a further section. It is however, useful to first review the literature surrounding women's role from an Islamic perspective.

Notions of Gender in Islam

The notion of gender equality, which is largely encouraged by Western development agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and many others, is not one which is fully understood in many Muslim contexts. Hessini

(1994), in her work on Moroccan women received various confused responses in regards to gender equality; one interviewee responded “are men and women equal? I don’t understand your question.” (p. 42). This confusion was not due to lack of education. In fact the woman interviewed was a 21 year old psychology student. Instead, the concept of equality was foreign to this young woman’s notions of gender. This is quite a revealing answer if one decides to analyze it. How does the notion of gender equality not permeate the minds of young educated women? Perhaps this is because gender *equality* is exclusively a Western concept?

Badawi (1999) makes a clear statement about gender ‘equity’ in Islam instead of gender ‘equality’. He states that the term equality is understood as absolute equality in each and every detailed item of comparison rather than overall equality. This entails competition between the two parties. Equity on the other hand means justice and overall equality and totality of rights and responsibilities for *both* genders. He adds that the role of men and women from an Islamic perspective are complementary and cooperative rather than competitive in nature. Barlas (2002) argues that Western notions of equality are often confused with similarity, and difference with inequality. It is useful to note that the term gender equity has been adopted by mainstream gender theory such as GAD. However the understanding is different from the Islamic perspective argues Barlas (2002). The Islamic perspective, she argues, relies heavily on difference between the genders but promotes a fundamental equality between the sexes. Men and women are but two halves of one whole according to the Qur’an; “It is Allah who hath produced you from a single person” (Qur’an: 6:98); “It is Allah who created you from a single person, and made its mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her in love” (Qur’an:

7:189); “We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know one another” (Qur’an: 49:13); “Of everything We have created pairs: that ye may receive instruction” (Qur’an: 59:49). Male and female, Barlas (2002) argues, are not separable as they create one totality.

Men and women according to Islam’s sacred text, the Qur’an, have also the same spiritual nature “O Mankind! Reverence Your Guardian-Lord, Who created you from a single Person, created, of like nature, His mate, and from them twain scattered countless men and women...” (Qur’an: 4:1). Badawi argues that no one gender is superior to the other, in front of God men and women are equal partners. The Qur’an considers men and women to be garments of one another; “They are your garments and ye are their garments.” (Qur’an 2:187). This implies that they are protectors one of another, concealing those things which are most private and sacred from the outside world; a relationship of intimacy and trust.

One of the most interpreted verses of the Qur’an, 4:34 “[m]en are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means”. This verse is often used to justify women’s subordinate status to men. A.Y Ali (1991) interprets the verse as “men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more than the other and because they support them from their means”. Others, according to Eissa (1999) interpret the Arabic word *qawwamun* as ‘in charge’, ‘overseers’, ‘maintainers’, ‘the boss of women’ (p. 22). A variety of interpretations have been given to this particular word, as the verse continues to say that “Allah has given the one more than the other.” In some interpretations men are considered superior to women in both physical

and spiritual realms (Barlas, 2002). Others argue that God has given certain attributes to men and others to women, reinforcing the idea of complementarity without defining the parameters of each individual's capacities and suitability (Eissa, 1999; Wadud, 1999). Al Hashimi (1997) argues that each gender, in an ideal Muslim society which is adherent to the principles of the Islamic faith, plays the role they are best qualified for, this being relative to each individual. Only by doing so, he states, can a society achieve solidarity, mutual assistance and co-operation without preventing one another from doing as the other desires.

The concept of complementarity becomes central when describing the social roles of men and women. Al-Hibri (2000) argues that complementarity stems from the foundational Qur'anic concept of *tawhid*¹⁰ or oneness which considers all humans created from a single male and female. In turn God created man and woman to live in tranquility, mercy and affection as it is stated in verse 30:21 of the Qur'an. This points to woman's role as a companion to her mate and vice versa, without hierarchical tensions. Al-Hibri (2000) continues to point to verses which emphasize complementarity as opposed to domination, conflict and hierarchy such as verse 9:71 of the Qur'an "[t]he believers, men and women, are protectors one of another".

Clearly, the emphasis found in the Qur'anic text is placed on co-operation, consultation and harmony, two halves creating one whole in a social context. This refers to an overall social complementarity within a society, a community and a household. The violation of the rights of one half would entail disequilibrium in the complementarity equation. Practices which would harm an individual or a society would be deemed

¹⁰ "An Arabic term meaning literally 'making one' or 'unifying' " (Sonn, 1995, p. 190)

impermissible according to Kutty (2005) and therefore going against the fundamentals of *shari'ah* law and in turn in violation of complementarity. The Western concept of equality and the fulfillment of women's lives through imitation of men's roles and achievements become extremely limited and disregards the worldview of the Muslim woman as identified in the literature.

According to Badawi (1999), Walther (1999) and Webb (2000), a large number of rights are provided to women in Islam through their various social roles. One of the most important rights to consider when advocating for women's economic integration is that of financial support. Badawi states that women are granted freedom from financial burdens all throughout their lives. Muslim women are entitled to full support before marriage, during marriage and during the waiting period in the case of divorce. Therefore they are granted support in all stages of life, as daughter, wife, mother and sister. In accordance to this right and the obligation of male members to provide for their female relatives, inheritance is proportionately divided. Critics (White, 1978) are keen to point to discrepancies in inheritance, women receiving half of the amount of their male counterparts; any income a woman receives belongs to her alone and legally, can be spent in any matter deemed appropriate to herself, whereas men are legally obliged to care for the financial needs of their female family members. Any spending done on her family would be considered as an act of charity before God. Within these parameters, women are free to engage in other activities which they deem fulfilling. If a woman desires employment then she is free to do so and spend her money as she wishes (Badawi, 1999).

In political matters, where women are most absent today according to the ESCWA and the AHDR (2002-2005) Al-Hashimi (1997) argues that from the early days

of Islam, women were active even in the political sphere of life. Women partook in the treaty of Aqabah which was to support the Prophet (pbuh) and their oath was accepted independently from their husbands. Their identities remained independent; even after marriage women did not change their last names. Financial independence was also granted to the early Muslim women as they had a right to their own personal wealth whether it was acquired before marriage or even through dowry (Stowasser, 1984).

Muslim women have the same right to education as their male counterparts. Al-Hashimi (1997) argues “[t]he Muslim woman is responsible just as a man is, so she is also required to seek knowledge, whether it is “religious” or “secular” that will be of benefit to her.” A *hadith* states that “seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim” (Al-Hashimi, 1997). Within the early days of Islam, women were appointed a special day for religious instruction by the Prophet (pbuh); it is important to distinguish that women were appointed a special day where men could not attend. However, whenever men would attend religious instruction, women were never kept from being present. There are numerous examples of women from the first community asking questions to the Prophet (pbuh) to increase their knowledge of Islam; this implies that women were free to ask and debate as much as they desired.

In the case of childrearing, the status a woman achieves through motherhood is extraordinary. This is exemplified in a narration (*hadith*) of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh): “A man came to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) asking, “O Allah’s Messenger, who is more entitled to be treated with the best companionship?” The Prophet (pbuh) said, “Your mother”. The man said, “Who is next?” The Prophet (pbuh) said, “Your mother”. The man further said, “Who is next?” The Prophet (pbuh) said, “Your mother”. The man

further asked (for the fourth time), "Who is next?" the Prophet (pbuh) said, "Your father." (Al-Bukhari, 1994, p. 958).

Barlas (2002) also elaborates on the status of motherhood which is described in some detail in the Qur'an. She argues that in fact the Qur'an gives mothers a privileged position in a variety of verses. In one verse God commands "O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, Who created you from a single person (*nafsin-waahidah*), created, of like nature, his mate, and from them two scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; reverence Allah through whom you demand your mutual (rights) and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you..." (Quran 4:1). Again the concept of creation from one single person emphasizes the common origin of both male and female. The verse also draws attention to the origin of each human being, the mother's womb. In fact it is commanded to show reverence to those mothers who bore their children after bearing reverence to God who ensures mutual rights are provided. According to Barlas (2002) there is no comparable mention of the father figure in the Qur'an thereby providing a distinct position to mothers.

Cassandra Balchin (2003) argues that motherhood is in fact a dominant part of female identity in virtually all cultures. However, a 'problematizing' outlook all too often emerges when dealing with Muslim contexts (p. 42). Moghissi claims that Muslim women are reduced to a single identity, depriving them full representation in all spheres of life (1999, p. 42). Although the Qur'an places great emphasis on motherhood, it is not the focal point of a woman's identity nor is there any indication in the sacred text that it is woman's sole purpose in life to bear and raise children. On the contrary, as Barazangi (1997) argues continuously in her work, women's primary duty in this life is to "self-

identify as *khalifa*¹¹, a trustee- a Qur'anic mandate of human existence" as God has commanded this to be the purpose of human life on earth without differentiating between male and female (p. 22). Al-Hageel (1999) in his book on Human Rights in Islam argues that the "a) vicegerence endowed to man on earth is universal in nature. In other words it is for all humankind, b) it is not designed for a certain class or a certain group of rulers." (p. 40)

Nowhere do Islamic texts forbid women's involvement in the economic or the political sector of society. However, the weight and pride placed on the role of motherhood may encourage women to fulfill this role to the best of their abilities and, secondly, engage in other outside activities. In many cases, as will be shown in the Moroccan case study, women privilege a social or collective obligation, for example the rearing of children, over individual aspirations which are often deemed materialistic (Heissini, 1994). The rearing of children is seen as a societal contribution, not merely a familial one.

Hessini (1994) in her fieldwork revealed that women in Morocco took into consideration familial and societal needs before individual aspirations. They felt that the needs of society superseded individual desires and therefore required the cooperation of an entire society to succeed. The women whom she interviewed felt that Islam was the only model which would create this functional society. This was put into stark contrast with the Western models of gender roles promoting competition between the sexes. Muslim women interviewed saw the Western model as dehumanizing and destabilizing.

¹¹ "The Qur'anic term for 'vicegerent' is *khalifah*, and that for 'vicegerency' is *khalifah*. "According to the teachings of Islam, all human beings are commanded to fulfill their individual roles as vicegerents to God." (Butterworth, Abed-Kotob, 1995, p. 305)

These women also saw their roles in society to be much easier than those of their male counterparts. Childcare and rearing, along with other goals which were often educational and sometimes professional, were seen as less burdensome than the financial responsibilities which are placed on the men.

Bunting's (2001) brief research also raises interesting points which are similar to those of Hessini. Although her interviewees were Muslim women who considered themselves British Muslims (and not women of MENA), these interviews uncover the same views held by the Moroccan women, despite their belonging to a completely different culture. An overwhelming desire to return to a 'genuine Islam' dominates the conversations of these women, expressing their disapproval of various cultural practices which have permeated the Muslim world. These practices such as female seclusion, honour killings, forbidding education, are all considered alien to Islam by the women interviewed. These women argue for a return to freedoms which were brought by the first Islamic community in 7th century Arabia. Interestingly, women from both Morocco and Britain express the same desire for this 'genuine Islam' and a return to the past. The data collected from British women reveal their longing for a return to the emancipatory practices and teachings of the first Islamic community.

The outline thus far deals with the ideal social roles of women in Muslim society as viewed through the literature, the theoretical basis upon which scholars build their arguments. However, it is equally important to investigate what the literature presents on Muslim women's historical roles within their communities. How is the teaching put into practice in the past? It is worth recalling that these texts, in particular, the Qur'an hold

higher persuasive power in Muslim society, due to it being considered infallible, than comparable texts hold for other religious societies.

Women in the Early Communities

El Guindi (1992) argues:

After the early days of Islam- in seventh-century Arabia, when women did have a central role in the birth and spread of the faith- Muslim women gradually turned inward, giving up their right and obligation to have an active public role in religious life. Distanced from scriptural information and first-hand knowledge of Islam, they became dependent on men for guidance on spiritual and practical issues of immediate concern in their lives (p. 160)

This is an extremely important argument which outlines women's past and present positions. El Guindi (1992) begins by noting the important and central role women had in the early days of Islam. Other literature shows that women not only spread the faith, but were actively involved in education, nursing, business, judicial positions, the battlefield and many other important societal roles (Spellberg, 1994). All aspects of public life, as it reflects the worldview of Islam, are deemed to be forms of worship. El Guindi also says, however, that women have distanced themselves from first-hand knowledge of the scriptures, and the result can be seen in today's context simply by looking at the significant rates of illiteracy. This exclusion from the religious realm in terms of knowledge has left women dependent on their male counterparts for various interpretations. Essentially, El Guindi's argument is divided into two crucial parts, (i) the influential and vibrant role of Muslim women in the first community (ii) decline of women's positions often reflected in the status of Muslim women today.

Among the most influential women in the first Muslim community are Khadija and A'isha¹². Both Khadija and A'isha were wives of the Prophet (pbuh), at different stages of his life, but exemplify the different roles Muslim women have had. Khadija was Muhammad's (pbuh) first wife and was much older than him. In fact she was a successful businesswoman of extremely high status (Emerick, 2002). Khadija was a wealthy widow, who owned her own business and proposed to Muhammad (pbuh) long before his prophethood. This exemplifies the strength and independence some women, at least, exerted at this time in history. Walther (1999) states that in the early days of Islam, women from noble families or women with properties of their own (as their right was to sole ownership of their properties, just as their finances) not only demonstrates how women had some of the same rights as their husbands but in some cases demonstrated superiority through their wealth and investments (p. 115). It would be hasty to assume that the marriage between Khadija and Muhammad (pbuh) was based on financial or political interest only since their marriage lasted many years until Khadija's death at 65. It is reported in many *ahadith* that Khadija was Muhammad's most beloved wife and even after her death he continued to honour her; "[s]he believed in me when no one else did. She considered me to be truthful when the people called me a liar. She helped me with her fortune when the people left me with nothing. Allah gave me children from her while He gave me none from other women" (Walther, 1999, p. 104). From the example of Khadija, Muslim women can identify many desirable characteristics which may serve as models for their personal lives. By her active social engagement as well as her family and social life, Khadija is an excellent early example of an independent Muslim woman.

¹² There are many female figures in Islamic history which are considered to be role models, for a concise review of some of these women see Walther (1999) and Hashimi (1997).

A'isha, the youngest wife of the Prophet (pbuh) represents other endeavours in which women engaged within the first Islamic community. A'isha was actively engaged in politics, as she was implicated in several battles both during and after the life of the Prophet (pbuh) (Spellberg, 1994, p. 105). A'isha led a battle against Ali (one of the Prophet's companions and his nephew), also known as the battle of Jamel (camel) after the Prophet's (pbuh) death. Though she lost the battle, she was seen as the first Muslim woman to lead an army.

Not only did A'isha have a political role but she was extremely important in religious education. She was the narrator of the largest number of *ahadith* which guide the daily rituals and actions of millions of Muslims worldwide. Having had such a close relationship with the Prophet (pbuh), she was the most knowledgeable concerning his way of living and his routines. A'isha became a *hafiza* or memorizer of the Qur'an; she was knowledgeable in law, mathematics, medicine and poetry. According to Frager (2002) religious scholars regard her as one of the earliest legal experts. She also took an extremely active role in education as well as social reform, training many boys and girls and turning her home into an Islamic academy (Frager, 2002, p. 115). As an extremely respected woman in her time, men and women came from far away places to benefit from her extensive knowledge.

Although much more can be said about both Khadija and A'isha as important female figures in Islamic history, it is important to show that they were not unique in the roles they assumed. One might argue that Khadija and A'isha are supreme examples because they are specific to the Prophet's (pbuh) era and that Muslim women in this time

were perhaps special or had achieved greater status due to their marriage to the Prophet (pbuh). However, female social participation and full integration is not peculiar to this era. In fact, Muslim women were extremely active in scholarship until approximately the 11th century (Farooq, 2003).

Within these generations, according to Farooq (2003), Walther (1999), and Siddiqui (1993), women scholars were numerous and had the important role of teaching both men and women. Learning environments were not segregated during this time, in fact women and men actively engaged with each other on an intellectual level. Nafissa, the great-granddaughter of Hassan (the Prophet's grandson) was considered so great in knowledge that scholars such as Imam As-Shafi'i, one of the founders of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence, travelled long journeys to visit her (Spellberg, 1999, p. 110). Her academic endeavours were coupled with strict asceticism and charity to the poor; according to Spellberg (1999) she is said to have stood up against tyranny, committed by the Egyptian governor in the early 800's.

The Decline of Muslim Women Leaders

Women of these generations were extremely bold and courageous, speaking out in times of oppression with the knowledge they had acquired about Islam. Unfortunately, according to Farooq (2003), women's scholarship declined drastically from the 10th century onward due to historical and cultural circumstances. Although Muslim women were not as active as men after the 10th century, there are still examples of a few Muslim women who played important roles in *hadith* literature until the 11th century (Courtese and Calderini, 2006).

Barazangi (1997) argues that the imitation of European institutionalized religion and biases toward women at that point in time lead to a drastic decrease in women's participation (p. 26). Muslim male leaders are believed to have been encouraged by colonizers to impose more restrictive measures upon women especially in the realm of higher educational pursuits and their participation in the interpretive process (Barazangi, 1997, p. 26). She also argues that the absence of female scholarship was up until that point in time unknown to Muslim societies.

This lack of scholarly participation resulted in great imbalances within the Islamic discourse in general and particularly in the science of jurisprudence (*fiqh*)¹³. The lack of women's participation led to restrictive interpretations of gender norms and roles (Farooq, 2003). Women are treated as absent due to their lack of qualifications to determine their own rights in respect to the Islamic sources (Sachedina, 1999). The blatant absence of women today from fields of scholarship, which were once held by the female Muslim predecessors, has created an epistemological crisis according to Sachedina (1999). This epistemological crisis is due to an unrepresented human voice in crucial matters such as Islamic law and issues directly affecting the fate of women's involvement in Muslim societies. It may also be considered as an *impasse* in scholarship due to disproportionate under-representation of Muslim women in crucial interpretive endeavours. As a result, women's rights have not been upheld in various realms of society; hence, the huge gender gap within the MENA. Cultural overlay, which largely reflects a male-worldview and women's role within this, has largely ignored women's

¹³ "*Fiqh*- the science of jurisprudence, literally 'understanding'- is the process of human endeavor to discern and extract legal rules from the sacred sources of Islam,- that is, the Koran and the *Sunna* (the practice of the Prophet, as contained in *hadith*) (Mir-Hosseini, 2006, p. 632). Also see footnote 3.

voice and their claims to Islamic rights. Lack of consultation, a basic Islamic principle called *shura*, with respect to issues directly related to women, is reflected in some interpretations such as *qawwamun*, or responsibility, as explained earlier. This seems to be the inevitable result of women's exclusion from the field of religious scholarship. How can a man fully represent the interests of women, even if the intentions are well founded? Farooq (2003) argues that "in order to empower women from the Islamic perspective, women need to equally and fully participate in society, beginning with education and scholarship". The reintegration of women in this domain will help ensure their representation in all spheres of life. The analyses of why women have lagged behind in development differ greatly. Western analyses, which are reflections of mainstream development organizations, point to Islam and women's adherence to its traditions as hindering their full inclusion in development whereas the Islamic academics point to women's exclusion from Islamic traditions as detrimental to their full participation in development.

Reasserting Islam: Changes from Within

Those scholars who argue for a reclaiming of Islam in the realm of gender are indeed diverse yet all have two points in common: (i) the belief that Islam is a viable alternative for women's meaningful inclusion in society and (ii) the contention that misrepresentation of the Islamic faith occurs when cultural practices are labelled religious in nature or have been twisted to the point of such belief (Mir-Hosseini, 2006; Barlas, 2002; Eissa, 1999; Wadud, 1999). As stated by Al-Hibri (2000) the fundamental principle of *tawhid* is all too often ignored when it comes to gender relations. This neglect leads to religious interpretations which merely reflect patriarchal assumptions. Basic concepts of

harmony, consultation and cooperation are traded off for conflict and domination which is a socio-cultural outcome according to Al-Hibri (2000). Al-Hibri (2000) and Barazangi (1997) argue that the weight of culture overshadows the Qur'an's wisdom in achieving a balanced society (this is a common occurrence in text-based religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam). In fact Al-Hibri argues that Islam has always sought gradual change whenever social reform has been required. Sayed and Morse (1995) argue that the early community is a prime example of gradualism in the reform of women's status. They argue that women's emancipation began as education and was introduced indiscriminately for both genders. Once women gained access to valuable religious education the seeds for emancipation were sown and their engagement in society became visible (Sayed and Morse, 1995). If this concept is revisited in a modern day context, one can see how women's re-engagement with Islamic education can restore power and agency to the Muslim woman through a legitimate Islamic lens.

Mir-Hosseini (2006) argues that *fiqh* has in fact become patriarchal in its interpretation. This is contrary to the intrinsic nature and teachings of the Qur'an. She affirms that the intrinsic nature of the Qur'an is one which provides humans with justice and equality. Equality in this sense is equality of opportunity and a representation of equality before God in duties of both Muslim men and women. Boundaries of *fiqh*, Mir-Hosseini (2006) argues are most blurred when it comes to family law and women. This as seen under the criticisms has received most attention and is often the bastion of critiques.

Mir-Hosseini's (1999) previous work in Iran in the areas of family law and *shari'a* reveal the great injustices done to women in the name of religion. *Shari'a* and *fiqh* boundaries often become blurred and make it easy to pass issues of jurisprudence off

as divinely ordained *shari'a* which was the case in Iran. In the absence of education in Islamic law and jurisprudence and thus the inability to participate in its interpretation and enforcement, women suffer from the rulings emanating from the male-dominated Islamic courts. However, in her study, Mir-Hosseini saw an evolution in the family courts mainly when women became knowledgeable about their rights under Islam. Once women had the power of religious knowledge, they were able to fight the court battles and win the cases in their favour by using Islam (Mir-Hosseini, 1999). She claims that “by uncovering a hidden history and rereading textual sources they are proving that the inequalities embedded in *fiqh* are neither manifestations of divine will nor cornerstones of an irredeemably backward social system; rather they are human constructions” (Mir-Hosseini, 2006, p. 642). Barazangi (1997) argues that women’s limited access to Islamic education, one which goes beyond basic rituals, is the primary cause for women’s inability to become emancipated. This limited ability results also in an inability to “self-identify as *khalifah*; a trustee- a Qur’anic mandate of human existence” (p. 22). The challenge for these women becomes shifting paradigms within Islamic law to encompass a full interpretive worldview including the female voice. As Farooq (2003) argues, women need to integrate the domain of religious education, and men need to make space for them. Barazangi (1998) argues that the Islamic education of women favours the development of society through their direct involvement by childrearing as well as educating future generations. Hence, the education of Muslims within the Islamic context not only creates independent and autonomous individuals fulfilling the mandate of *khalifah* or vicegerent, but also permeates other spheres of society creating greater social benefit (Barazangi, 1998, p. 5).

The most dominant argument related to women's education is the need for an indigenous model of social change. Within a Muslim society, which has Islam as its bedrock, the only source for legitimate change becomes Islam itself; Mattson (2006) argues that Islam is the primary paradigm for legitimate change. Mattson (2006) connects this movement with a traditional concept in Islam: *tajdid* or renewal. The idea of renewal, rather than reform or reshaping, is a well established one, in Islam. One *hadith* states "At the beginning of every century, God will send to this community someone who will renew its religion" (quoted in Mattson, 2006, p. 5). This idea of renewal, according to Mattson can also be considered as repair; once the Muslim community strays from its roots, it must go through a phase of renewal or *tajdid*. The famous scholar Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) discussed the concept of *tajdid* in great detail. He was considered one of the great revivalists of the 20th century. His focus was on the re-education of humanity and women, in particular. Muhammad Abduh was considered a forward thinking scholar for his time¹⁴. Before Abduh, Egypt's Qasim Amin (1863-1908) wrote largely in favour of Muslim women's education as well, as a means to the development of Islamic civilization and is still considered one of the primary scholars on women's issues today. The idea of renewing women's rights then becomes a legitimate fight for change within the Islamic framework. *Tajdid* can bring about a renewal of the early Islamic communities with their holistic view of women and their balancing of social as well as family rights and roles in today's context.

It is important to note that renewal or revival of the early Islamic communities cannot flourish while ignoring the modern-day context. Wolfe (2008) argues that

¹⁴ See Abugideiri (2004) for a discussion of Abduh's ideas and Cragg (1995) for a biographical account of Abduh's life and ideas.

religious revival is flourishing even in secular societies where the two, religious revival and secularism, work well together. The interplay of moderating ideas of the West and traditional Islamic values is not uncommon as societies are forced to deal with the presence of secularism and globalization. It is within the framework of the revival and the lessons from the early communities, that the re-assertion of Islamic identity and education take shape. It is, however, necessary to look to the future and to meld the two worldviews together. An Islamic revival is a product of its modern day environment and can only be successful if it reconciles itself with modern day social issues according to Wolfe (2008). Although this argument must be considered, the process must essentially be grassroots and indigenous for it to be viewed as legitimate. All initiatives are products of their contemporary environment and many make great use of technological trends. However, when discussing women's rights in the Muslim world, despite the globalized context, Eissa (1999) argues that these rights are:

[N]ot only possible for women within an Islamic legal framework, but mandated by the letter and spirit of the Qur'an. Therefore, there is no claim to the argument that only with secularization will we achieve absolute equality of rights for women. Therefore to deny equality of rights for women is un-Islamic. Second, any attempt at secularization or 'liberalization' will be met with accusations of Westernization, or even apostasy, and will not achieve the objective of revision in Islamic jurisprudence... (p. 8)

These are strong arguments against exclusively Western notions of gender equality and development for Muslim women. Eissa makes the point that secularization will naturally fail because it does not address the root problems of gender injustice which is a result of the interplay of colonization and women's retreat from the Islamic intellectual front, in Muslim societies today. A balance must be achieved between the two models of Western and Islamic.

Likewise, Hassan (1987) in her concluding remarks on gender equality and justice in Islam argues that ultimately, it will be the burden of Muslim women themselves, once they have attained levels of education, to be proactive in asserting their rights. The meaning of their lives will have to be defined in their own words. A positive formulation of goals and objectives must be undertaken on both the individual and the collective level.

Webb (2000) argues that “any analysis or theory of women’s nature, role, rights or problems must include attention to the practical, immediate issues involved in actualizing the Qur’anic mandate of social justice, and concomitantly, that any considerations of ‘practical’ solutions to problems and injustices faced by women must have sound theological grounding in the Qur’anic worldview” (p. xi-xii). Any advancement in the realm of gender must come from within as quoted by Webb as she points to legitimacy, as do Matteson (2006) and Eissa (1999), as the starting point for change. Without this foundational block any attempt to incorporate gender policy, engage women in development or revise family laws to reflect the Qur’anic ideal and mandate of justice will be met with hostility and rejection.

This call for an indigenous, grassroots movement towards change is one which is of primary importance. Sardar (1997) argues that each society needs to define its own notion of development, social transformation and unique features for moving forward. Western models are unsuited to the needs and requirements, visions and aspirations of non-Western cultures. He states that Western notions of development, which ascribe to an imperialistic and conflict-ridden worldview, simply create havoc when transplanted to

other cultures. Islamic culture and its gender vision are not exempt in this case, as faith is deemed all-encompassing and cannot be compartmentalized (Ahmed and Gauer, 1977; Ali, 2005; Iqbal, 1994). Wignaraja (1993) makes a strong argument in favor of such Southern-based initiatives. He states that the disorder Western development models have brought to the South has given legitimacy to new thinking in the South (p. 4). He also argues that the questioning of narrow Western intellectual framework is necessary in the South so that new paradigms can be developed by the people who will be directly affected by the policies and outcomes of this new thinking.

The immediate solution proposed by grassroots scholars is education, but not just any education. Barazangi (1997) argues that higher Islamic education should be considered a human right for the Muslim woman. Barazangi defines Islamic education as one which “fulfills the premise of producing an autonomous individual who intellectually and spiritually makes the choice to be *khalifah* (trustee, vicegerent) and to follow the course of action toward achieving social justice described in the holy Qur’an and objectified by the Prophet Muhammad” (p. 30). Education of the Muslim woman about her basic and divinely ordained rights is the ultimate goal as is that of institutional recognition and participation in the realm of jurisprudence. However, as Farooq (2003) states, one of the major impediments for change is women’s institutional access, or access to seats of power in jurisprudence. Barazangi (1997) warns, however, that women’s challenge is not limited to changing policies or their legal status once their educational demands have been met, but it “includes changing the entrenched paradigm of understanding Islam and its practice” (p. 25).

Mahmood's (2005) work in Egypt provides an example of women's educational pursuits. Although most of the women she interviewed were not engaged in legal education, they felt a sense of agency through knowledge of their religion, practice and worship. Such movements are perhaps the seeds of future institutional change. It is therefore necessary to consider individual motivations and actions which inspire women to become agents of change within their own lives, their families and their communities and assert themselves within their faith. It is by recognizing such actions that a clearer picture can be painted of grassroots gender development.

It becomes apparent that GAD theory, although claiming to be holistic in its approach, does not address a variety of issues raised in the literature surrounding women in Islam. The major focus remains on women's public capabilities and visibility largely overlooking other relevant social roles which are deemed equally important according to the Islamic perspective, such as the enhanced sense of motherhood. It is clear however, that both GAD theory and Islamic theory on gender roles encourage women to be part of society's various facets such as the economic, educational, and political spheres. The historical nature of Northern gender theories does not take into account the fundamental difference between the two worldviews: Islam and Western perspectives. The worldview of Islam which extends felicity in this life to acting in a God-conscious manner cannot be limited to public participation and narrow understandings of successful gender relations. The literature suggests that Western gender development models are inadequate and narrow in addressing the realities, values and concerns of Muslim women. Education and fluency in Islam allows women to define their own concepts of development and

provides them with a legitimate model for holistic societal integration, defined in their own terms.

The Islamic Revival and Women's Informal Groups

According to Mahmood (2005), renewed interest in Islam and adherence to the faith dates back to the 1970s. Afshar (1993) argues that during the anti-colonial battles many middle and upper class women were looking to Western women as the standard bearers of liberation. However, the 20th century is considered to be the apex of Muslim women's intellectual engagement first by denouncing Islam and then by reclaiming it. Women have reclaimed it as a liberatory tool through a re-engagement with it (Mahmood, 2005). A number of scholars argue that this revival is largely due to failures in development and the secular models and hence an increased desire to return to Islam as a possible solution for their own societies (Mahmood, 2005; Lubeck, 2000; Esposito, 2003; Kepel, 2002; Ayoob, 2004; A. Ali, 2000; Layachi, 2000). Some characteristics of this revival are dramatic increases in mosque attendance by both men and women, marked displays of religious sociability, for example adoption of the veil, increased consumption and production of religious media and literature, growing circles of intellectuals who write and comment upon contemporary affairs in the popular press from Islamic viewpoints (Mahmood, 2005). Mosques have come to serve as organizational centres for many activities including religious education open to all.

Within this movement, which has swept the Muslim world, women have become increasingly active in affairs related to religion. They are advocating complementary roles rather than Western perceived equality which was the development agenda, and looking to previous scholarship and role models as described in the literature above. Just

as during the colonial struggles those women looking to the Western women as standard bearers of liberation, during the revival, middle to upper class women, have formed a large part of the revival (Kepel, 2002).

It is within this context that women's informal educational pursuits in Morocco can be observed. As Farooq (2004) argues, the first step to change within the Muslim world is woman's first hand re-engagement with religious knowledge. The lack of formal institutional opportunities for many women makes informal knowledge all the more meaningful. The case of Morocco is a particularly interesting one for several reasons; Morocco is considered to be among the more liberalizing Muslim countries in the MENA today according to the UNDP Arab Human Development reports. Morocco's gender policies have been reformed within the past years increasing women's opportunities in the political as well as economic spheres. However, religious adherence remains strong. Despite numerous attempts to adopt international Western based conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), attachment to religion and its revival continues (Le Journal Hebdomadaire, 2003, p. 13).

The use of informal learning channels (which are called *halaqat*: circles or *durus*: lessons) among women has increasingly gained popularity. The setup of such lessons is relatively simple and straightforward; generally one woman leads a discussion topic about religion and then allows the group to interact with the topic. As religious literature has become widely accessible, there is a great variety of topics. Women actively engage with their religion through classes in Islamic law, Qur'anic memorization and other subjects which deal with daily issues pertaining to faith. Women attend in large numbers

not only in house settings but also in mosque settings, where they gain free access to a variety of classes in Islamic jurisprudence and Qur'anic memorization. Interviews with women who teach in such settings in a variety of research reveal their desires to stimulate greater God-consciousness in the minds and hearts of their participants which will have a direct impact on society's future (Mahmood, 2005; Ahmed, 2002; Bullock, 2005). How is this re-engagement with religion affecting these women's lives and the communities around them? Do they see religion as the primary vehicle to social development? These issues will be explored in a local setting in the empirical section of this thesis.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT

Rationale of Methodology

Voices of Muslim women are all too often “broadcast as the unanimous expression of ‘women in Islamic societies’ ” (Moghissi, 1999, p. 42). Their personal experiences are viewed as representative of Muslim women worldwide which in turn facilitates analysis by placing them into neat boxes. Further examination of relevant and crucial issues related to Muslim women are hence abandoned and do not incite further examination.

This was taken into serious consideration in the design of this research; appropriate methods reflecting the diversity and particularity of women’s lives were given priority and matched with methods which would provide a broader picture. While seeking to understand the role and impact of informal Islamic learning networks, three research methods were used: baseline surveys, narrative interviews and focus group interviewing.

What are Informal Islamic Learning Networks?

Informal Islamic learning networks, (as used in this research) describe a variety of learning environments which all have two common denominators: Islam and a level of informality. The learning groups are versatile and can present themselves in a variety of shapes; there are informal lessons which are transmitted through television, cassettes, CD’s or the internet. These lessons are usually presentations of a given scholar on a topic related to Islam. Home/ private setting based groups also qualify as informal Islamic learning networks because they bring together a smaller group of women, usually

between 4 and 10. In this setting, women engage in research on any given topic and the lesson is usually directed by a woman who has formal training in the Islamic sciences. Finally mosque groups enable the participation of larger groups of women. The women meet in a mosque, oftentimes in a classroom setting, and also engage in research and presentation in a variety of fields related to Islam. The lessons are directed by knowledgeable women, who generally have obtained formal training in Islamic sciences, however not exclusively. All of these settings are informal which distinguishes them from formal education environments which have rigid standards of admission but which also have an end result of certification. Although many of the lessons which are offered in the mosque setting can lead to certification, the focus of this research is the informal and semi-informal gatherings.

An important aspect of the informal setting is the guidance provided by a learned figure in the lessons. The presence of women who have received formal training ensures authenticity of knowledge. Teachers in the mosque setting are chosen based on their qualifications in the same fashion one would be hired in a teaching job. However, their work is completely voluntary and unpaid. In an oral culture, the correct transmission of knowledge is extremely relevant and important and is given much weight in the selection of group partners. This method of learning is one which dates back to the early days of Islam when the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself was the teacher and his followers his pupils.

Baseline Surveys

The first research method employed was a basic baseline survey. The survey was handed out to women, after my research was explained to them, on various occasions at mosque gatherings. Those women who felt comfortable filling out the questionnaire were then given the time and assistance, if required, to fill out the survey. A total of 17 women committed to filling out the survey. The purpose of this method was to get a general sense of the women who were engaged in the learning process in order to notice any trends in education, employment, interests of study as well as the impact of study on their daily lives. Identifying trends through the baseline survey allowed for finer tuning of the narrative interviews. It also provided information about the potential candidates of the narrative interviews and the focus group.

Narrative Interviews

The validation of women's 'self-perceptions' and providing them an arena for expression, free from the pressures of interrogation, were crucial to the selection of the narrative technique which provided the bulk of data for this research. Richmond (2002) argues that the researcher involved in narrative methodology works to actively find the voice of the participant in a particular time, place or setting. It also allows the participant to critically reflect on her condition, constraints and actions. This reflective process may thus be beneficial to both participant and researcher; it is through narrative interviewing that these women can be given a voice which is reflective of them and therefore serves the purpose of understanding the various life situations in fuller contexts.

According to Denzin (1989) narrative interviewing begs the question “how do men and women live and give meaning to their lives and capture these meanings in written, narrative and oral forms?” (p. 10). The rich and complex nature of the data which is collected through narrative techniques can be analyzed in a variety of ways. According to Baumgartner (2000) there are three methods of analysis when narrative is involved i) linguistic ii) psychological and iii) biographical analysis. The data collected will be analyzed using biographical analysis in order to get a comprehensive and full account of the women’s lives. The biographical method as explained comprehensively by Denzin (1989) takes into account a number of relevant factors:

- i) the influence of society on an individual
- ii) important turning points in people’s stories
- iii) the importance of family beginnings
- iv) the impact of gender and class on narratives
- v) the influence of the audience

While these factors are deemed important in the biographical analysis of narratives, they are often overlooked in other forms of research thereby weakening the analysis. All five points will be taken into consideration in the analysis of the data collected from the women interviewed.

Although narratives provide meaningful insight into an individual’s life and allows that individual’s voice to be heard, it is not without shortcomings. Denzin (1989) argues that truthful statements are often difficult to distinguish from fictitious ones. Individuals also create and recreate their realities through time, therefore providing different accounts of one event on multiple occasions (Denzin, 1989).

Derrida (1972) states that narrative “contributed to the understanding that there is no clear window into the inner life of a person, for any window is always filtered through a glaze of language, signs and the process of signification” (quoted in Denzin, 1989, p. 14). Despite the complex and often confusing nature of narrative analysis, it is representative of human existence, and provides a dynamic insight into an individual’s worldview of herself at any given time. It opens the door to unlimited expression and voice in an area where women have often been overlooked.

Finally, it is important to note that the voices of women until recently have been largely ignored in empirical research, especially the voices of Southern women and more so Muslim women. Access to Muslim women is only one barrier in obtaining good data along with establishing trust when the researcher is not an ‘insider’.

Franzmann (2000) argues that fieldwork in the realm of religion has often sidelined women and favoured the voices of their male counterparts, this being a result of accessibility as well as researcher bias (p. 71-72). Research in the religious traditions according to Franzmann (2000) has been overwhelmingly conducted by male scholars who in turn are “imbued with a language and world view that are normatively male” (p. 72). Therefore engaging with women in the realm of religion, understanding their perceptions and their visions of Islam as a vehicle for social development will open a door of new dialogue. My interest in this dialogue is the creation of a space for Muslim women of the South to express their vision of development through the lens of Islam, as a legitimate and viable gender development paradigm.

Denzin’s fifth point “influence of the audience” is crucial to understanding the dynamic that existed between the women interviewed and myself. Having lived in

Morocco and being a Western Muslim convert myself with relatives residing in Morocco, I found it very easy to access and gain the trust of the local women, as they saw me to be an insider. This assumption was confirmed on numerous occasions when the women used “they” when addressing the Western audience instead of “you”. Despite the fact that I grew up, lived and pursued my education in the West, all the women felt an immediate sense of kinship with me. They immediately considered me an insider based on our common faith regardless of my Western background. Perhaps the fact that I had chosen Islam independently as my faith encouraged women in all three methods to participate and help out a “new sister” (despite the fact that my conversion dated back to 2002). This advantage has contributed to the very informative narratives each of the women provided during my stay in Morocco.

The guidelines which were adapted for the narrative interviews were based on Richmond’s (2002) story map analysis (see Figure 1). The story map schema sets markers as points of reference in life histories. The major categories employed in this research were past experiences, present experiences, future expectations and turning points. Under each category the women were guided along through a series of questions (which were often answered without ever asking) around the pillars of family, society, schooling, work and self. This ensured a well rounded view of the women’s lives and how each pillar related to the women’s views of their role in development, through a religious worldview.

In total, four women were interviewed in the narrative style over a period of three weeks in the city of Tangier, in the North of Morocco and the city of Rabat, the nation’s capital. It was important for each woman to feel that she had all the time she needed to

tell me her story in its entirety, expand on points or remove points made from the formal script that was transcribed in the end. All narrative interviews were conducted in French and have been translated to English. Because of the length and detail of narrative interviewing, a limited number of women were asked to participate. As Kirk and Miller (1986) argue, “quality” which is the basis of qualitative research, “connotes the nature, as opposed to the ‘quantity’, or amount, of a thing... qualitative research would denote any research distinguished by the absence of counting” (p. 9). They argue that qualitative research implies a commitment to field activities. “Qualitative research is an empirical, socially located phenomenon, defined by its own history.” (p. 10). Interviewing more women would have compromised the amount of detail made available in this study on each woman’s life and in turn neglected one of the primary goals of such research: granting voice.

Focus Group

The second research method employed was the focus group. Focus groups often accompany narrative research to further understand and expand upon issues common in the narratives in a collective setting. My initial goal was to set up two or three focus group sessions with women in the mosque classes in the city of Tangier. However, this task proved to be more difficult than I had originally envisioned. My research was explained to women in several mosque-setting classes. However most women found themselves too busy, overcommitted or simply uninterested to participate. Instead, I was given permission from one of the *daiya* or teachers of the mosque classes to attend her class, after the summer vacation period and organize a focus group among her students.

This opportunity was flattering and allowed me to meet many participants; however, it was the only focus group I was able to facilitate. The lesson given on that particular day, initiated by the *daiya* was devoted to my topic, notions of gender equality in Islam, women's participation in societal development and personal experiences of transformation through informal learning networks in both the mosque setting as well as other settings. The *daiya* spent the entire allotted time for her lesson on the above mentioned issues from a scholarly perspective (as she was learned in the Islamic sciences). The lecture was followed by an open session in which several women recounted personal experiences. On that day, a total of 32 women attended the lecture and focus group, and 5 women shared their personal experiences on the topics provided. Since the lecture and focus group sessions were held in Arabic, my translator facilitated the session and translation was done afterwards. All interviews were recorded to preserve the accuracy of participants' stories. Although this part of the research did not result in three focus groups as originally planned, flexibility in the process of data-collection has proven essential.

The three-pronged method employed for data collection was conceived to triangulate the data and observe issues from different angles or viewpoints. However, it is important to note that the results of the data are not to be considered representative of all Moroccan women engaged in informal Islamic learning. It is to serve as a catalyst for further research into a variety of topics and issues brought up by the women themselves. It is meant to invite further and more thorough examination of this under-researched field and open a new arena for dialogue between the academic community and those who are often ignored.

Historical Background

The rich history of Morocco cannot be faithfully and adequately rendered in a brief overview. However, a number of important landmarks must be noted in order to provide a context for the women's personal experiences. Situating the women in time and space is crucial to understanding how each lived through their various life-events. Generational differences between the women are also important factors and again are reflective of historical and societal environments.

Any visitor to Morocco today will immediately notice the Islamic culture of the nation, women and men clothed in Islamic dress, long *djellabas*¹⁵ and women in *hijab*. Beside them one can also find men and women dressed in European fashions, many women matching their European fashions to their *hijabs*. Meanwhile one can hear echoes of French language woven into the colloquial Moroccan Arabic, street signs also written in French and shops varied in both French and the Standard Modern Arabic. The diversity of dress as well as the languages spoken are telling signs of Morocco's past. If one were to walk the same streets fifty years ago the image would be drastically different.

Morocco and France

Morocco was under official French protectorate¹⁶ for over 40 years. So the French were actively involved in the evolution of the state. Although Morocco remained a monarchy despite French presence, the Monarch during the period of the protectorate, until independence in 1956, was greatly influenced by his European neighbours (Waltz, 1995).

¹⁵ Traditional Moroccan dress which is long and covers the entire body, concealing the shape of the body

¹⁶ Although the official term used is "protectorate" and not "colony" the women interviewed referred to this period as colonization as they saw the effects identical to the latter.

Only after independence did Morocco's Monarch have full control over the nation. (Waltz, 1999).

The King of Morocco is also known as "Commander of the Faithful" as his family claims to be a direct descendent from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Because of this title and the Monarch's symbolic role as spiritual leader (despite the fact that he is not a qualified religious scholar), Islam in Morocco is considered to be politically anchored from the King down (Waltz, 1995, p. 125). Freedom of speech as well as political expression were limited until the late 1990s when Mohamed VI ascended to the throne and began granting more liberties to the press, while seeking to modernize the nation according to Western standards. Although the King's agenda has been to mimic Western laws broadly, one area has provoked most debates: family law.

Morocco's Family Code: the Moudawana

The Family Code or *Moudawana* debate surfaced in all narrative interviews and the women expressed their discontents with both the reforms and the nature of the document. Any contemporary discussion of gender in Morocco demands a brief look at the *Moudawana* and its history.

The *Moudawana* or family code is the only Islamic set of laws in Morocco based in *shari'ah*. All issues directly or indirectly related to family, women and children are governed by this document. The *Moudawana's* creation dates back to November 22nd 1957, shortly after Morocco gained independence from France. The former King Mohamed V assembled a committee for the creation of the document. It was composed

of religious scholars, who were doctors in Islamic sciences from the Qarawiyne University in Fez (Moulay Rachid, 1997).

Although the *Moudawana* was established in 1957, it took 36 years before it would see its first set of reforms. March 1992 was marked by a campaign protesting the inequities of the *Moudawana* such as disproportionate marriageable ages for girls and boys, inequities in divorce for women as well as issues related to female guardianship to name a few (Lahlou, 1997, p. 78). On September 29th 1992, King Hassan II gave a speech addressing the representatives of Moroccan Women Association's announcing his shock at some of the injustices and discrepancies in the implementation of the *Moudawana* (Lahlou, 1997, p. 78). It was at this point that the first set of changes came about.

Between 1993 and 2003, much rallying was done to further encourage reforms of the same issues relating to guardianship, divorce, polygamy among other demands, amongst women's groups. It was only on October 10th 2003 that King Mohamed VI gave a speech that would change the history of the *Moudawana* forever. Islam was used as a basis for all of the reforms relating to family law, and a religious justification such as verses from the Qur'an, or selected *ahadith*¹⁷, and consensus by the religious scholars was provided. Some of the *ahadith* selected in the King's official speech included the following: "women are equal to men before the law"; "Dignified is the man who honours them (women) and ignoble is he who humiliates them (women)"; "Make things easy, do not complicate them!"; "The most atrocious of legal acts, in the sight of Allah, is divorce". For every reform related to family law the King systematically used religious justification. Initially the reforms in divorce law, guardianship and marriageable age were

¹⁷ The King's speech given on October 10th, 2003 included several references from both Qur'an and *ahadith*. For his complete speech refer to *Femmes du Maroc* October 2003, Special Edition pages 6-8. In reference to the Qur'an, the King cited verse 4:3. For a summary of the latest reforms see Appendix B.

accepted by both women's groups and the more conservative sectors of society. However the 2003 reforms would be a catalyst for future reforms.

Through these reforms the King opened the doors of *ijtihad*,¹⁸ an Islamic legal term which means independent judgment in a legal or theological question, based on the interpretation of the four sources of Shari'a, i.e. Qur'an, Sunna, *Ijama'* (consensus) and *Qiyas* (analogy or human reasoning). All of the reforms were followed by Islamic justification.

The importance of the ongoing debate about Morocco's family law surfaces in any discussion one engages in about women in Morocco. It was common to meet people who immediately began discussing the *Moudawana* once they learned about my research. However, all women related to these sets of laws in one form or another and made reference to the reform movements. Despite the fact that the reforms were rooted in Islamic jurisprudence, interesting issues surface as the women expressed their discontents with the nature of the reforms and the direction it has taken. The most frequently cited were the inconsistencies between the *Moudawana* and *shari'ah* law. All participants felt that *shari'ah* granted them full rights and agency in society whereas the *Moudawana* was a human endeavour primarily aimed at pleasing Western donors.

The influence of the French and Morocco's struggle to reclaim its identity while keeping up with the West in image most notably through family law reforms, are factors which are crucial to understanding the lives of the women who participated in the narrative interviews and the paths they have taken.

¹⁸ *Ijtihad*, is an Islamic legal term which means independent judgment in a legal or theological question, based on the interpretation of the four sources of Shari'a i.e., Qur'an, Sunna, *Ijama'* (consensus) and *Qiyas* (analogy or human reasoning). For further discussion on *Ijtihad* and its 'closed doors' see Hallaq (2003)

The Islamic Revival

An important historical period in the Middle East and North Africa was the Islamic revival of the late 1970s and 1980s onward. Morocco, at the far West of the Muslim world, felt echoes of this religious resurgence. One of the main characteristics of the revival, according to Ahmad (1983), was the “unwavering commitment to Islam and its great capabilities to face the challenge of modernity creatively” (p. 222).

Most revival movements were not only a reaction to colonialism, but also the recovery of an identity and position that the Islamic world or *ummah* (community of Muslims worldwide) felt they had lost due to Western domination. The revival was geared at returning Islam to all levels of society. Ahmad (1983) defines it as an “upsurge in almost all levels of Muslim existence, the intellectual, moral, social, cultural, political and economic” (p. 221). The Islamic revival sought comprehensive transformation of the social order, changing nearly all aspects of life and making faith the focal point of society. It was a representation of a balance between the eternal and temporal aspects of life based on morality and truth.

Lubeck (1994) argues that the revival provided an alternative, a solution, for the failures of national development. Failures of development were often attributed to the secularization of a nation and its drifting away from Islamic values and social order. Education in the process of modernization after colonization also became largely secularized, as indigenous languages became marginalized. Education was seen as a means to dominate the intellect through language and the culture of the colonizer. This model, Ali (2000) argues resulted also in the formation of dual personalities; youth were exposed to secular societies but religious homes. Dissatisfaction with society became a

catalyst for the search for alternatives (Ali, 2000). Ali argues that Marxism and Communism were not plausible alternatives for the Islamic lifestyle; instead Islam, as an entire social system, was seen as the alternate solution. A 'return' to Islam as a solution to society's ills and a return to the Muslim identity were major themes during the revival. The revival is extremely important as context to the narratives of the four women since they grew up either post revival or during the revival, each historical setting influencing the women's choices and paths greatly.

Chapter 4

THE MOROCCAN WOMEN

Who is Studying?

In order to get a sense of who is attending the mosque lessons, a baseline survey was distributed to those women who were willing to participate in the study. The surveys were anonymous and took approximately 10-15 minutes to fill out. Assistance was provided to any woman who needed further clarification or who did not understand words as the questionnaire was distributed in French. A total of 17 were fully completed and the results can provide a baseline for the two mosques surveyed in the city of Tangier. The first part of the survey addresses basic questions such as age, education level and profession.

Age

Of the 17 candidates who completed the questionnaires 8 were between the ages of 35-45, 4 between the ages of 25-35, 3 between the ages of 45-55, 2 between the ages of 20-25 and none of the women were above 55. Although the sample is of only 17 women, it appears that the majority of women who answered the baseline survey are between 35 and 45 years of age.

Education

Since the majority of women who participated in the survey were of working age, most of them had attained high levels of education. The Moroccan educational system follows French standards where a Baccalaureate (Bac) is equivalent to the North American High

School Diploma. Following the Bac, are a variety of options; one can pursue a diploma for one year in order to obtain certification, this would be classified as Bac +1. An equivalent to a community college degree in North America would be called Bac +2. A university degree would be Bac +4 or Bac +5, depending on the field of study.

8 of the 17 women in this study had a university degree (Bac +4/5) and 2 of those 8 were still completing their degrees (Bac +3). The second largest category was 4 women who had a high school diploma (Bac). 2 had a diploma (Bac +1) and 2 had a community college diploma (Bac +2). Over half of the women were therefore university educated, while the other half was split between certification and high school. None of the women indicated a level below high school. As suggested by Winter (2000) and Mahmood (2005) educated women are those who are most likely drawn to the lessons being investigated, the mosque lessons, despite the fact that there are no prerequisites for participation, besides time.

Professions

One might conclude that the educated women belonged to the middle or upper-middle classes of society and therefore had more time to devote to such lessons. However, out of the 17 women only one of the women stated that she was a homemaker and did not work outside the home. The list of professions was diverse:

4 women wrote that they were students, 4 teachers, 2 government employees/technicians, 1 orphanage worker, 1 accountant, 1 industrial engineer, 1 hydraulic engineer, 1 homemaker, 1 pharmacist and 1 retired bank manager. The list is very varied and again supports Winter (2001) and Mahmood (2005) who suggested that it is often the

highly educated and professional women are often attracted to both religious organizations and to the Islamic learning networks.

The second part of the survey was designed for short answers revolving around the women's participation in the informal learning networks. Some of the questions required more reflection on behalf of the participants. The implications of the self-selecting sample are discussed below.

Questions asked were:

(a) Why have you joined these classes? (b) How long have you been studying in a group setting? (c) What are the subjects of Islamic study you have been engaged in? (d) Have these classes changed anything in your day-to-day activities? Private or public?

(a) Why women join the informal learning networks

The answers to this question were varied but can be grouped under 5 main headings, under each heading the participants responded in their own words;

- Deepen knowledge

"to better know my religion", "to better know and understand my religion and its true sources", "to better know my religion and become daiya (religious teacher)", "to better understand and know my rights and obligations", "to become more learned", "to deepen my knowledge and education of Islam and religious principles"

- Self- perfection

"to better myself", "to correct myself and to give meaning to my life", "personal interest", "ameliorate myself", "personal satisfaction", "to enrich my knowledge and to be a better Muslim".

- Passing on of knowledge/ teaching

"to teach Islam abroad; Indonesia", "to teach Islam", "to have a good education of Islamic principles in order to transmit them correctly", "to better know my religion and become daiya (religious teacher)"

- Emotional well-being
"to find moral comfort", "personal interest and well-being", "social well-being"
- Obligation
"it is an obligation for all Muslims"

Almost all women made some mention of increasing knowledge, as this would be the primary reason for any type of education in most circumstances. However, most of the answers in the first category were coupled with responses of self-perfection. Most women envisioned their knowledge giving greater meaning to their lives and becoming better believers, therefore, applying the knowledge learned to their everyday lives. The transmission of knowledge to others implies that those women saw benefit in the lessons not only for themselves but for others as well. This is an interesting answer as the literature suggested; the education of Muslim women in the realm of Islam not only creates independent and autonomous individuals fulfilling the mandate of *khalifah* or vicegerent according to Barazangi (1998) but also permeates other spheres of society creating greater social benefit (p. 5).

There is also a clear emotional benefit as women who participate in religious learning are emotionally attached to their religion and see value in pursuing knowledge of it. One participant stated that it is an obligation upon every Muslim to seek knowledge of his/her religion. This comes from a *hadith* from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) which states this very same phrase (Al-Bukhari, 1994). Every Muslim is obligated to pursue knowledge in this realm in order to practice his/ her faith with knowledge and understanding of its rituals, rights and obligations and identifying oneself as a trustee or *khalifah*. As expressed in the literature, this is often at the core of women's identity.

(b) Length of Study

When asked how long women they had been participating in Islamic groups for informal learning 1 woman responded 1 year, 5 women responded 2 years, 1 responded 3 years, 2 responded 4 years, 2 responded 5 years, 1 responded 6 years, 2 responded 10 years and 3 responded more than 20 years. Due to the age groupings it is understandable why many women are relatively new (5 years and under) to the learning networks. Most of the women are still in the formative stage of learning with a few exceptions of extensive study. Many women also go on to teaching in informal lessons outside of the mosque setting, once they pass certain courses; although the networks are informal. It is perhaps due to senior women's interests in the creation of other groups, that most of the students in the groups have only a few years of learning experience.

(c) Subjects of Study

This question was also designed to provide a self-created response to scan the subjects the women were most interested in and participated in most often. The responses in order of popularity showed interest in *tajwid* which is the art of recitation of the holy Qur'an along with its memorization, Islamic sciences, life of the Prophet (pbuh), *shari'ah* law, *tafsir* which is Qur'anic exegesis, *hadith* which is the study of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), pillars of Islam and theological foundations.

76% of the women had studied *tajwid* or were in the process of studying *tajwid*.

Most women seem to begin their learning with lessons in *tajwid* whereas the senior participants had elaborated their fields of study and interest with a variety of subjects.

The emphasis on the learning of the Qur'an within Islam itself is enormous; the word Qur'an is often translated as "reading" or "recital" (Ayoub, 1995, p. 387). It is important to note the stature the Qur'an holds in the minds and hearts of believers worldwide. The Qur'an is considered by Muslims to be a direct communication from God consequently containing divine speech in its original Arabic format therefore "[e]very written word and recited sound is revered by believers" (Ayoub, 1995, p. 387). It is for this reason that the text is memorized by Muslims worldwide in its original Arabic format¹⁹. Along with its memorization come proper recitation rules which are considered an art to be mastered, *tajwid*. Nevertheless, it is accomplished even by children whose mother tongue is not Arabic; the rhythmic verses of the text enable its memorization and make it a goal for many Muslims. The memorization of the Qur'an entails a close relationship with text; hence closeness to divine speech. It is not a surprise that the mosque learners almost all seek to learn the art of memorization before continuing their studies which elaborate Qur'anic principles and laws. It becomes much easier to study fields such as *shari'ah* law and Qur'anic exegis (*tafsir*) once one has memorized the verses and can easily find the text in the process of study. This is however not a prerequisite, but perhaps a preference for some of the students.

(d) Changes

This question demanded most thought and generated the greatest response. What changes did the women feel after engaging in religious learning? Did they see any changes in their private lives, in public?

¹⁹ For a detailed history of the Qur'anic text see Ayoub (1995)

Interestingly, the responses all addressed changes which affected their family life, social interactions with neighbours and colleagues as well as a change in personal behaviour. Under the headings the participants' responses are provided in their own words.

Changes in Family Life, Social Interaction, Change in Behaviour

- *"At work: my behaviour, my education, how I interact with friends"*
- *"Very good change for the better in my private life with my husband and children and my professional life"*
- *"My behaviour, education of my children, relations with others"*
- *"My behaviour, at work, education, my relations with both friends and my neighbours"*
- *"I have learned the principles of my faith and I feel more efficient than before in my relations with others"*
- *"Important positive change in professional, family and social life"*

Some women noted they felt radical or remarkable changes in their lives:

- *"A remarkable progress in my faith as well as my behaviour with my surrounding"*
- *"A radical change in my professional life as well as private; my behaviour with my immediate family, my surrounding and my colleges"*
- *"To be truthful this education has provoked a radical change in my life both private and professional"*
- *"A real change has come about in my private life because I am always in contact with my family; in the professional realm I give advice to small children around the age of 6. I am very happy to have the opportunity to study this field"*

Some women emphasized issues related to personal benefit, behaviour, tolerance and identity:

- *"I have learned a lot but I still have much to learn, Islam has helped me learn many things even if my Islamic studies do not have a material gain, I have to learn for my own benefit"*
- *"I live with the Qur'an and the Hadith, my behaviour and my life have changed profoundly"*
- *"A radical change in my professional and private life, I became more tolerant"*
- *"I discovered a Muslim identity which has had a beneficial impact on my surroundings, both family and society. I have become more tolerant with my"*

colleagues as well as clients at work. I have been able to defeat some negative character traits such as egoism among others; with my family I have become more understanding with my parents especially, brothers and sisters (close family); with my husband, we have less arguments and there is greater obedience; with my children I spend more time and sacrifice more. In brief I stopped thinking only about my physical self and I have given greater value to my spiritual side."

- *"I have noticed many changes for the better in my character, in the way I speak, the way I act and also in my manners. Professionally, I try not to cheat or do things which are wrong."*

All changes reflect personal transformation on behalf of the individual, but the women all generated responses which also emphasized their social environments. Although not all women specified exactly *how* the changes occurred, others gave insight into qualities which improve social and family relationships such as tolerance, honesty, understanding and altruism. Two women clearly stated that they found interest in the spiritual side of life rather than materialism and physical appearances.

By their own perception the changes these women have gone through and most likely continue to experience produce favourable family and social environments, the common thread among all responses reflects the importance these women give to their social surroundings, emphasis is placed on family and friends and even co-workers. Although the question asked for changes in both private and public life, almost all participants spent most of their time describing the impact on the social. Clearly their learning environment produces a social impact; the various forms of social impact are explored through the in-depth narrative interviews.

Narrative Explorations: The Journeys of Four Learners

The bulk of the research undertaken in Morocco in 2007 was done in the form of narrative interviews. A total of four women volunteered to devote an average number of 3 hours of their time to recounting life experiences while being guided by selected topics.²⁰

The goal of a narrative as stated earlier by Richmond (2002) is to actively find the voice of the participant, to engage in free conversation and in many cases storytelling. The story to be told is of the participant's life in relation to a series of guiding questions or topics. In this case all participants were given an introduction to the topic: women's informal education in Islam and its potential contributions to development. A life history was the objective of the interviews in light of the topic and each participant was questioned about certain life stages upon which they elaborated as they felt appropriate. The central question which guided the entire interview process was "how does this woman conceptualize her role within society through the lens of Islam?"

The main topics of discussion revolved around the following themes: the roles of parents and childhood, religious environment while growing up, adolescence and Islam, the role of their commitment to Islam in society, family, education and career paths and their relation to Islam, participation in social development, changes noted in social participation since Islamic education began, past and current involvement in informal Islamic education networks, gender reforms in Morocco and in the West, notions of gender equality, providing one message about their roles as Muslim women to Moroccan

²⁰ All interviews were audio taped in order to preserve the authenticity of the women's voices. All the interviews were conducted in French and have been meticulously transcribed and translated into English whilst reflecting the words and expressions used by the women as best as possible.

society and one message about their roles as Muslim women to the international community.²¹

All four women were very articulate and expressive which facilitated the telling their life stories. They were all introduced to the research through the informal learning networks in either the mosque setting or other informal gatherings through word of mouth. Because narratives are so extensive and in-depth a limit of four participants was necessary in order to do justice to each story as well as extrapolate as much meaning as possible out of each. It was a pleasure and a great honour to be given the privilege to take a glance at these women's lives, their social contributions, their ambitions and motivations.

The tool used for analysis of the data is an adaptation of the story map schema designed by Richmond (2002). It is useful to this research as it sets markers for the analysis of life histories; I have adapted her version of the story map to also incorporate four of Denzin's (1989) five points of reference: the influence of society on the individual, important turning points in people's stories, the importance of family beginnings and the impact of gender and class on narratives. Excerpts of the narratives are included in caption boxes throughout the text.

²¹ For an outline of the guiding questions used in the interviews see Appendix 1.

Past Experiences

Pillars

- **Family:** Roots, personal history, events
- **Society:** Setting the context
- **Schooling:** Incidents, sites
- **Work:** Incidents, history of work in relation to informal learning
- **Self:** Background, identity, roles

Present Experiences

Pillars

- **Family:** Current support
- **Society:** Current connections, feelings towards society, message to immediate and international communities
- **Schooling:** Informal education involvement, current schooling, goals of education
- **Work:** Current role in workforce and ambitions, work experiences
- **Self:** Current status, level of awareness

Future Expectations

Pillars

- **Family:** Future support, vision of family
- **Society:** Future goals for community enrichment
- **Schooling:** Plans for future education, self-development, social development
- **Work:** Future work expectations, contributions
- **Self:** Personal development, self-identity, outcomes

Turning Points

Pillars

- **Family:** Events, incidents
- **Society:** Influence of society on change
- **School:** Role of informal learning
- **Work:** Events, realizations
- **Self:** Internalized change, emotional and spiritual

Figure 1: Model of adapted story map from Richmond (2002) used in narrative analysis

Imane's²² Story

The youngest participant in the narrative interviews was Imane. Imane is a 23 year old student of optics residing in the Northern city of Tangier. She was slightly shy beginning the interview. However, her ambition and expressive nature soon displayed themselves as she became more at ease with the structure of the interview.

Family and Society

Imane, a recently engaged young woman²³ grew up in the Northern city of Tangier where she still resides today with her family. She identifies herself as middle-class whose parents worked professional jobs outside the home while she was growing up. Growing up in a large city she led an urban lifestyle which had minimal demands on her time aside from school.

Imane's recollections of her family life as a child are coloured with mixed emotions towards her mother, whom she identifies as her primary influence in the realm of religion. She also recognizes her mother as having direct input on the home's Islamic culture which she considers to be a great achievement. However, she is reluctant to credit her mother entirely for the direction she has taken in her Islamic learning; she gives greatest credit to her teachers and scholars of Islam outside of the family circle.

²² All names have been codified and changed to abide by the strict guidelines of confidentiality.

²³ Many Moroccan urban brides have two ceremonies, one engagement where the paperwork is completed and the marriage contract is sealed, making bride and groom officially married and one final ceremony which is the official wedding celebration. It is only at this time when the bride and groom move in together.

Nevertheless, Imane feels strong commitment to her family and the preservation of the family unit. She repeatedly emphasized throughout her interview that she did not wish to work outside of the home the same way her mother was obliged to (for financial reasons).

A scholar said that if every family takes only one of their children and tries to make a religious scholar out of him or her that will be something impressive. As for me, I want to do it with all of my future children.

Her sense of family preservation, the enhancement of society and the good of community through the education of her children are evident throughout her narrative. Imane sees herself as the primary educator of her future children, as an educator of global citizens as well as future scholars of Islam. Despite her formal educational pursuits, she sees them as subordinate to her main goal in life: to have children and raise religious and socially -conscious citizens.

Among the turning points which changed Imane's vision of family was a story she heard from a friend and influenced her ideas about family life and her role in the family. The story emphasized the creation of a home environment which instils love for the Islamic faith in the hearts of children through storytelling. It is through storytelling that Imane's friend was able to recreate history and sow the seeds of love for the Prophet (pbuh) and his companions.

The story Imane tells had an impact on her future expectations of family life as well as her community since she sees her community as an extension of the family unit. She views the raising of a family not only as a personal endeavour or part of the personal sphere of life rather as a social and political undertaking. In her case she visualizes the family unit as her educational responsibility, as a personal goal and future endeavour

aside from her educational and career outcomes. Although her primary career choice is one of independence, a self-employed business woman, which without a doubt requires extensive efforts, her vision surpasses that of career goals and is emphasized in her discussions surrounding family and community. Imane sees her contribution to development as the proper raising of her children in Islam, as contributing to the global Islamic community and being a pillar of education for her children.

Schooling

Imane's path to informal education reflects the society in which she has grown up in. She tells the story of her first lesson, one which marked her greatly and was on television. The combination of technology and informal learning are popular methods of education as scholars around the Muslim world give lessons on a variety of topics via television or internet. Imane sees her informal Islamic education as having its roots within these methods.

I listened to a scholar who was talking about hijab, and said that hijab was good, it is in the Qur'an, the Qur'an tells us to wear the hijab, that it is to cover and not to imprison, why should a young girl not be beautiful WITH hijab? And so at that point I understood that I made the right choice, to wear the hijab.

The power of her first informal lesson which was on television and its intense mental images coupled with the scholar's charisma left a mark on Imane and traced her path in informal Islamic education. Another turning point in Imane's schooling was a lecture about the *hijab* she watched also on television. She told the story of her adopting the *hijab* at a very young age out of imitation of her mother and other women around her. However, her commitment was not strong and she felt conflicted about the cloth she

covered her hair with while she attended school. It was only at the age of 17, when she heard a particular lesson from a televised scholar that she grew committed to her covering. It was only when Imane understood the religious meaning behind *hijab*, transmitted to her via informal learning channels that she began to accept and admire her choice to wear it.

The modern, globalized forms of education contributed greatly to Imane's education and launched her interest in further pursuing her Islamic education. She continued to expand on her knowledge through mosque groups, Friday prayer sermons, gatherings with friends and reading of Islamic material. She even attended online lessons which were broadcast live and allowed the participation via Paltalk. All of these forms of informal education have played a role in Imane's vision of herself, the society she lives in as well as the global community with which she associates herself.

Work

Because of Imane's status as a full-time student she did not have any work experience at the time of our interview. However, her ideas about work were intertwined with her visions of the ideal family life she wished to recreate. Flexibility and independence were two key factors necessary for an ideal job according to her. Because of her childhood experience, having both mother and father work outside of the home, she has found value in dedicating more time to the home than her mother seemed to have. It is interesting that being raised by a professional mother did not leave the imprint of devoting herself to her career. In fact, it created the opposite effect.

Self

Imane's primary frame of reference is Islam and she adapts the ideal model of the life she wishes to live (most notably when she has children) as she learns in these various settings. The importance of her family beginnings also shapes the life she deems as ideal. Despite the fact that her mother and father worked outside of the home and provided models of professional success, she does not see this model befitting to her Islamic ideal. Although she recognizes that work is essential for survival in her society, she chose her career with much thought about repercussions on her future family life. Her vision of herself as a pillar of education for her future children has created a career path that privileges flexibility and is seen as a means to an end. Nevertheless, her choice of work requires education and commitment as well as perseverance alongside her primary goals.

Because of Imane's younger age, she has grown up in the period when Morocco's independence was solidified and it had begun reclaiming Islam as the nation's tradition and primary identity (post-revival). The effects of colonialism are far less pronounced in her narrative than they are in the other women's stories; her access to modernized forms of education (internet, satellite television) speaks to a generational difference between her and the other women.

Lamiaie's Story

The second woman to volunteer her time and energy to this research by recounting her life story was Lamiaie. Her expressive and animated ways of speaking was very engaging and required little probing on my behalf; her story told itself without much guidance.

Family and Society

Lamiaie is a 51 year old teacher who spends her evening hours and free time taking care of her elderly and sick mother. Never having married, Lamiaie ardently expresses her devotion to the care of her mother rather than accepting conditional marriage offers which have tried to sever the bond of caretaker she has with her mother.

Lamiaie recounted her family beginnings: growing up in the urban environment of Tangier her father was a hard worker, providing for his family of 5 children and his wife who was a homemaker. Lamiaie is keen to note that her family was a traditional Moroccan family; her father was educated in the *madrassa's* or Qur'anic schools of Tangier thus obtaining the qualification of *fqih*, someone who has studied the Qur'an and Islamic sciences and obtains certification. Despite this certification Lamiaie was insistent on the fact that his designation was simply traditional and did not make her father a *practicing* Muslim.

Lamiaie makes a distinction between people who are brought up in Islam and simply follow rituals such as prayer, fasting, attending the mosque regularly, giving charity and so forth, and those people who she calls *practicing* Muslims who have engaged in an intellectual and spiritual quest for Islam, beyond being brought up Muslim.

The key difference is personal research; therefore Lamiae identified her family as traditional Muslims and not necessarily *practicing*.

The parameters of Lamiae's upbringing were designed around a traditional Islamic education and a strict guarding of her social activities to avoid mingling with unsuitable friends. Although she moved away to boarding school at a relatively young age, her family traditions had great impact on her as she began her ritual prayers while she was away from home.

Unfortunately, while still young the family suffered the death of their father and husband and the eldest son, Lamiae's older brother took on the role of the father. Because of the sudden changes the course of Lamiae's life would change as she decided to leave her post-secondary education in order to help support the family unit by educating her brothers as she was the only daughter and subsequently her nieces and nephews²⁴. She saw value in sacrificing her educational pursuits in exchange for the education of her family which reflects her commitment to her family and her role within this structure.

The latter half of my twenties I felt that everything that I was doing was insufficient, I felt a void.

It was after her adolescent years that Lamiae felt a change and a shift in her thinking. Despite the fact that she was engaged in ritual prayers on a continuous basis she admits that her commitment was not strong and that she was simply following the path that was laid out for her, being a traditional Muslim as opposed to a *practicing* believer. At the age of 25 she felt a void.

²⁴ Although this drastic change in Lamiae's life may be viewed as hindering her academic potential, she expressed in her comments on gender equality the balance that is created through cooperation in achieving a goal. Despite having sacrificed time to educate her siblings and her nephews/nieces, Lamiae completed her own post-secondary studies when she felt the time was appropriate and her immediate goal of supporting her family was achieved.

One of the turning points Lamiae experienced while in her twenties was her feeling of inadequacy vis-à-vis her religion as she compared herself to her younger brother. It is apparent that her younger brother was engaged in an intellectual and spiritual search for Islam at a time when Lamiae was still on the path of traditionalism. She relates how her first experience with *hijab* was difficult and how she faced an inward battle.

At that time, on the first day that I wore it, it was difficult, every time I went to change, I wanted to take a step back (and remove it) but then I told myself "you are foolish! What are you trying to do!" it was an internal struggle, between two subconscious realities, one saying "I cannot handle it, you cannot continue, you won't do it, you won't do it..." and the other telling me "No! You must wear it! This is your right, you don't have a choice! What will my students say about me, what kind of example will I be giving them, to those around me? After a few weeks I remove it? What am I doing?" Every time I begin thinking about taking it off, I find it impossible. Little by little I was able to keep it, now it is completely out of the question, taking it off.

Her struggle with *hijab* was manifested internally. However she persevered and did not turn back on her choice. One factor influencing her choice to keep it on was society's perceived view of her if she was to take a step back. The impression she felt she needed to give to her students was not one of wavering convictions. Instead she felt a need to provide an example and be a leader in this situation rather than succumbing to her insecurities.

Lamiae's involvement with her community manifests itself in various ways. Firstly she identifies as her mother's caretaker and the educator of her nephews and of her brothers in the past. Although she felt insecure when she was asked about her contribution to social development she quickly came back and stated that her contribution is that of family education and caretaking. She also emphasized her desire to become engaged in future social work. Because of her experience as a caretaker she feels a desire

to extend her work through the creation with some of her friends of a Non Governmental

Organization (NGO) which is devoted to helping sick elderly people.

God created us differently, gave us different occupations, each well defined, we are complementary, we cannot be equal or the same, we complement each other. We have different roles, they try to make us have the same roles, to do the same things, to be totally the same but we are not, God did not create us the same, I don't understand how we can try to achieve something impossible, I don't understand why we are looking for equality, we complicated women's roles, that is all. We gave her more work! She has to work at home, and she has to work outside too! God did not create us for this!

When discussing society and community Lamiae was extremely expressive and had very strong convictions about the future of Moroccan society. She made a very clear statement about gender equality claiming that it exists neither in Morocco nor in the West. In fact she emphasized that it was an unnecessary theoretical debate that could easily be solved if Moroccan society simply returned to 'real' Islamic laws.

Her disagreement with the concept gender equality is made clear in her argument for complementarity²⁵. Although Lamiae has been single all of her life and is a working professional woman, she still argues for gender complementarity and the following of a 'natural' ordinance in gendered roles. Although Lamiae does not support the notion of gender equality, she makes reference to spiritual equality between the sexes in her narrative.

²⁵ Although there is no specific reference made in Lamiae's narrative to the notion of *khalifah*, she draws on the Islamic worldview of gender complementarity. As the literature suggested, full complementarity, which leads to true equity is found when each gender realizes the role of *khalifah* or trustee (see Barazangi, 1997; 1998; 2004). The fulfillment of *khalifah* demands dignity, respect and cooperation between individuals without the presence of hierarchical roles. The Qur'an clearly stipulates that no man or woman is superior to another except through his/her worship (see Qur'an, 39:14).

Although she describes complementarity as each individual accomplishing duties that are most suitable for them, she does not draw a line between what is suitable for men and women distinctly²⁶. This suggests that roles are sometimes interchangeable depending on the strengths and weaknesses of each individual and mutual agreement. This is also reflected in her own life situation as she has taken on the role of providing for herself and family independently of any of her male relatives.

For me it is an utmost comfort, emotional comfort. I completely forgot about the battles I was waging, there are no more battles, I accept those things which happen to me... I accept them. I no longer feel disturbed, with a tight chest, no I accept things now with a smile. My sickness even got better, asthma.

The topic of the *Moudawana* also surfaced in discussion of gender equality.

Lamiaie voices her clear discontent with the nature and the reforms that have been made in the *Moudawana*. She views the reforms as Western manipulations and interpretations of Islam rather than an effort to incorporate *shari'ah* law in its true form. She sees true liberation and equality of rights in Islamic law.

Schooling and Work

Lamiaie dates her informal Islamic education back to her mid-twenties when she decided to take a step towards God by wearing the *hijab*. She associates beginning group lessons with her avid interest in reading about Islamic history.

Her lessons continued at the time of the interview and she was an enthusiastic reciter of the Qur'an using rules of *tajwid*. She emphasized the term 'research' as

opposed to simply engaging in traditional education which implied memorization and little understanding. This form of lessons is what she felt distinguished her Islamic education from that of her father. Lamiae considered herself a *practicing* Muslim only after she engaged in this type of learning, where she was an active participant in the understanding and the acquisition of knowledge of her faith. This type of schooling personalized Islam for her and integrated it into her daily activities through reason and understanding.

Lamiae felt that her informal education impacted her life in many ways, most importantly a sense of emotional comfort. Her behaviour also changed in a number of ways in her social life, she began drawing lines in behaviour which was deemed appropriate and inappropriate. She refused to engage in favouritism at work despite the necessity for it at times; she insists that fairness is an Islamic principle that cannot be compromised. Her dealings with co-workers generated a ripple effect, being the only woman performing prayers at work, as years went by she saw a wave of colleges joining her and adhering to similar moral standards. Her journey however, has not been without problems as she recounts a history of conflict among friends who did not understand the changes she was going through and the distance she created in their dealings, most notably her interaction with male friends. Nevertheless, she admits that with time everyone has accepted her, she never felt any loss in sticking to her convictions.

Self

It is important to note that the time of Lamiae's youth was a period when Morocco had not yet felt the effects of an Islamic revival which sent waves all across the Muslim

world. It was only in the early 80s onward that the Moroccan population began actively reclaiming their Islamic heritage. Changes therefore in behaviour, such as Lamiae's sudden changes, were not understood in the context of religion unless an individual was actively engaged in understanding their religion. Otherwise, tradition was the rule coupled with traces of French cultural influence.

Having broken out of the traditional Islam her family was practicing, Lamiae sees herself as a *practicing* believer and uses Islam as a moral and ethical guide in her daily interactions. Her identity is strongly influenced by her faith and she wishes the same for her fellow citizens whom she feels have largely lost an identity indigenous to them.

Interestingly Lamiae does not discuss her students, her influence on her co-workers, or her contributions to the informal learning networks as contributions to social development, despite her personal achievements she considers her devotion to the education of her family as the biggest contribution to social development.

Najat's Story

Najat's story is one which provides an interesting angle to the group of narratives, having volunteered to participate in the interview after her daughter Imane; she provides greater detail to the upbringing and the background of Imane as well as Najat herself. The two narratives also illustrate the different social and historical contexts mother and daughter situated themselves in, enriching our knowledge of this family's history, as well as Najat's impact on her daughter's upbringing.

Family and Society

Najat's story is one which was given in great and elaborate detail, her story telling skills were extraordinary and gave me the chance to vividly visualize her past experiences.

At the time of the interview Najat has just retired from her career in bank management at the age of 56. She is the mother of three children all whom she proudly admits have successfully completed high levels of education and are independent with the exception of one daughter who is still a student. Najat also lives in the city of Tangier with her husband and student daughter and now admits to fully enjoying her retired life.

Najat's memories of her childhood were recounted in amazing detail, beginning with the statement: "*I was born when Morocco was still colonized by France. Meaning, during that time, all Moroccan families were traditional except those who were working with the French.*" She continued to speak about her father who was married at a young age to her illiterate mother, together parenting a total of 8 children.

Najat's father was employed by the French during and post-"colonization" and was greatly influenced by his dealings with them. Najat being the eldest daughter, her

father had decided to raise her in the image of his French colleagues and sent her to the French mission at an early age. Because of Morocco's traditional environment at that time in history, Najat admits that her education at school and that at home were seemingly contradictory: *"we had a traditional family, my grandparents, but our lifestyle tries to imitate the French, we were straddling two horses, two civilizations; two types of education."*

Being the only child of her family educated in the French mission, Najat was disassociated from her traditional culture as well as language. In her summer vacations from school she tells the story of being sent to an uncle, who was a religious scholar, to learn the Arabic language. Najat tells that her uncle, who was blind, used to transcribe Arabic literature into Braille and needed someone to dictate the books to him: this was Najat's summer job. Although she practiced reading classical Arabic with her blind uncle, Najat admits to having forgotten her own language, the Moroccan colloquial form of Arabic, as her French education progressed. Her father, working with the French insisted that she practice her French at all times and only speak French at home.

Najat's French education came to an end when they moved cities and she was obliged to enrol in public school. At the age of 12 Najat began school in a co-ed environment and with the Moroccan syllabus. She mentioned that Arabic was given little attention at school with perhaps one or two hours a week only, the rest of the teaching was done in French. The Moroccan school curricula remained an imitation of the French system to a large extent until the late 70s early 80s (which was the beginning of the Islamic revival and when echoes of pan-Arabism touched Morocco as well). Arabic and Islamic studies were sidelined until that time in the curriculum.

Najat remembers her mother removing her traditional Moroccan dress which used to include face veil when they moved to the city. However she continued to wear long garments which were considered socially acceptable. Najat recalls when Morocco began seeing changes in dress and behaviour. The social changes Najat described were most likely during the time of the Islamic revival in the late 1970s or early 80s, because of Morocco's distance from the events in the Middle East, the changes appeared even stranger. Najat points to her mother's clothing as traditional, however a break in tradition is seen in Najat's generation where all the girls her age as well as boys adopted European dress. This implies the rejection of traditional garb, as well as the idea of tradition itself.

To me, the djellaba (long dress) was always a Moroccan tradition, that's all. I never saw it as a veil; I never even heard the word "veil", what is a veil? I had never heard of it! After my high school graduation, I used to wear what everyone else was wearing, all the young girls that is, it was the same for us all. So my first djellaba, I wore on the day of my wedding, I couldn't even walk in it! And I hated it, I thought it was much too large, long and I could not walk in it.

Within Najat's immediate family, her sister came home wearing the *hijab* and met great disapproval from her family. This also implies a break with the Moroccan traditional dress, which was deemed as appropriate and mostly worn by the older generation and the newly adopted European dress, worn by the younger generation. Instead, her sister was following the changes which were taking place in Morocco, echoes of the Islamic revival and a return to Islam visibly manifested in conservative dress.

Najat remembers being the last one in her family to adopt the veil: *"It was like a resurrection, Allah willed it. And the last one was me, because I was working in a place where I could not imagine wearing it. Especially at the bank."* Because of Najat's social setting, she did not feel comfortable displaying an image of religiousness.

Najat was self-admittedly trying to follow the example of her European neighbours in abiding by the latest fashions, and found little interest in religious pursuits; her upbringing in the French school system she remembered stayed with her for a large part of her life. She felt like she belonged to the modernized sector of society. She remembers her curiosity seeing her sisters all change and becoming influenced by the Islamic model of life. She recalls beginning to read and pray and began her search for what she feels is the truth. She remembers a turning point in her life, an event which occurred when her youngest son was around the age of five. In a fit of anger he told her not to go

All day long, I wondered why my son had done that, why did he do that to me? I began wondering if I should wear the veil? Could I do it? Do I have to do it? So one day, my husband was away on a trip, it was a Friday, I remember well, the morning I left as usual, all done up and dressed up, I went to work and I remember that day, every single man on the street was chasing me. I would pass by a coffee shop and all the men commented on my appearance, I went into the bank and all my colleagues commented also, telling me how beautiful I was, what beautiful hair I had, everyone was flattering me, and I was feeling uncomfortable for the first time. Normally I loved it, but that day when I went to my desk I wondered if I was not cheating on my husband in this way, normally this is not the way it should be. Before I never used to wonder about this, it was totally normal. So all morning I wondered to myself what I was doing, so at around 11:30 I went to my parents' house and I saw my sister and mother preparing for Friday prayer at the mosque. I wanted to go with them.... As we arrived at the mosque we found the imam giving a speech about the veil! As he spoke, I cried and cried and cried! I could not stop crying! The other women came to console me asking if someone had died! But I could not stop. I swore to myself, that very day that I would not take off the veil. So I went to the bank, with my veil, my djellaba and since then, I am a different person, a different person.

out in her miniskirt and make-up.

Najat experienced a profound emotional and spiritual change which manifested itself in the donning of *hijab*. She insisted that her transformation brought about a number of radical changes in her life, most notably her family life. She remembers one of her first changes as love for her husband. Najat felt that her love was not to be divided between her family and work since she used to have an active social life outside of her home. Feelings of devotion to her family became very strong and she grew weary of her work environment which used to be her stage. Had she been able to leave her work financially she would have done so, because she was no longer convinced by the principles of her work, doubting the validity of such work from an Islamic viewpoint.

Nowadays everywhere in the world we see women working like slaves, at the end she feels so exhausted, she even forgets to get married, to have children and to take care of herself, she ages and then what is left? Nothing. An exhausted body through age and no one to take care of her. But in Islam it is different, Allah asks us to protect women, mothers, to take care of our children because they will in turn take care of us. Alhamdouilllah (praise be to God), what more do we ask for? I am sure that if we come back to Islam, we will be happy and gain our well-deserved happiness insha'Allah (God willing).

With her children she recalls feeling more maternal and devoted to their education. Previously hiring a nanny to care for her children, she no longer wanted to share her role as educator; she began actively teaching her children religious values, transforming the home environment into a moral and ethical place.

She also tried to enrich the education she was providing her children with outside Islamic education by enrolling them in Qur'anic classes during the weekends. Najat was clear in what her new goal was: *"In all of that, my goal was to raise a Muslim family. An Islamic education for my children. That was my goal."*

Reflecting on her past, Najat spoke sadly about what she felt were shortcomings on her behalf. Her biggest regret manifests itself as she speaks about her children and what she sees as the ideal role for a Muslim woman. A Muslim woman's most precious contribution according to Najat is the proper education of her children and care of her home. She argues that all women should seek higher forms of education to be supportive of the family's endeavours whether it is supporting the husband in his work or enriching the children through her education.

Najat makes reference to equality when speaking of women basing their work at home. This is also a reflection from her personal experience as she remembers having to compete with men in the workforce for credit in the end having to sacrifice her efforts for the recognition of her male co-workers. Instead, Najat feels that equality is manifested in complementary roles, the woman essentially as the support unit and the educator of the household. She also feels strongly that women have an advantage over men in their rights.

An important point is brought up by Najat's argument about women's status in Islam: the status of motherhood. She inherently sees motherhood as an essential validating role and in turn as a support system. Children who care for their parents when they grow old out of respect and obligation is an important element and a protection the Qur'an grants parents and particularly mothers as seen in the literature. Najat is clearly educated about the rights she has in Islam as well as her obligations. She constantly compares her working life to the ideal which she holds in high esteem and which she identifies as Islamic. She sees women's salvation in returning to her understanding of Islamic values and roles.

Schooling

Najat's informal education began during the time of the Moroccan revival in the early 1980s. She too, like Lamiae, began her education by self-directed reading and research in a variety of subjects which were of personal interest. However as time passed, she joined informal networks of women who would meet on a weekly basis in their homes to discuss issues relevant to their daily lives, learn about the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Najat's goal while engaged in informal learning was to become a *daiya* or a religious teacher or leader. However, she remembers discussing her goals with family members who instead encouraged her to become a *daiya* for her family before seeking to reform and teach others. Her education has therefore been focused on her family.

The changes that emerged in Najat's life were very profound, many discussed in the above section, and they included a complete rethinking of her role in society, in the family, in her work environment. It becomes clear that her education in Islam largely influenced the choices her daughter Imane has made in her educational and career path. Despite Imane's sometimes conflicted nature about her mother's influence, it becomes clear in Najat's story that she has encouraged her daughter to follow a path she had wished to follow herself.

Najat's informal schooling has had a greater influence on her life than any other event. Her "return", as she calls it, to Islam has shaped her thoughts about every matter in life. Being recently retired, Najat devotes much of her free time to mosque lessons where she is now learning to memorize and recite the Qur'an and feels she has come full circle in her life. After our interview, Najat prepared for her first pilgrimage to Mecca, the final pillar of Islam and an event she had dreamed of for the past twenty years. She was

engaged in intense religious lessons in the mosque group she attended in order to prepare for this spiritual journey as well. The awakening to a revived Islam in each of the women's lives has left a big mark on all three of the narratives so far.

Najat's view of social development reveals itself in her discussion about family and education. Central is a woman's education, hence the support she provides to those around her through such. The care and proper raising of children is at the crux of her vision of a healthy society, as her goals were reoriented towards becoming a *daiya* to her family, she focused solely on perfecting her family unit. Her belief is in individual efforts, if every family engages in similar work Najat feels success is then imminent.

Work

Najat's story is intertwined with her experiences at work, with family and society. It is therefore impossible to clearly separate all three. However it is possible to state that Najat's life working in bank management outlined everything she did *not* want and everything she saw as inappropriate for women.

In her time, working at the bank was considered to be the best work, the classiest job for any lady to hold and naturally fit for any sophisticated woman which she was groomed to be. However, the changes that emerged in her social environment as well as her personal family experiences all pushed her into informal study. Once her studying had been launched she no longer found pleasure in her work, instead a complete reorientation took place in her life and her ideals of work, family and society all changed. Her encounters with colleagues were also riveted with difficulty, being the first woman to adopt the *hijab* in a bank, Najat struggled to keep her authority in the workplace. She

often found herself in situations of choice in which she privileged her personal convictions.

The force of her character and her determination to follow what she had newly learned helped her keep her work. Although she is conflicted about working in the bank, she too understands social pressures to work and the obligation to help support the family unit financially. Her determination to provide a comfortable life for her children, sending them off to obtain the best standards of education once grown were all factors which kept her in her work. Nevertheless, she feels regret for working with the bank all of the years she did. Interestingly, her success has left her with a desire to change the path of her daughter and encouraging her to follow an 'Islamic' adaptation of female success.

Self

"My entire life changed, it was as if I had been reborn."

Rebirth is perhaps the best word to describe the life changes Najat went through as she engaged in Islamic education first hand. Growing up in a time in history when Morocco truly was straddling two cultures is greatly reflected in her life history.

Beginning by rejecting tradition and religion altogether as an imitation of French culture, ending with a rejection of the Western values she was educated in and returning to an Islam she rediscovered through personal engagement. Najat's story is one of seemingly two people and illustrates the power of education in changing a life.

Najat today rejects attempts to change Islamic law and urges for a return to what she considers a 'true' Islam. Her desire for Moroccan women is for them to forge their

own path to development, by using indigenous ideals and values which are inherent to Islam.

Asma's Story

Asma was the last woman I interviewed in the city of Rabat, where she lives today.

Despite her quiet nature, Asma's story is one of great courage and strength.

Family and Society

Asma is a 48 year old hydro engineer in the city of Rabat. However she is a native of the city of Tangier. She lives in Rabat with her family of three children and her husband. An experienced career woman Asma's story provides an interesting look inside the world of a religiously committed, yet career driven, woman.

Growing up in an urban setting like the other women, Asma's childhood reflected the urban trends. As a child she remembers going out in European styles, spending her summers at the beach in revealing bathing suits. She admits that nothing in her environment suggested that such a lifestyle was inappropriate. Nevertheless, Asma recounts her innate feelings of fear and restraint towards things which seemed immoral.

Women from the 60's and 70's started removing traditional clothes which used to cover their bodies. It was really a return to jahiliya (ignorance), instead of moving forward, they were going backwards, they even had the idea of removing the sleeves from the djellaba, it was ridiculous, with slits up to their knees, and it was really a return to jahiliya. But this simply means that they never understood why they were wearing the djellaba in the first place, it was simply an outfit.

Asma describes the social mood in the years of her adolescence as “ignorant”. She firmly asserts that the trends that were manifesting themselves were of an ignorant nature, one of pure Western imitation. She recalls the traditional *djellaba* being modified to suit the latest fashion trends, making it an immodest dress rather than a concealing garment.

It meant coming closer to God. That is what pushed me, knowing that it was necessary. It was not political, I was not even aware of the politics people were associating with it... My sisters did not agree with me, to them I was just playing around, my mother and my father thought this too.

From one day to another, I wore the hijab. I wore it without my parents consent; I was the first one of my family, of my sisters to wear it. It was new even at the national level! I did not even find something to wear, I had a dress I used to use for prayer, my mother sewed it for me and it was not well done, even deformed! It was not something that you could leave your house with, my, who was very fashionable, I was following the latest styles and now I was leaving my home wearing this dress!

The change Asma observed in her youth had a tremendous impact on her as she still remembers the first girl she saw wearing *hijab* that was concealing all of her hair and her body. She remembers being confused about the outfit, believing that the girl had just come out of the shower and oblivious to the connection the *hijab* had with Islam. She also remembers mocking the few girls who began wearing *hijab* in school, laughing at their insistence on religious principles.

Clearly changes were happening in Moroccan society during Asma’s youth.

As an engineering student in one of Rabat’s most prestigious universities, Asma found herself in the midst of the changes. Because of her traditional upbringing she was unaware of the meaning of *hijab*, which was the obvious outward indication of a renewed

commitment to Islam. It was only until Asma listened to a lecture on a cassette given to her by a friend, that she understood the meaning of *hijab*.

The change in Asma's attitude towards her dress and public appearance is radical. However she reaffirms that fear, prompted her into this direction. It is interesting that the fear that Asma describes is the fear of displeasing God while having knowledge of what is pleasing to Him. Once she knew what *hijab* meant, she immediately made the choice to adopt it.

Despite family opposition Asma decided to stand by her choice to wear the *hijab*. Not only did she find opposition from her family but she also encountered social opposition as she remembers her first job interview where she felt demeaned by the office secretary which prompted her to leave before the interview had begun.

Despite being in a Muslim nation, it is clear from Asma's narration that Moroccan society did not associate the *hijab* at that time with renewed attachment to Islam; instead an immediate association was made with political changes which were happening in the Middle East, most notably Egypt. Asma also described the mood of Morocco as tense during the years of her post-secondary education. Her university became militarized and crackdowns on student protests were common.

Asma gives herself credit for the creation of the first uniforms which conformed to *hijab* in the university. She completed all of her military training, which was a new requirement for the university students, in her *hijab* and her modestly crafted military outfit. Morocco's unstable times as well as fears of Islamization made Asma's journey to her faith much more testing and challenging.

Schooling

Asma's informal education began in her early days as a student in the university. She remembers studying the Qur'an with some close friends as a simple way to come back to Islam. This was coupled with lectures on audio-cassettes, and gradually grew into more intensive learning.

As a university student Asma was engaged in informal sessions in Islamic learning and forged intense friendships which she continues to nurture today. The lessons she attended, she remembers, were done in hiding because of the tense political environment Morocco was facing.

Gatherings of more than three individuals required an authorization by law; therefore, the informal gatherings of 4 to 5 people were kept secret.

Despite the risk she was taking, Asma saw her participation at the informal lessons as necessary to her spiritual as well as social development. Her learning continues on today, while she admits that attendance becomes more difficult as one has a family and time is limited. Because of her weekly activities at work, Asma insists on spending her evenings and weekends with her family, she does not like to take time away from her children whom she leaves with an in-house nanny during the weekdays. Nevertheless,

We started to attend small lessons. This was very very important, once a week we would learn the Qur'an, we would study the life of the Prophet and learn about smaller things, what were our rights, what were our obligations, how to act in certain situations. And finally there were durus (lessons). At that time we did not have all of the TV channels like today, where you can learn all day long, there was no need for it at that time. So the lessons were extremely good, I changed between a few of them, and for each of them there was a teacher and 4 or 5 students. It was very small because we did not want to be known. Lessons were forbidden at that time. Because there is a law which stipulates that if there is an assembly of more than 3 people, authorization is necessary. Especially with regards to Islam. So we had to hide. However, we never did anything wrong! It was really only Qur'an, every time there were verses of the Qur'an discussed, and that is how I learnt many of them, I even memorized some of the larger suras(chapters) in the Qur'an like al nur, kahf, alhamdoulillah (praise to God).

the only activity which is given time outside of her family life are her religious lessons. Many of the students who followed her in the same informal networks now belong to Morocco's only official Islamic political party. She remembers many of the members and keeps contact with them.

Asma claims that her education helped her answer questions which were relevant to everyday life, her rights, obligations and issues which the participants deemed important to their lives. With the acquisition of knowledge she also formed a support group and lifelong friendships which she cherishes deeply. She is adamant about the nature of these friendships, which she believes are extraordinary compared to other types of friendships.

Asma's renewed faith and interest in Islam was coupled with strong convictions which she brought up when discussing issues of gender. Her willpower to overcome obstacles such as finding employment and combating family disapproval were all events that demanded great support which she found in her network.

Work

Asma's difficulties in the job market were perhaps a test of endurance, as she walked away from her first job interview feeling humiliated she had made a choice to return to the city of Rabat in search for a career. As the nation's capital, Asma felt she would find more approval of her *hijab* and her convictions in the workforce. Her hopes were confirmed when she was called for an interview with a national water organization. Despite showing up in her *hijab*, she states that it went almost unnoticed and her interview was such an amazing success, she was immediately hired as an engineer in the

organization. Her success made a large impact on the organization, as she was the first women with *hijab* to work in this department. *"My interview was amazing, it even made an impact on everyone, as if I was a shining star. Really! They recruited me as if I was a shining star! I know that I am only normal."*

She modestly admits and she credits her persistence to stand by her morals for her success.

Because Asma was a hard worker and ethical in her demeanour she quickly gained the respect of her coworkers. Although she was a hard worker Asma struggled to get ahead in the organization both as a woman and a woman wearing *hijab*. It was only in early 2000 that

she was promoted to head of division, a period when the new King initiated some gender reforms which opened the doors to women in

executive positions. Once the doors had been opened, Asma quickly rose to the top of her organization having proven herself. She admits that her knowledge of Islam has greatly influenced her in the work sphere.

Asma's behaviour at work is largely influenced by her faith. The view she has of society is also filtered through the lens of Islam, every action she engages herself in is measured up to the pleasure of God. Asma's ethical standards are high and speak to her success in all realms of her life.

As far as Islam, I can say it changed many things. If I earn my living it has to be done in a halal (permissible) way, otherwise my money will not be halal. That has an impact on my work ethics for example I never use my cell phone, my work cell for personal calls. I often say if my maid used my home phone for personal affairs I would not like it either, if I take the phone at work for personal affairs it will be the same, even though no one would ever check up on me, but if they did, I am sure they would not like it! It is not mine, it belongs to them, the workplace, the community that is all of us, and I don't have the right to take something or use something that does not belong to me.

Self

The environment in which Asma grew up in was not one which encouraged her researching and discovering her faith. It was only as she left home and was exposed to a different social environment that her journey began. Her constant desire to do what is 'right' and pleasing to God has continuously shaped her choices; the comfort she found in doing so outweighed the social consequences she could have faced. Although the social setting of Morocco at the time of Asma's journey towards Islam through informal learning was not conducive to the acquisition of such knowledge, her desire to follow a path of learning and self-development could not be stifled.

Asma's vision of social development requires a re-interpretation of Islam to suit the modern world. However, imitation of Western gender ideals are socially debilitating according to her and cannot provide the foundations of an Islamic society.

Common Messages in the Narratives Regarding Society

A number of messages were common to all four narratives. In all of the women's messages to their own society about the role of Muslim women they reiterated the lack of knowledge women appear to have of their religion and urge them to re-identify with Islam on a deeper level; a return to the fundamental beliefs and laws of Islam are what they consider most valuable to Moroccan society.

Let us live our lives, as Muslims, accomplish our prayers as Muslims, live and apply Muslim laws, the shari'ah, and that's all. Lamiae.

The women all argue for an independent path of development, ideas which are rooted in the indigenous culture and religion of the nation, one which supports the development of a strong

identity.

As far as messages to the international community about the role of Muslim women, feelings of misunderstanding surfaced as well. The women expressed feelings of being judged by those who do not have a comprehensive knowledge about Islam. "I would say to them that they cannot judge the rights of Muslim women without knowledge of those rights, they don't even know her religion" Imane.

We are losing ourselves, and the rest of the world is encouraging us to lose our identity; our identity as human beings first and foremost, before being Muslim. Lamiae.

When discussing society and community the women were extremely expressive and had very strong convictions about the future of Moroccan society. They made very clear statements about gender equality claiming that it exists neither in Morocco nor in the West. The women also expressed

I am against gender equality, because God gave us much more than men! If we demand equality, we will lose all the good things that God has given us, I am not for the current battle towards gender equality. That does not mean that I don't believe women can work, there is no question about it, because even in Islam, women work, do jihad, women do everything, they can do it all, but it is not because she has to be equal to man that she can do it, it is because she is herself. I am against those women today, who have issues and go about asking for gender equality, they are only puppets of international politics. An international policy which aims at taking women out of the goodness of Islam, because a society is made up of what? A man, a woman and children. If a society's women are not doing well, society is ill. That is what international policies are doing to Muslim nations, however, if we want women to go out of their homes, they should know that they can do so within the fold of Islam! They try to rid women of the Muslim context, encourage them to remove the veil, to demand equality, no one tells her to be at peace with her husband, instead she constantly has to make demands on him, it is women that we are deteriorating, and it is through the deterioration of women that society will go bad, children and all the rest. I don't agree with the actions that are being taken to get this so called equality. Muslim nations are no longer practicing Islam. Therefore respect is lacking, women are abused, and they suffer abhorrent conditions, which is why many are asking for these rights. But it does not mean that if women ask for these rights that we have to create a new Moudawana which contradicts Islam! We can give women rights within the fold of Islam, but within the context of Islam we are in need of ijtihaad. There are things which used to be applied in the past which are no longer relevant to today. Asma

their disapproval with changing and reforming the *Moudawana* attributing the constant changing to international influences.

Some of the messages overlap and have common themes to both the international as well as the local communities. Asma's message to the international community is one example. The first point she makes reflects her vision of gender equality. She reaffirms what the narratives have voiced; conforming to Western notions of gender equality strip Muslim women of rights which grant them special status. She views her Islamic rights as holistic and validating. International interference is seen as the cause of women losing their rights. The degeneration of society, according to Asma occurs when women's

true nature is neglected and her rights are taken away from her. The preservation of the family unit is essential in her statement, for social well-being. Implied is that social well-being can only exist in an Islamic context, when the spirit of Islamic norms is

observed. Acknowledgement of the state of Muslim women as less than ideal was reflected in all of the narratives as well as a return to *ijtihad*, a renewal in the interpretation of Islamic laws to suit the modern context.

The idea of *practicing* Muslim is one which is brought up frequently in the narratives. The women make a distinction between people who are brought up in Islam and simply follow rituals such as prayer, fasting, attending the mosque regularly, giving charity and so forth, and those people whom they call *practicing* Muslims who have engaged in an intellectual and spiritual quest for Islam, despite being brought up Muslim. The key difference is personal research; therefore all of the women identify themselves as being formerly *non-practicing* until they engaged in their educational pursuits at which point they became *practicing* Muslims.

The struggle to change is a common theme throughout all of the narratives; the women often face an internal struggle as well as a social struggle to establish themselves as religiously observant, practicing, devoted and competent individuals. This is manifested in all narratives through the adoption of the *hijab*, the most notable public symbol of this new change. All women went through a rediscovery of what it meant to be a Muslim woman and through the adoption of the *hijab* their values, ideals and lives were profoundly changed.

Drawing Lessons from the Group

While in the city of Tangier I attended a religious lesson in one of the city mosques. As I headed out with my translator, we were doubtful about the number of women who would potentially attend. After having advertised my intentions to conduct a couple of focus groups within the following weeks, we expected to find few women in the lesson for several reasons.

The first reason was the common hesitance to participate in a group interview due to women's time constraints and apparent lack of interest. Many women also felt shy voicing their opinions in a group setting. Secondly, the time of my research coincided with the end of summer holidays season. The months of August and September were apparently the most common months of travel and vacation for many of the women; the class I was going to attend was in fact the first lesson after the summer holidays. It was to our astonishment that we found pools of women coming to listen to the *daiya*, as well as participate in the learning experience. They were also keen to hear about my research. However, only a limited number of the 32 women who attended felt comfortable participating in the focus group; efforts to put together more focus groups after that day's lesson were futile. I therefore have only one focus group to analyze for this research.

The lesson on that day was directed by a woman who had received official training in Islamic sciences, *daiya* Maryam. As she was the guide of the lesson, the women took instruction from her and often joined in the discussion of a variety of topics. Following the lesson, five women participated in the focus group along with Maryam, which was primarily led by my trusted translator. Because my knowledge of Arabic was limited, I had to therefore rely on her expertise.

It is worthwhile, for the purpose of this research, to introduce the background of *daiya* Maryam, who is the primary teacher of the lessons. Maryam professed to be a university educated Engineer, who obtained Master's level qualification in her native country of Syria. After working in her field for a number of years, she gave birth to her children and founded a family. It

When you read the Qur'an, it is as if you are speaking to God and God is speaking to you, for every science there is a teacher, for every course there is a teacher and a textbook. For Islam, the Qur'an is the teacher and the textbook. The Qur'an is on a high moral and ethical level and it is teaching the Muslim based on this high moral and ethical level. So as long as the Muslim is reading the Qur'an, the Qur'an speaks to him and He talks to his heart until his heart speaks.

was upon the founding of her family that she made a drastic career change. Maryam had decided to devote herself to the upbringing of her children by staying at home. She also decided to embark on a lifelong journey in Islamic education. She obtained Master's qualification in the field of Islamic sciences in the Middle East and became a leader among the women she started to teach. Her gentle and docile nature was obvious at our first meeting. However, Maryam was extremely expressive in her speech about Islam; it became clear that it was her life passion. Her keen sense of memory, having memorized the Qur'an, made her a fabulous speaker, engaging with all the women who attended the lesson on that day, including myself. Nevertheless, Maryam did not speak much about herself, instead she insisted on expressing her views with continuous reference to the Qur'an and Islamic texts.

Having introduced my topic of research to her, she decidedly devoted her lesson to the topic of the day: gender in Islam and women's involvement in social development. An overview of the lesson given on that day gives an insight into the teachings which are

common in the mosque lessons. It also sheds light on a female scholar's interpretation of gender roles in Islam. The lesson of the day began with an introduction to the topic by addressing the nature of the Qur'an. Maryam described the Qur'an as the central point of reference in the lives of Muslims, the source of all guidance in matters of life.

The strong emotional attachment Muslims are encouraged to have with the Qur'an is exemplified in the quote; it is seen as a prerequisite to further spiritual development and change. Once a student actively engages in this process, she is bound to follow the guidance which is provided in the text for her. However, acceptance of the Qur'an does not imply denial of reason Maryam argued.

The Qur'an is also used to train the human mind through reason as it continuously incites humans to understand the signs God has given through creation. Maryam argued that once the mind is convinced through reason, then faith and submission follow. This certitude leads to utmost belief in the words of God as the only true guidance in all realms of life. The Qur'an, she argues, is the first thing that is used to educate the Muslim woman.

Interestingly, the weight given to understanding the Qur'an is one of the common themes of all the narratives, reading with a goal of understanding according to Maryam is what creates change in an individual, as we have seen in the lives of the four women. It was only when the four women actively engaged themselves in the understanding of the Qur'an and Islam that they went through drastic changes.

Women who participated in the baseline survey also showed enthusiasm in the study of the Qur'an before they engaged in any other religious studies. A link can be

drawn between women's involvement in the study of the Qur'an and the consequent impact it has on them in both private and public realms.

Maryam infused her lecture on the Qur'an and reason with numerous stories of Islamic history where reason was used to argue in favour of Islam. This strengthened her point and supported her comments with evidence in history.

Unity among Muslims was the second major point of her lecture. Emphasis on social bonds between Muslims as a means for social development was made as she elaborated on this point. Maryam argued strongly in her lecture for a renewal of social bonds between Muslims and gave examples of women who studied in the groups and were actively working for social development. Her argument was that approaching the Qur'an with heart and reason infuses the believer with commitment to social change as social obligations are clearly outlined in the Qur'anic text. Care of orphans, widows and

homeless are epitomized in the Qur'an as crucial acts of *zakah* or charity and purification.

These women have grouped themselves, when one is missing the other one replaces her, they help each other out amongst themselves, on a volunteer basis, they do not desire any profit. These women are sisters; the believers are brothers and sisters amongst themselves.

The reward for the volunteer work which many of the women were engaged in is perceived to exist in the next world, with God, Maryam emphasized. They work without immediate reward, and this she claims is what separates

practicing Muslims from the Western audience. She also spoke of the dedication of the mosque lesson teachers. 70 women were currently teaching in this large mosque complex with a total of 1400 students in total attending the various lessons. The women who attended the mosque lessons had access to academic resources in the complex and

engaged first hand with the scriptures and other sources. Many classes had textbooks to accompany the lessons despite them being informal. Because of the informal nature of the lessons women were not obliged to stop at the classical texts, rather they were encouraged to explore other modern interpretations of given topics. All of the teachers work on a volunteer basis and devote much of their time and energy to the informal instruction of their female students.

Again the idea of understanding the Qur'an and connecting with it at a deep emotional and intellectual level are prerequisites to individual development which in turn creates socially responsible citizens as exemplified in the quotation above. The women she described were learners in the informal setting and found expression of their belief in social issues. Lamiae's narrative also expressed her desire to engage in social work. However she felt her home commitments took most of her time. The four women interviewed in the narratives saw their main social contributions resting in their children and their immediate environments. This issue is spoken to by Maryam in her lesson as well.

Imane, Lamiae, Najat and Asma all made statements similar to Maryam's in their interviews, viewing the state of their families as reflections of society. The role of women in their families is clearly considered of primary importance before moving on to other social issues. Maryam elaborated that one of women's duties is the creation of real men and women to society, although she did not disagree with women working outside of the home.

Maryam sees the Qur'an as elevating the status of women even above the status of men in certain respects. This however is with regard to roles; she emphasized women's equality with men in the spiritual realm quoting a number of verses in the Qur'an which make reference to both men and women.

The notion of covenant or the role of *khalifah*, vicegerent on earth, is brought up as a universal role for both men and women. This can be considered the ultimate equalizer in the Islamic faith, with varying roles and duties

attached to the mission of men and women in order to accomplish the role of vicegerent in a holistic way.

Maryam delved into the Qur'anic particularities which deal with women and men differently and provides arguments to facilitate understanding. The different rights accorded to each gender in the Qur'an are discussed at length in her lecture. What is particularly interesting is her approach to each right or obligation. Maryam keenly uses layers of analysis in explaining why God might have decreed different rights and obligations for men and women and the importance of understanding them before quoting them. The idea of complementarity is clearly expressed as each gender accomplishes a task or a role which is most suitable to them (depending on the individual's strengths and

Allah does not differentiate between men and women with regards to belief. Allah says in the Qur'an "believing men, believing women, Muslim men, Muslim women, truthful men, truthful women..." This is an example which shows that Allah does not differentiate with regards to that which is dearest to Him: belief. "Fasting men, fasting women, worshipping men and worshipping women, patient men, patient women, pure men, pure women..." just to say that in the noblest thing to Allah, the covenant which He gave to humanity, He does not differentiate between men and women. Allah created women and He gave her roles and missions and those roles and mission have rules, Allah has also created men, they have roles and missions and those roles and missions have rules. In spiritual matters men and women are equal, equality in worship, equality in piety, equality in judgment and punishment.

weaknesses). Despite the fact that both men and women are attributed different roles and obligations, they are considered to be guidelines for harmony. This encourages co-operation, consultation and harmony in the creation of a balanced society.

The lecture given by *daiya* Maryam mostly looked at the ideal of the Islamic faith and how it should be implemented in daily life; however the reality, as she ended her lesson on, is quite different. Unfortunately society has not adopted all of the principles which are believed to create positive social change as well as harmonious gender interaction.

Interestingly Maryam points to colonialism as the main event which robbed Morocco of its foundations and slowed the process of Islamization. The issue of identity and reclaiming what was lost speaks to the themes of the Islamic revival as discussed in Chapter Three.

We do not yet have the rights we are entitled to under Islam, it is not applied in society but these are our goals. It is because we left the Qur'an, Allah says that we will leave the Qur'an and harm ourselves. But we are unaware of this. Colonialism came and society left religion, they left the veil, their prayers, the Qur'an... religion was abandoned. This is our way to educate society, create these groups, to teach the Qur'an, our religion, to give society back its religion and its practices. Because society left religion, it no longer fears Allah and this has caused catastrophes to our society, it has no more soul.

Group Discussions

The topics of discussion in the focus group, although planned, were somewhat random. The women reflected and commented on some of the topics *daiya* Maryam covered in her lecture.

All women revealed that prior to coming to the mosque lessons they were *traditional* rather than *practicing* Muslims. Their reconnecting with the Qur'an gave them a sense of ease in life as they devoted their work to God. One of the women was working in a factory and wanted desperately to come and study in the mosque lesson. However all of her colleagues told her that her boss would never allow her to leave work for her lessons.

Maryam spoke about a survey she conducted about her lessons among young girls and found that they were given greater autonomy and trust from their family members.

Before coming to the mosque lessons, I used to be a normal woman, but after I began my lessons, I began loving the Qur'an and learning it, I felt closer to Allah and many things happened in my life! For example, to come here to study, I felt it was impossible to come, I thought my boss would not let me come, my colleagues even laughed at me, they said: among 570 people who work here in a factory, what makes you think the boss will let you come? It was almost impossible, but when I asked him, he accepted! And people even began respecting me!

It becomes clear that women attending these informal lessons are given great respect and their educational pursuits are deemed important. It is not uncommon for young Moroccan girls to be restricted in their movements. It is considered culturally inappropriate among many Moroccan families for young unmarried women to go out of their homes as they please without supervision. Nevertheless the mosque lessons seemed to be considered a worthy purpose to leave home and as the young girls advanced in their studies their families granted them greater liberties and respect.

Finally the women discussed working at home and outside of the home as a means of worship, to be pleasing to God. One woman insisted that she refused to

compete with men in the workforce, because it would lead to an endless battle. Instead she argued Islam encourages her to accomplish her job with a strong work ethic, doing what she does to the best of her ability. This in turn gives her confidence that no matter how fierce the competition is at work, she is certain that her job is well done. *“The most important, even more so than competition is working with quality, this way you will be recognized for your work by Allah”.*

Looking at the larger picture is a key theme of the focus group discussion. Despite all of the difficulties and different life situations the women find themselves in, they look to a larger picture which incorporates God. With utter devotion to be pleasing to God and to follow His rules and the path of the Qur’an, they find even the smallest of tasks rewarding. One woman discussed her house chores as being previously tedious and tiring. Once she devoted her tasks to pleasing Allah, she felt at ease and energetic. Once work was turned into worship, she found reward and joy in accomplishing whichever task needed to be done.

It is important to note here that the concept of working for God may be abused in situations where one gender or individual wishes to dominate another under the pretext of ‘working for God’. An example may be restricting a woman’s mobility and implying this is pleasing to God. Women in this situation may comply with demands or wishes as they see the ultimate reward to be with God. Another possible understanding is that tedious chores, which women engage in worldwide, regardless whether they are religious or not, become less burdensome when one commits such tasks to the pleasure of God. In this case there is no domination, nor abuse but psychological comfort. The women who participate in the informal learning networks achieve fair understanding of their Islamic

rights and duties which they feel to be empowering. As it was demonstrated in the literature, Muslim women are free to engage in activities they deem productive and challenging which in no way implies subordination. It becomes increasingly difficult to dominate women once they become knowledgeable of their rights and their obligations as independent *khalifahs* on this earth, as dictated by the Islamic worldview. It would be therefore inappropriate to suggest that the women in this study are merely obedient to the possible demands and are subordinate to the opposite gender rather than manoeuvring within a legitimate paradigm to regain their perceived lost rights (see Schaefer-Davis, 1982). It also assumes that women are devoid of agency and are unable to differentiate between a rewarding religious experience and an abusive domineering manipulation of religion, especially once educated. It is nevertheless, important to realize that the impact of the religious education networks works on a continuum of growth and empowerment.

Once these women came to the mosque lessons, their life journeys either changed or took on a different meaning, one which encourages spirituality and connecting with the deeper things in life, turning devotion into acts of love and by extension impacting those around them. Working for God in this sense may also be considered to be an equalizer among both men and women as each one strives to be pleasing to God in all of life's pursuits.

The Impact of Informal Learning

The benefit of such a lecture is evident; the women engaged in this study are urged to think critically and to search for themselves rather than to memorize rules and laws. This is held in contrast to the *traditional* upbringing of Lamiae, Najat and Asma where rules

were not understood or explained. This type of interaction creates women who are critical thinkers and leave with a sense of purpose and determination. As seen in the narrative interviews, all of the women had a renewed sense of purpose once they engaged in informal learning. Their enthusiasm to practice Islam in all realms of their lives had a direct influence on their perceptions of society as well as their interactions with society. They related to their families intensely and committed themselves to perfection in those realms they saw as crucial to social harmony.

The idea of reclaiming something that has been lost or returning to the sources is prominent in all four women's interviews. The idea of an Islam practiced as it was in early Islamic history when women were active members of society but embraced their Islamic rights as they were socially instilled, is foundational to all of the women's discussions. The lives these women live today are efforts to bring back those rights despite the contradictory nature of society. The battle for a return to the foundations of the Qur'an as outlined both in the literature and in the women's lives is indeed a difficult one. However, Western development policies on gender, which are viewed by these women as destabilizing women's visions of gender, could be readjusted to help in the struggle of reclaiming women's rights. In fact, both efforts complement each other in a variety of ways. The enhancement of education is surely a positive thing, as the education all of these women were engaged in created socially conscious citizens who aspired for a better future for their nation, some even extending to a global community. However, attention must be given to the role of motherhood and the intense commitment Moroccan women feel towards family education and enrichment.

Chapter 5

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The baseline survey, narrative interviews, lecture and focus group all reveal common themes which are worthy of elaboration.

Reality vs. Idealism

The first theme throughout the interviews is the discrepancy between ideal and reality. All of the women in both narratives as well as the lecture/focus group session expressed their discontent with Moroccan society's obvious contradictions. Despite the fact that Morocco is a Muslim country with the head of the monarchy professing to be "Commander of the Faithful" all women consider Moroccan society far from ideal Islam (even the family code, the *Moudawana* which is professed to be a reflection of *shari'ah* laws dealing with family and society, does not reflect women's rights under Islam). All women argued for a return to what they called 'real' *shari'ah* law, one which is open to interpretation as times and social conditions change, thus speaking to the practice of *ijtihad*. In fact, the idea of *ijtihad* (to exert intellectual effort in legal rulings) is one which is also prominent in the literature around *shari'ah* law as outlined by a number of scholars such as Mir-Hosseini (2006) and Sachedina (1999). Most arguments encourage the integration of women into the interpretation and implementation of *shari'ah* law as was argued by Farooq (2003), Sachedina (1999), Mir-Hosseini (2006), Hassan (1987), Barazangi (1998) and others. It is through educational pursuits of Islam that women become interested in the participation of *ijtihad* and realize the potential of such

reinterpretations. The women in the interviews expressed a desire to return to *shari'ah* law as a way to liberate Muslim women, contrary to the opposite assumption of scholars such as White (1978), Afshar (1993), Moghissi (1999) and Ahmed (1986). What is interesting in this point is that women recognize the current day interpretations of the *Moudawana*, for example, as inappropriate and badly implemented. Despite current reforms to the document the women felt that these were simply due to pressures from Western governments rather than true Islamic reforms, or real attempts at *ijtihad*.

Women's Right to Self-Determination

Another important and related theme is self-determination. Because of Morocco's colonial history along with Western pressures and influences today, the women felt that they did not have a say in the future of their nation. In fact, their messages to the international community all voiced their desire to be *left alone*. This implies their desire to define their own futures, based on their own points of reference. All the women saw their future in the Islamic model of social functioning; whether it is in the realm of law, social organization and brotherhood/sisterhood as well as economics, their model for success was Islam. According to these women, straying from the values, principles and laws of Islam is what has devastated the state of women. It is only through a return, by redefining their future as a nation, that development can be visualized. Despite the seeming impossibility to impact the road Morocco has taken, the women all held family life as their primary means of impact.

Family as a Development Vehicle

The importance given to family in all the interviews is most prominent. Whether it is the raising of children, caring for elders or educating nephews and nieces, the women envisioned a future result through family. By educating future generations in Islam, these women felt that the future leaders would represent their ardent desire to return to this renewed Islam. Once the women engaged in informal education they all felt a renewed devotion to this task. As the *daiya* of the lesson emphasized, women are the creators of men and women; meaning it is through their efforts, their training and education that they are able to create socially responsible and religious beings. Of course, it is important to note that none of the women felt that motherhood was the only (or even primary) role of a woman. In fact they identified with many roles; the women all worked or studied outside of the home and were very successful in their endeavours. However, the greatest impact to social development and advancement was seen through the family.

The social work in which women engaged reflected the gaps they wished to fill in the family structure. For example, in the lesson, Maryam emphasized the student's commitment to taking care of widows, orphans, homeless women, in a sense providing support for those without family; perhaps a mending of a broken family. Lamiae also expressed her desire to work with elderly people who were sick and without family in the hospitals; again, providing a support system for those without family members present. The women emphasized each individual's obligation to educate and strengthen her family unit, to promote a solid foundation of Islamic education, and by extension create a society which reflects Islamic values. In a sense, those families who cannot accomplish this task are provided assistance through the social work of these women.

The view of motherhood in development and feminist literature and in development projects is problematic itself. Motherhood in Western feminist and development literature has been viewed as an obstacle to women's full socio-economic participation. As it was pointed out in the UNDP statistics, the ultimate goal has been to include women in publicly visible realms, limiting the time they can devote to the raising of children. Western feminism, as discussed in Chapter 1, views motherhood as a form of economic dependence on men and therefore fundamentally problematic. As Mitchell (1984) argued, women's production, reproduction, sexuality and child-rearing were all interlocking structures in their subordination. Childbearing and motherhood are seen as roles which keep women from being fully productive citizens.

Nevertheless, among the post-modern feminists, are those who have sought to revisit motherhood as an empowering role amongst women worldwide. The Women Culture and Development paradigm (discussed in Chapter 1) gives value to women's choices and the ways they identify themselves, even if it is as mothers. Unfortunately, as discussed earlier, this stream of thinking has yet to become central to mainstream theory and feminism (in fact it would most likely be considered regressive).

The primary problem lies within the conceptual as well as theoretical analysis of women of the South. Using Northern models and ideals is truly ineffective as it is obvious in these findings. Listening to women's account of their lives, to what they want and how they see themselves achieving development is necessary to recognizing the diversity of paths to development. As Sardar (1997) argues, there is a need for a rediscovery of development paths which are unique to each nation and their historical circumstances. It is also important to see value in Islam as a model for social

development which is gender inclusive, as the literature and as the research for this thesis suggest. All of the women involved felt a strong connection to their faith after engaging in informal learning and rediscovered a model which is suitable to them and reflects the values they hold close.

The emphasis on family as a primary means to development may be a result of historical circumstances, which have limited women's access to other realms that mainstream development organizations consider indicators of women's involvement in development such as politics. However, the women's engagement with alternative forms of power cannot be ignored. Although the women recognized that there were no impediments to full social participation in Islam, they were aware of the difficulties and obstacles Moroccan society imposes on them (such as unfair competition with men in the workforce). Nevertheless, they embrace other legitimate social realms of power which they feel are valued both socially and within the Islamic faith. Through the family structure women are able to contribute to development, based on their personal visions of development. Young (1991) argued, development must meet the emotional, physical as well as creative needs of a population at a historically acceptable level. This reinforces the idea of indigenous models of development which can be assessed against the 'potential for transformation' indicators developed by Moffat et al. (1991).

- a) Does the project (initiative) contain the seeds of change²⁷?
- b) Do participants gain confidence and skills that will assist them in other activities?
- c) Does the project support efforts to tackle related issues?

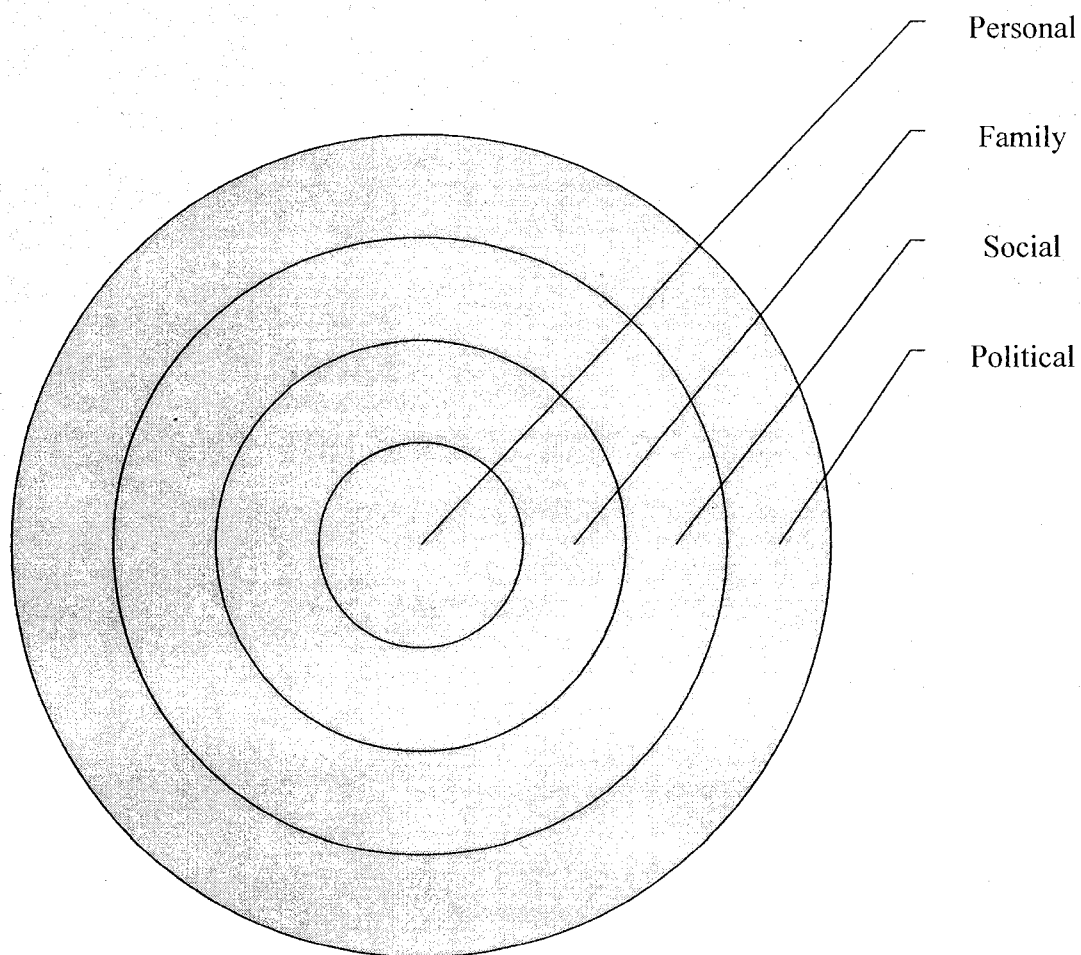
²⁷ Words in brackets have been inserted by myself.

In answering question (a), according to Farooq (2003), Sachedina (1999), Barazangi (1998), Matteson (2006) and others, the seed of change is women's Islamic education; a direct engagement with the text and sources of the faith. Barazangi in an audio lecture at Cornell University in 2006 stated eloquently about Muslim women: "when they have the power of understanding the principles that are being exploited against them, they will be able to liberate and empower themselves from within the system that is being misused in their oppression". It is therefore possible to assume that women's engagement, as seen in the data collected, although limited, can be a seed of change.

In looking at question (b), the women all displayed renewed confidence whether it was in their careers, their personal lives or interactions with others. They felt a strong commitment to their faith which seemed unwavering. Their educational pursuits may assist them in multiple realms which range from ethical dilemmas to possible societal change through their involvement in development (in their terms).

Question (c) is an extension of question (a) and (b) since their learning influences all realms of life and has a direct impact on their relationships, their worldview, their self-image and confidence levels as well as their visions and actions taken toward social development. The women's confidence extended outward from personal identity, moving to family, social and eventually political identity through a self-reliant nation (see Figure 2). Finally, Moffat et al (1991) stress that as development practitioners "we have a responsibility to ensure that people in general, and women in particular, are able to identify and determine their own goals and processes for change; and that support from external agencies is reliable, flexible, responsive and sensitive to the need for compromise and self-pacing" (p.42).

Figure 2: Levels of confidence moving from personal to political



Intellectual and Spiritual Rebirth

Although family is central to these women's visions of development, most of them are innovators in their ideologies. There is a drastic difference between their family beginnings and the family beginnings they are working to promote. The divide between *traditional* and *practicing* Muslims is an important concept that deserves some attention. What distinguishes the two is education and research. Traditionally Moroccan families are Muslim and practice the essentials of the faith such as prayer, fasting, charity and even pilgrimage. As in Lamiae's family, most of the children were even sent to Qur'anic school to memorize the Qur'an. However, further research was often limited among common folk. Once women engaged in research, which is simply an engaged form of learning, reading, listening to lectures, attending lessons which encourage critical thinking and logic, they felt a rebirth. Once they rediscovered their faith through the lens of education and intellect rather than routine and memorization, they experienced dramatic life changes. The intellectualization of faith, as it was encouraged by the Islamic revival, is essential to understanding the difference between the *traditional* and *practicing* dichotomy the women spoke about.

All women experienced the change of *hijab*. That the symbol of the *hijab* was the primary change in these women's lives is telling. In renouncing social trends, European fashions and appearance, these women all felt their dress allowed them to be closer to God. Despite family and social opposition, they proved themselves and gained the respect and subsequent following of those around them. Although the subject of *hijab* can be discussed in great lengths, it suffices to say that it was of primary importance to all of the women involved as it reflected their spiritual path towards Islam. Similar to early

feminist movements, the renunciation of social norms which are believed to represent ultimate femininity, these women felt the adoption of the *hijab* ultimately representative of their Muslim and female identity. Some even referred to the *hijab* as their rights rather than obligations. In fact, the wearing of *hijab* was given meaning to these women after they understood and studied its meaning, again making reference to reason²⁸.

Gender Complementarity: Co-operation vs. Obedience

As suggested by the literature, the women's notion of gender equality differed greatly from that which is expressed in development literature. The women all emphasized gender complementarity rather than equality. Only in the realm of spiritual matters did they emphasize equality. The women all believed that women's status was often superior to that of men; women's rights exceeding their responsibilities and men's responsibilities exceeding their rights. This is contrary to the misconception which was exemplified in the literature arguing women's inferior status in Islam as suggested by authors isolating Islam as problematic. The women were adamant about preserving their rights under Islam; gender equality to them meant losing rights which God had given them, elevating their status in a number of realms. Western notions of gender equality are extremely inadequate when trying to understand the lives and views of the women interviewed. A comprehensive understanding of complementarity in Islam and its implications on the functioning of society are necessary.

²⁸ There are many interpretations of the *hijab* among Muslims. Mahmood's (2005) study discusses women using the *hijab* to become publicly visible and manoeuvre in a socially acceptable fashion. Moghadam (1993) provides a case study of Iranian women who embraced *hijab* to oppose the secular, westernized rule of Iran's Shah. Other women, argues Afshar (2002) adopt the *hijab* as a symbol of empowerment, refusing to submit to the ideals men impose on women in society, and chose to become 'minds' rather than 'bodies' (p. 136). Other women as this thesis supports, embrace *hijab* as a spiritual symbol of their devotion to God. Whichever meaning is given to the *hijab*, when chosen by women, it becomes a powerful symbol which is internalized by the one who adopts it.

Comments were made by women in both the narratives as well as the baseline survey related to obedience. It is important to note that oral histories through narrative can present contradictory evidence as women constantly re-create themselves through story. However, issues surrounding obedience and seemingly submissiveness are what may be considered by Western feminists as impediments to development. From an outside perspective this would sound alarming. However, it would be inappropriate to judge obedience as blind obedience to husbands before considering the sum of data. Although the concept was not central to the women's discussion, nor was it elaborated upon, one can draw several possible conclusions.

Firstly, one could assume that the informal learners are being taught to be obedient to their husbands irrespective of their own desires. This would imply a patriarchal interpretation of Islam undertaken by the women themselves. Although it is possible, it is clear from the narratives as well as the focus group session that the women felt liberated from patriarchal tendencies such as the sexualization of women, once they wore *hijab*. The women all expressed feelings of superior status to men in many realms. Patriarchal interpretations would contradict the fundamental teaching of Oneness or *tawhid* as elaborated by Al-Hibri (2000). The concept of *tawhid* which is absolutely central to the Islamic faith stipulates that there is only one God, One entity which is to be obeyed. Obedience to any other than God would contradict the notion of women's free agency in Islam.

Secondly, given the evidence from the narratives and the lecture, all the women emphasized complementarity as cooperation to create harmony which supports notions of peaceful consultation and cooperation between spouses as identified in the literature

surrounding men and women in the Qur'an. Cooperation and the narrow interpretation of obedience to husbands would therefore be contradictory.

Finally, as argued by Mahmood (2005) and Kandiyoti (1988), women often embrace stereotypical patriarchal forms of behaviour in order to create a legitimate manoeuvring space. Although their behaviour resembles blind obedience and submissiveness, the women actually use these behaviours to achieve their goals. Goals may include increased cooperation from the male sector of society whether it be in or outside of the household or increased access to realms which are considered 'unfriendly' to women such as competitive, male-dominated workplaces. In both scenarios the women would strategically use socially acceptable forms of behaviour and possibly change the perception of women's role in society. Although such behaviour is often associated with Muslim women, the data suggests that the women leave their Islamic learning activities empowered rather than submissive to their male counterparts. Instead they feel essential to the complementarity of gender relations.

Identity

The themes emerging from the data all reflect issues of identity. Reclaiming or recreating an identity which has been lost through traditionalism and Western interference²⁹. The only way these women see their identities returning is through a re-education in Islam. Closeness to the sources of Islam, mainly the Qur'an is extremely important in the

²⁹ Women in the narrative interviews expressed great discontent with Western interference and values, oftentimes identifying the West with stereotypical images seen in the media. It is important to note that their discontent with the West was primarily directed towards Morocco's seeming constant compliance with Western pressures for reform rather than having reforms come from within. This research project was viewed by the women as a positive step towards dialogue as they were all surprised that 'the West' would encourage such discussions.

creation of this identity. The baseline surveys revealed this as well as the interviews. Women's interest in bonding with the Qur'an, understanding it, learning its rules and finally memorizing it, creates a link with God and affirms their identities as Muslims. Hearing the teachings of the Qur'an and critical reflection upon the messages behind the revelation distinguishes this learning from the traditional memorization which took place. Also linking the stories to modern day issues and showing the relevance of the Qur'an to their current lives are essential in this form of education as well. It also encourages the women to think critically about laws which are reformed and engage in independent intellectual striving. Women's visions of self, their level of confidence in thinking about contributions to social development are widened, moving from self-identity to social and political confidence (see Figure 2).

The Road Ahead

There is an urgent need to listen to the voices of women, such as the Moroccan women, in this study, in the field of development. If effective gender initiatives are to take place they must incorporate the goals and views of those whom they affect. As the literature and data suggested, these women found freedom in their intellectual engagement with Islam. The rise of informal education and the wave of renewed interest Moroccan women are experiencing cannot be ignored. The outcomes of this re-engagement with Islam are yet to be seen. It is credible to expect that they will have an impact on future interpretations in the Islamic sciences and will most likely open a new door for women's participation in mainstream Islamic discourse.

Unlike the developmental notion of linear progress, these women see success and development incumbent on cyclical progress constantly returning to the original sources of Islam, re-reading the history of Islam through their own eyes and recreating a model which is legitimate and indigenous to their culture and time. Further interest and dialogue needs to be created in the world of academia to give voice and legitimacy to such women. Once legitimacy is granted, surely cooperation to achieve the ultimate goal of development, while including women meaningfully, can be attained. However, as long as the voices of Muslim women, who are committed to their religion, are sidelined as unreasonable and traditional, as well as their endeavours to deepen their knowledge of Islam and practice it, each will take its own course for development. Dialogue, with a view to expand alternative gender paradigms is the key to mending women's discontents with the West.

Informal educational pursuits are surely not a 'cure-all' solution to women's lack of involvement in development in Morocco. Just as secularization has not been successful in abolishing all heinous crimes against women nor has it proven to be an effective gender and development blueprint for all nations, crimes have been perpetrated against women in the name of Islam. Patriarchal and often oppressive interpretations of the faith have left women in abominable conditions all across the Muslim world. However, it is unreasonable to disqualify Islam's potential due to the mal-practice of the faith by some. It has been made clear both in the literature as well as in the data that there is great potential for change in women's engagement with Islam. A rediscovery of foundational concepts which have been overlooked through unequal representation in religious interpretation is creating a new generation of Muslim women. These women are greatly

committed to their faith and liberated from Western conceptions of what development *should* be while reinventing what it means to progress socially on an individual level but most importantly collectively. It is the task of development practitioners as well as scholars to take a closer look at local initiatives and help women embrace their visions of development if true human progress is the ultimate goal.

APPENDIX A

Guiding Questions for Narrative Interviewing

Primary Question: What is the point of this story?

How does this woman conceptualize her role within society through the lens of Islam?

The story map schematic will serve as the guiding map for the narrative interview questions. Guiding questions for this process will be as follows:

- a) What roles do you remember your parents playing while you were still a child? Did your parents both work outside of the home? Looking back, do you consider yourself to have been raised in a religious environment? How so?
- b) How do you think your parents or family members shaped your impressions of Islam? Tell me about your memories around this topic.
- c) How was your adolescence? Did you feel a need to rediscover Islam? At what point in your life did you feel greater attachment to Islam? What differences have you noticed, throughout your life, when you took a step forward towards incorporating Islam into your life?
- d) How do you see Islam outlining your place in the world? In society? In your family? Do you feel something is lacking? Is it complete?
- e) Tell me about your education and career or work path? How do you feel your ambitions suit your lifestyle/ religion?
- f) How do you see yourself participating in the development of your society? How have you seen yourself in the past? Have there been changes in your involvement in society since you increased your education on Islam? How so?
- g) Do you think it has been important for you to increase your knowledge of Islam? How can it be beneficial to other women in your opinion?
- h) Tell me about your past and current involvement in the mosque setting? How does this enrich your life and your participating in society?
- i) How do you feel about outside initiatives for gender reform, for example Western based initiatives which seek to increase women's 'equality' with men? How do you see gender 'equality'? What does it entail for you?
- j) If you had one message to give to your society, and one message to give to the international community on how they view you, what would it be?

APPENDIX B

The concept of equality in the 2004 reforms of the Family Law is attested to in the following innovations:

Equality between spouses

- The legal age of marriage is eighteen for both sexes.
- There is equality in family legal responsibility: both spouses are legally heads of the family.
- There is equality in rights and duties: the right to obedience in return for financial support has been abolished.
- There is no guardianship for women over the age of majority.
- There are severe constraints on polygamy, making it almost impossible.
- Repudiation and divorce are in the hands of judges, rather than those of women's husbands. Judges also handle consensual divorce, compensation divorce, and *shiqaq* (the impossibility of cohabitation without marriage).
- Girls and boys choose which parent to live with at the age of fifteen.
- Grandchildren from the daughter inherit in the same way as those from the son.
- Accumulated property and benefits gathered during marriage are shared.

Guarantee of family equilibrium

- The public ministry automatically intervenes in any application of the Family Code.
- Family courts have been established; twelve are already operational throughout Morocco (royal letter addressed to the Ministry of Justice [*Le Matin* 2003b]).
- Reconciliation through family has been reinforced.
- A fund for family assistance has been created.
- Moroccan marriages contracted abroad are recognized according to the legislations of the host countries.

Protection of children's rights

- In the interest of the children, the right of the mother's guardianship is not lifted if the divorced mother remarries or if her residence is far from that of the father.
- In the interest of the children, the judge may alter the order of the family members

eligible for guardianship: the mother, the father, the maternal grandmother, and so on.

- The social status of the child is taken into consideration at the moment of divorce: the standard of living should be similar to that which he or she was accustomed before divorce, he or she should have a decent dwelling, and so on.
- Paternity is recognized when the child is conceived during courtship, that is, before marriage is formalized by a contract. (Sadiqi, 2006, p. 39)

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