

## **Religious Peace and Religious Reform in Morocco: The State's Role in Creating the "Third Way" Feminist Approach**

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### ***Abstract***

On the eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Morocco was living under an intense dichotomy between extremist religious and secular actors. This notorious polarization threatened 'Spiritual security' or 'Al-Amn Alrruhi.' Consequently, Morocco instigated the reform of the religious field, which has created a suitable atmosphere for a 'third way' feminist approach to emerge. By adopting a firm official religious discourse, the state turned the table over all the ideo-religious movements, taking the lead into a more controlled and balanced religious peace, which in particular impacted the feminist scene. This paper traces back the religious reform as the solid ground of promulgating the "Moroccan moderate Islam," where secular and religious ideologies could shun conflict and operate within the framework of unity and stability. This reform has arguably succeeded in maintaining three main objectives: 1) curbing the leashes of religious extremism, 2) alleviating the tensions between contending religious and secular actors 3) paving the way for better engagement in intellectual and theological debates on Islam, feminism, and modernity. In fact, the state needed to employ a policy of balance and control over the contending feminist sensitivities to pave the way for "the state feminism" and the 'third way' feminist approach to embellish the Moroccan image regarding women's rights. As such, Morocco could propose a female-friendly reading of Islam that absorbs the religion vs. secularism binary perspective and reconciles people's religious commitment to their faith with their aspirations for modernity and gender equality.

Keywords: Religious peace, religious reform, Islam, the state, modernity, 'Third way' Islamic feminism

### ***Introduction***

Religious peace is often viewed as a goal to be achieved by religious actors belonging to different religious traditions. This paper argues that it is also a matter of managing intra-social and ideological tensions between religion, secularism, tradition, and modernity in their complex, infinite and non-fixed definitions. In the Moroccan context, attempts to preserve the religion and its constants are referred to as 'Al-Amn Alrruhi' or the spiritual security, which, according to Driss Maghraoui, refers to "ensuring the preservation of -the country's- religious doctrine, which is

based on a tolerant Sunni Islam [...] and to guide the people and combat those who hold extremist views.”<sup>1</sup> This paper examines the role of the state and the monarchy in keeping an upper hand on the religious field by addressing the challenge of harmonizing Islam with modernity in general and feminism in particular.

## *I. Religious Peace in Morocco: Managing the “Peace with Religion”*

### **A) Peace with Religion in Morocco**

Within a wide range of literature on peacebuilding and conflict resolution, religion is usually debated as its role in promoting or ruining peace and stability in several conflictual contexts.<sup>2</sup> In his article “Religion: Source of Conflict or Resource for Peace?” Gerrie ter Haar (2005) suggests that religion is neither inherently good nor bad for peace, and that its influence is undeniable.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, Nathan C. Funk and Christina J. Woolner (2011) view that aside from the two fundamentalist, exclusionary and discriminative approaches to religion and peace: “peace through religion alone” and “peace without religion,” a third approach known as “peace with religion”, is more adequate for religious peace as it promotes coexistence, dialogue and focuses on the common principles present in every side of the conflicting parties.<sup>4</sup> The bottom line here is the possibility of religions to be part of the peace process relies on their aptitude to be moderate and open to contemporary challenges.

For centuries, Morocco has attempted to maintain a policy that serves the requirements of stability and unity derived from its religious legacy paralleled with contemporary openness. Moreover, as a Muslim country, Morocco neither falls in a tunnel vision approach to religion, claiming Islam to be the sole reference to resolve all problems of today, nor blindly embraces the sparks of western secular modernity. The reform of the family code in 2004 and the new constitution in 2011 represent occasions where Morocco reaffirmed this policy, which reflects attempts to play on the two cords of Islam and modernity in non-conflictual ways. Therefore, Morocco has managed to set up an approach where religious peace and modernity can meet within the model of “peace with religion,” meaning neither dogmatically inside religion nor exclusively outside it.

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<sup>1</sup> Driss Maghraoui, “The Strengths and Limits of Religious Reforms in Morocco”, *Mediterranean Politics*, 14:2, 195-211. 2009. p. 203

<sup>2</sup> See for example: Silvestri, Sara, Lawrence Freedman, and James Mayall. *The Role of Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding*. London: British Academy, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Gerrie Ter Haar, “Religion: Source of Conflict or Resource for Peace?” in *Bridge or Barrier: Religion, Violence and Visions for Peace*, ed. GerrieterHaar and James J. Busutil (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2005), pp. 18-36

<sup>4</sup> Nathan C. Funk and Christina J. Woolner, “Religion and Peace and Conflict Studies,” in *Critical Issues in Peace and Conflict Studies*, ed. Thomas Matyok, Jessica Senehi, and Sean Byrne (Toronto: Lexington Books, 2011), pp 351-358.

To sustain this approach, Morocco has launched the initiative of reforming the religious field with the aim of achieving three main objectives: 1) combat religious extremism, 2) soothe the tensions between contending religious and secular actors 3) pave the way for better engagement in intellectual and theological debates on Islam and modernity. These objectives required settling certain constants that outline the prototypes of the Moroccan religiosity and establishing several institutions that maintain Morocco's religious preferences.

## B) Pillars of Moroccan Islam

By revealing the background of settling a religious peace in Morocco, one needs to invoke the context of reforming the religious field in which the state was put face to face with religion as a cultural element that needed to be monitored. Right after the Casablanca bombings in 2003, Morocco, under the command of King Mohammed VI, was obliged to win the challenge of combating extremism in the name of Islam. Since then the Moroccan authorities have been active and indeed successful in dismantling many terrorist cells, and have been working with foreign intelligence services to dry off the sources of terrorism and fundamentalist discourses. Islamists with diverse ranges of orientation were under scrutiny and were forcibly obliged to mollify their religious speeches. The state gained control over the religious field by setting its religious preferences and restructuring its institutions to promote a more tolerant, moderate, even Sufist type of religiosity among Moroccans.

Since the 7th Century, Islam has prevailed in Morocco with the Alaouite Dynasty, which claims succession from the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (PBUH). Therefore, the monarchy represents the first and essential pillar of Moroccan Islam. The King solidifies his Islamic legitimacy by declaring his status as the 'commander of the faithful' and consequently he is exclusively in charge of managing the potential threat of political Islam in Morocco.<sup>5</sup> One significant act of articulating the monarchical vision towards religious diversity in the country is the "Marrakech Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in the Muslim World". In this declaration, the King stated, "As Commander of the Faithful and Defender of the Faith, I am committed to protecting the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims alike."<sup>6</sup> Obviously, such statements targets the goal of setting a religious peace between religious segments under one umbrella of the monarchy in a manner that protects diversity and serves the stability and unity of the country.

The type of religious peace promulgated in Morocco is set upon three pillars that outline Morocco's religious preferences: The Maliki School of Law (*maddhab*), Ash'ari theology (*kalâm*) and Sunni Junayd tradition (*tassawûf*). The royal speech

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<sup>5</sup> Mohammed Tozy, *Monarchie et Islam politique au Maroc*. (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po). 1999

<sup>6</sup> Hamouda. "Full Text of HM the King's Message to Conference on 'Rights of Religious Minorities in Islamic Lands.'" Accessed March 4, 2020. <http://www.habous.gov.ma/fr/rencontre-de-marrakech/3116-full-text-of-hm-the-king's-message-to-conference-on-'rights-of-religious-minorities-in-islamic-lands'.html>

following the Casablanca bombings in 2003 can be considered an important milestone for the confirmation of this Moroccan triptych (Malikism-Ash'arism-Sufism), which backs up the 'middle path' Islam (*al-Islam al-wasaty*).<sup>7</sup> King Mohamed VI stated that "Moroccans have remained attached to the rules of the Maliki rites, which are characterized by a flexibility [herein emphasized] that enables consideration of the aims and purposes of the precepts of Islam, and also by its openness to reality. It has been enriched through the imaginative effort of *Ijtihad*,<sup>8</sup> hereby demonstrating that moderation goes hand in hand with the very essence of the Moroccan personality, which is perpetually interacting with civilizations and cultures."<sup>9</sup>

In line with this argument, Moroccan Islam leans toward Sufism, as it follows the Junayd tradition.<sup>10</sup> Sufism is officially advocated in Morocco as it emphasizes the tolerant message of Islam and its flexibility, especially in comparison with the rigidity of radical forms of religious interpretations. In an interview, Ahmed Taoufiq, the minister of Islamic Affairs and one of the followers of the Boudchichi Sufi order, reported that:

*'Sufism is constitutive of the Moroccan personality . . . It is a building block against deviation and the use of religion for goals other than spirituality. Sufism has the particularity of moderation, tolerance and openness to other expressions and opinions' (quoted in Fernandez Suzor, 2007: 13).*<sup>11</sup>

The Sufi inclination in Moroccan Islam is also evident if we consider the royal generous support of *zawiyas* (shrines), especially the Boudchichi one, and the sponsoring of the Moroccan authorities of the annual Festival of Sufi Culture each October in Fez, the spiritual capital of Morocco.<sup>12</sup>

These religious preferences of Morocco, which aim to settle a sort of religious peace against heresy and extremism, needed to be backed up by institutional measures to reform the religious field. Many institutions were created and others were renovated to fit the reform's goals. The following section examines the main institutions allocated for promulgating the type of religiosity that is open to modernity and feminism.

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<sup>7</sup> Baylocq, Cédric, et al. "Spreading a 'Moderate Islam'? Morocco's New African Religious Diplomacy." *Afrique Contemporaine*, vol. No 257, no. 1, 2016, pp. 113–28.

<sup>8</sup> This term refers to intellectual reasoning or independent analysis of Islam's holy texts (the Quran and the Hadith).

<sup>9</sup> Speech from the Throne, 30 July 2003, by King Mohammed VI.

<sup>10</sup> Junayd of Baghdad (835–910) was a Persian mystic and one of the most famous of the early Saints of Islam. He is a central figure in the spiritual lineage of many Sufi orders.

<sup>11</sup> Fernandez Suzor, C. *La modernization de l'Islam*, Entretien avec Ahmed Taoufiq, Afkar/Ide'es. 2007

<sup>12</sup> Ranger, Helen. "Spotlight on: Festival of Sufi Culture in Fez, Morocco." *Lonely Planet*, 19 Mar. 2019, [www.lonelyplanet.com/morocco/the-mediterranean-coast-and-the-rif/fez/travel-tips-and-articles/spotlight-on-festival-of-sufi-culture-in-fez-morocco/40625c8c-8a11-5710-a052-1479d2757e79](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/morocco/the-mediterranean-coast-and-the-rif/fez/travel-tips-and-articles/spotlight-on-festival-of-sufi-culture-in-fez-morocco/40625c8c-8a11-5710-a052-1479d2757e79)

### C) Institutions at the service of Moroccan Islam

#### *The High Council of Religious Scholars*

The High Council of Religious Scholars was first established in the early 1980s, but had undergone a restructuring in 2004 when reforming the religious field. In 2011, it was nominated for the first time in the constitution as an institution mandated as the sole legitimate issuer of *fatawa*.<sup>13</sup> The High Council of Religious Scholars is composed of 30 regional councils and 68 local sections. By 2009, 36 women were serving on the regional councils, and in 2015 the King announced his intention to increase this number.<sup>14</sup> The role assigned to this institution is to achieve a high level of religious homogeneity among Moroccan Muslims and maintain the *Madhab*<sup>15</sup> unity in Morocco. The Ulama<sup>16</sup> are asked to guide Imams, and combat religious radicalism, Wahabism, and Shiism. The parallel objective is to promote the official version of Islam, which is the Sunni Maliki rite and the Acha'ari doctrine. The work of the High Council of Ulama and its local affiliates is not only defensive, but also aims to transform Moroccan society. Its role is to popularize the use of pragmatism and rationality used in *Ijtihad* to the Moroccan culture of the masses. It aims at reconciling Moroccan Islam with its environment, locally and globally.<sup>17</sup>

#### *The Ministry of Pious Endowments and Islamic Affairs*

The Ministry of Pious Endowments and Islamic Affairs has always been among the country's "sovereign" bureaucracies, falling under the King's purview. In 2002, King Mohammed VI appointed Dr. Ahmed Tawfiq as minister of this Ministry, known for his belonging to one of Morocco's leading Sufi orders, the Boutchichiyah. Until 2016, Tawfiq undertook a massive reorganization of the Ministry, which included the creation of seven Directorates: Directorates Of Habous (Endowments), Directorate Of Islamic Affairs, Directorate Of Mosques, Directorate Of Managing Affairs Religious Of Attendants, Directorate Of Traditional Education (Al-Taalim Al-Atiq) And Combating Illiteracy In Mosques, Directorate Of

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<sup>13</sup> *Fatawa* is the plural of Fatwa which is a religious opinion on issues related to Islamic law (Shari'a) should be interpreted or/and applied.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah Feuer, "State Islam in the Battle Against Extremism: Emerging Trends in Morocco and Tunisia", (Washington. Institute for Near East Policy, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> *Madhab* refers to an Islamic legal school. In the Sunni Islam, there are four main legal schools that have emerged in early years of Islam: Hannafi, Maliki, Shafi' and Hanbali. These schools have created rules and regulations on a range of socio-economic matters that range from marriages, to war including commercial contracts, taxes among many other things. These schools have also established legal methods to interpret Qura'an.

<sup>16</sup> The *Ulama*, or religious scholars, have always played an important role in political and socio-economic realms. The source of their societal power could be found in one of the basic sources of the Islamic faith, Sunnah. The Prophet Muhammed is reported to have said in a long Hadith that: 'Ulama are the Heirs of the Prophets'

<sup>17</sup> Mohammed El-Katiri, "The institutionalisation of religious affairs: religious reform in Morocco", The Journal of North African Studies, 18:1, 53-69, 2013

Administration And Cooperation, And Directorate Of Judicial Affairs.<sup>18</sup> The most significant act of this reorganization is being able to closely manage and control the country's 50,000 mosques, by unifying the discourse of preaching and the nature of the educational system of imams, also, the opening of mosques in the face of around 120,000 individuals who benefit from literacy programs.

In addition, up-to-date telecommunications, such as televisions and projectors, were put inside mosques to transmit the message of a more moderate Islam.<sup>19</sup> In another regard, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Information, launched a religious radio and a TV channel (*Assadissa*) as well as a website, to propagate Morocco's official version of Islam against the influence of many oriental Salafist religious media that invaded Moroccan houses since the 1990s. The Moroccan official religious discourse essentially counters Wahabism, Shia, and radical Islamist groups, and symbolically, Moroccan preachers become no longer necessarily old with beards and wearing jellabas.<sup>20</sup> They now appear on TV clean-shaven and wearing European style clothes.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Qarawiyin University*

According to UNESCO<sup>22</sup> and Guinness World Records,<sup>23</sup> The Qarawiyin University is the oldest and continually operating educational institution in the world. Morocco's Qarawiyin mosque (established in 859 CE) has gone through varying periods of influence and change, but it always kept its symbolic position as a beacon of knowledge and religious guidance. Today, a Royal Decree, 1.15.71, which was issued in June 2015, it reorganized this university, specifying its tasks and the institutions that work under its system.<sup>24</sup> Apart from ensuring it falls under the supervision of the state through the Ministry of Islamic affairs, Al-Qarawiyin is given its financial and pedagogic independence as an institution that mainly carries the mission of training students and researchers in the field of religious studies. This includes theology, jurisprudence with typical focus on the Maliki school, modern Islamic thought, history of Moroccan, as well as the Islamic sciences. In addition to this, Al-Qarawiyin University works on training imams, preachers, and preparing male and female religious guides (Murshidat). In this vein, it was

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<sup>18</sup> The organigram of the ministry is available at the website:

[http://www.habous.gov.ma/fr/files/Habous\\_organigramme\\_MHAI\\_FR.pdf](http://www.habous.gov.ma/fr/files/Habous_organigramme_MHAI_FR.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Feuer, "State Islam in the Battle Against Extremism: Emerging Trends in Morocco and Tunisia", (Washington. Institute for Near East Policy, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> the traditional Moroccan dress

<sup>21</sup> Driss Maghraoui, "The Strengths and Limits of Religious Reforms in Morocco", *Mediterranean Politics*, 14:2, 195-211. 2009

<sup>22</sup> UNESCO. "Medina of Fez". <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/170>. Accessed on 10 March 2020

<sup>23</sup> Guinness World records. "Oldest higher-learning institution, oldest university".

<http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/oldest-university>. Accessed on 10 March 2020

<sup>24</sup> For more details see this document:

[http://www.habous.gov.ma/images/abook\\_file/universite%20alkarwiyine%20reorganisation%20dahir%2024%20juin%202015.pdf](http://www.habous.gov.ma/images/abook_file/universite%20alkarwiyine%20reorganisation%20dahir%2024%20juin%202015.pdf)

decided in the decree to include other scholarly institutions such as the Mohamed VI institute for training Imams and Murshidin and Murchidat, Dar al-Hadith Al-Hasaniya, Mohamed VI Institute for Quranic Readings and Studies, The Royal Institute of Research in Moroccan History, The Institute for Islamic Thought and Civilization and Al-Qarawiyyin mosque. The role of all these institutions is to produce researchers and scholars who can sustain the academic front of Morocco's moderate Islam as authentic, but also progressive and capable of facing the contemporary challenges of modernity.

*The Mohammadian League of Scholars*

With the same spirit, another academic and scholarly institution pursues the mission of safeguarding and disseminating the Moroccan model; The Rabita Mohammadia of scholars. This was established in 1960 out of a meeting of three hundred religious scholars in Rabat, and remained independent of the regime's control until 2006 when, within the context of reforming the religious field, King Mohamed VI decided to resurrect the role of this institution by unifying the efforts of Moroccan scholars under his umbrella.<sup>25</sup> Under the current presidency of Amhmed Abaddi, the general secretary, the Rabita evolved remarkably during the last decade, and now it comprises 15 centers and 7 units that work on diverse issues and disciplines from an Islamic perspective. Among these centers is the Center for Women's Studies in Islam, which is the first state-run religious institution in the Arab world dedicated to the question of gender and Islam. It had been under the presidency of Asma Lamrabet, a famous Islamic feminist figure in the world until 2018, when she resigned.

The Rabita generally seeks to contribute to the scientific and cultural life in Islamic Studies, focusing on the Sunni Maliki rite and the Acha'ari doctrine. It employs various means to achieve this, such as issuing scholarly and educational publications and journals, organizing national and international conferences, in addition to holding meetings and workshops to inform the public about the noble principles of Islam and the fight against extremist and deviant religious orientations.<sup>26</sup> As such, the Rabita has launched the initiative of training peer educators and scholars,<sup>27</sup> it has made use of such trainings in guiding and orienting prisoners who were caught for involvement in terrorist and extremist activities.<sup>28</sup> In the same regard, the Rabita has issued a series of pamphlets that seek to deconstruct

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<sup>25</sup> Sarah Feuer, "State Islam in the Battle Against Extremism: Emerging Trends in Morocco and Tunisia", (Washington. Institute for Near East Policy, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> The Royal decree n°1-05-210 (14 February 2006) of establishing the Rabita Mohammadia of Ulemas. Available at:

<http://arrabita.ma/dossiers/AkhbarMos/AkhbarDiv/Attachments/%D8%B8%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Caitlin Dearing Scott. "The Latest on Morocco's Efforts to Counter Violent Extremism -." *Morocco On The Move*, 15 Sept. 2017, moroccoonthemove.com/2017/09/18/latest-moroccos-efforts-counter-violent-extremism-2/.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.arrabita.ma/Article.aspx?C=107140>

the religious extremist discourse.<sup>29</sup> The Rabita is also active in the virtual world through two electronic platforms: one aims to spread religious knowledge through short video capsules,<sup>30</sup> and another one targets the young generation through interactive methods and online radio.<sup>31</sup> Within the broad image of reforming the religious field in Morocco, the role of the Rabita Mohammadia of Ulemas is evident through strategic praxis to alternate extremist and “deviant” discourses with an open, moderate and progressive Islamic discourse that owns the potential of forging the path of modernity within the special context of Morocco.

### *The Council of Moroccans Abroad*

Moroccans abroad constitute more than 10% of the total population and keep close links to their homeland. The King established The Council of Moroccans Abroad in December 2007 in order to supervise, orient, and meet their religious need. This was given the consultative status in the provisions of the 2011 constitution. Presided by Driss El Yazami, and the general secretary Abdellah Bousouf, The Council of Moroccans Abroad reflects His Majesty’s will in his speech on 6 November 2007, to set up an institution, which will be “given extensive powers to enable it to submit proposals regarding all public matters and policies which concern the expatriate community, especially with respect to religious and cultural questions relating to identity”.<sup>32</sup> Thus, one task of the council is to regularly send religious preachers that are accredited by the Moroccan Ministry of Islamic Affairs to different countries. In September 2008, 167 imams and 9 murchidat were sent to Europe and Canada to inform Moroccan citizens of Islamic spiritual messages and protect the Moroccan cultural identity overseas in case their religiosity veers towards different forms of extremism. The council includes government officials as well as agencies and institutions that deal with immigration issues. The council also includes members from the Higher Council of Ulama and the Council of Ulama for Moroccans living abroad.<sup>33</sup> With consideration of a systematic gender approach, the council comprises of diverse working groups that work on several subjects and objectives related to the religious, cultural, political and even economic life of Moroccan expats.<sup>34</sup>

## *II. Whose Modernity? Morocco’s Feminism and the ‘Third Way’ Approach*

### **A) Islamizing Modernity and Modernizing Islam**

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<sup>29</sup> <http://arrabita.ma/Article.aspx?C=107623>

<sup>30</sup> This platform is called Al-Raed platform <http://www.arrabitacademy.ma/>

<sup>31</sup> The website <http://www.chababe.ma/>

<sup>32</sup> Speech by King Mohammed VI. Available at <https://www.cndh.ma/an/actualites/his-majesty-king-mohammed-vi-declares-general-principles-setting-council-moroccan>

<sup>33</sup> Driss Maghraoui, “The Strengths and Limits of Religious Reforms in Morocco, Mediterranean Politics”, 14:2, 195-211. 2009

<sup>34</sup> Ccme. “Working Groups.” CCME, 10 Oct. 2014, [www.ccme.org.ma/en/the-council/working-groups](http://www.ccme.org.ma/en/the-council/working-groups).



In both direct and indirect ways, the type of Moroccan Islam, as maintained by its four constants and backed up by the above institutions, has set up a religious peace built upon unity and stability. It has primarily succeeded in curbing the leashes of religious extremism, which allured a large number of youths in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Also, after having religious discourses scattered and uncontrolled in mosques, houses, *Quranic* schools, and in Media outlets, the religious affair today is more unified and stable in the hands of the monarchical institution since the King is the commander of the believers, and as he announced in the Marrakesh declaration, believers who belong to different faiths.<sup>35</sup>

The official religious discourse, known for being flexible, moderate and open, has also contributed to the creation of a political atmosphere characterized by lower levels of contention between religious and secular actors who used to militate for pure Islamic or secular systems of reference. Today, both ideologies operate under the arbitrage of the King who, on the one hand, declared that he “cannot, as Commander of the Faithful, permit what God has forbidden and forbid what God has permitted,”<sup>36</sup> and on the other hand “has made the promotion of human rights a priority which lies at the very heart of the modernist democratic social project of which His Majesty is a leader.”<sup>37</sup>

The King’s speech made it clear that the new reform “Adopt the tolerant principles of Islam in advocating human dignity, and enhancing justice, equality and good amicable social relations, and with the cohesiveness of the *Malekite* School as well as *ijtihad* (juridical reasoning), which makes Islam valid for any time and place, to implement a modern *Moudawana* for the family, consistent with the spirit of our glorious religion.” With this, the King explained that “The reforms, {...} should not be considered as a victory of one group over another, but rather constitute achievements for all Moroccans”.<sup>38</sup>

Such a position, which was adopted in the 2004 family code, is considered part of a national agenda for promoting a moderate Islam in modern Morocco. According to Mounira Charrad, “In Muslim countries other than Morocco, debates over family codes have caused major controversies”.<sup>39</sup> This means unlike many countries where the contention between religion and secularism is very tenacious, Morocco serves as a model of a country that keeps alliance to both systems of reference with attempts to Islamize modernity and modernize Islam. It is within this model that the political and cultural environment became ready to accept a ripe

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<sup>35</sup> Hamouda. “Full Text of HM the King’s Message to Conference on ‘Rights of Religious Minorities in Islamic Lands” Accessed March 4, 2020. <http://www.habous.gov.ma/fr/rencontre-de-marrakech/3116-full-text-of-hm-the-king’s-message-to-conference-on-‘rights-of-religious-minorities-in-islamic-lands’.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Royal speech introducing the family code February 5, 2004

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>38</sup> *The Moroccan Family Code (Moudawana)* of February 5, 2004. An unofficial English translation of the original Arabic text. Global Rights. Available at: <http://mrawomen.ma/wp-content/uploads/doc/Moudawana-English-Translation.pdf>. Accessed on: 5 April 2020

<sup>39</sup> Cited in: Wainscott, Ann Marie. “Gendered Reforms in ‘Moderate’ Morocco.” *Bureaucratizing Islam: Morocco and the War on Terror*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017, pp. 135–157

engagement in intellectual debates about Islam, modernity in general, and Islam and feminism in particular. Right after the reform of the family code, which aimed to enshrine gender equality within the framework of Islam, feminists and Muslim theologians started to think of possibilities of Islamizing feminism and feminizing Islam. The following section discusses the idea of modernity in connection to Islam in so far as being the impetus of bringing the idea of 'Third way' Islamic feminism to the surface, and will spotlight on the challenges that continue to inspire the ongoing debate about Islam, tradition, modernity, feminism and gender equality in Morocco.

### **B) The 'Third way' Islamic feminist approach**

Feminist discourses in Morocco can be broadly divided into Islamic(st) and secularist. While they appear to be distinctive because the Islamic discourse derives its reference system from *Shari'a*, and the secular discourse is informed by the CEDAW convention, there is still space of convergence if we consider Malika Benradi's classification of feminist discourses in Morocco into four categories: The first one is the laicistic (Secularist) feminist vision that pleads for the historicity of the law and a differentiation between *Fiqh*, *sharia* and law, leading to a complete separation between religion and law. The second category is the feminist discourse that advocates modernism and considers that *Fiqh* should not narrow-mindedly been seen as the sole framework for discussion and interpretation, which implies that religion is not totally discarded. The third category is the Islamic reformist feminism, which calls for revising the Maliki rites to account for the changes in society. The fourth category is represented by traditionalists who reject gender equality and consider it as a Western product, which infringes upon the cultural identity of the country.<sup>40</sup>

It is within these categories that 'Third way' Islamic feminism can be located in the middle of the laicistic (Secularist) and the Islamist extremes. In her book: *Beyond Feminism and Islamism: Gender and Equality in North Africa* (2015), Doris Gray writes that 'Third way' Islamic feminism inevitably negotiates internal tensions between what has been dubbed 'tradition' and 'modernity'. Thus, it incorporates national and cultural identity, post-colonialism and religious principles into their gender discourse."<sup>41</sup>

Asma Lamrabet, who is one prominent Islamic feminist in Morocco, and who advocates the 'Third way' Islamic feminist approach, refers to it as a set of attempts to claim women's rights and gender equality within a religious framework, against those who monopolize the feminist discourse and claim that it can only be a secular

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<sup>40</sup> Malika Benradi. "Women in Islam –Feminist Orientations and Strategies for the 21st Century". (Ed). Johannes Kandel. Trans. James Turner (English). Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Conference. 2008. P. 25

<sup>41</sup> Gray, Doris. *Beyond Feminism and Islamism: Gender and Equality in North Africa*. International Library of African Studies. I.B.Tauris; Reprint edition. 2015. P. 66

endeavor.<sup>42</sup> Lamrabet challenges the models of “globalized feminism in the western style” and seeks to associate “the ideals of Islam with the egalitarian spirit of universal human rights in an effort to reconcile faith and modernity”. Accordingly, she occupies a space left vacant by liberal feminists, whose lack of genuine religious commitment had exposed them to the accusation of cultural alienation or even apostasy.”<sup>43</sup>

### C) The ‘Third Way’ Islamic Feminist Approach and the State-based Feminism

First of all, it should be noted that I deliberately associate the term ‘third way’ with Islamic feminism rather than with feminism in general because the advocates of this approach remarkably depart from the Islamic reference to make the ‘third way’ possible, not vice-versa. Arguably, the ‘Third way’ Islamic feminist approach happens to go in line with the state-based feminism as understood from Souad Eddouada & Renata Pepicelli article “Morocco: Towards an Islamic Feminism of the State”.<sup>44</sup> The authors suggest that “state feminism” emerged in the aftermaths of the 2003 Casablanca terrorist attacks, when Morocco’s decision to associate itself with the American “war on terror”<sup>45</sup> and managed to take control of all religious aspects including the feminist one in the framework of reforming the religious field. The pillar institutions allocated to undertake this reform all integrated a female based strategy to promote the image of the country internationally.<sup>46</sup>

It is worth mentioning that Islamic state feminism represents a competition with the Islamists and their longstanding presence and activism among women audiences<sup>47</sup>. Additionally, the nature of the ‘Third way’ Islamic feminist approach seems, as Fatima Sadiqi puts it, to be “welcomed by the secular feminists for three main reasons: they draw on the Sufi (rather than legal orthodox) Islamic heritage, they adopt the principle of equality, and they introduce change in gender relations within a powerful public space: religion.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Asma Lamrabet. *Believer and feminist. Another View to Religions {Croyantes et féministes, un autre regard sur les religions}*. éditions La croisée des chemins. Casablanca. 2016

<sup>43</sup> Souad Eddouada and Renata Pepicelli. *Morocco: Towards an Islamic State Feminism*. Publication. SciencePO, 2012. Web.

<[http://www.sciencespo.fr/cefi/sites/sciencespo.fr/cefi/files/ci\\_feminism\\_iran\\_se\\_rp.pdf](http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr/cefi/files/ci_feminism_iran_se_rp.pdf)>. 2012. p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Souad, Eddouada & Renata, Pepicelli. “Morocco : Towards an Islamic Feminism of the State”. *International Critique*46: 87–100. 2010

<sup>45</sup> Zakia Salime, “The War on Terrorism”: Appropriation and Subversion by Moroccan Women”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 33 (1), 2007, pp. 1-24.

<sup>46</sup> Souad, Eddouada and Renata Pepicelli. *Morocco: Towards an Islamic State Feminism*. Publication. SciencePO, 2012. Web.

<[http://www.sciencespo.fr/cefi/sites/sciencespo.fr/cefi/files/ci\\_feminism\\_iran\\_se\\_rp.pdf](http://www.sciencespo.fr/cefi/sites/sciencespo.fr/cefi/files/ci_feminism_iran_se_rp.pdf)>. 2012

<sup>47</sup> Julie Pruzan-Jørgensen. “Islamic Women's Activism in the Arab World. Potentials and challenges for external actors”. Danish Institute for International Studies *Policy Brief*, 2012. p. 54.

<sup>48</sup> Fatima Sadiqi, “An Assessment of Today’s Moroccan Feminist Movements (1946–2014)”, in M. Ennaji, F. Sadiqi, K. Vintges, *Moroccan Feminisms. New Perspectives*, Red Sea Press-Africa World Press, 2016, P. 67

In this regard, Souad Eddouada and Renata Pepicelli assert that the state inevitably tries to satisfy the demands of feminists and those of the Islamists, and for this, it was obliged to rapidly develop an “Islamic state feminism”.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, one noteworthy example of the manifestation of ‘Third way’ Islamic feminism by the state feminism is the balance that was created both in the family code in 2004 by bringing together Muslim scholars and women’s rights activists in the committee in charge of producing the new legislative text. The same logic was utilized in the 2011 constitution, where the state managed to respond to both Islamic and secular feminist demands by establishing the Authority for Parity and Fight against All Forms of Discrimination based on the provisions of article 19 which speaks about gender equality. Similarly, the constitution responded to the Islamists’ demands to promote the family institution through article 32<sup>50</sup> and its provision to establish the Advisory Council for Family and Childhood.

Finally, one can deduce that this notion of “Islamic state feminism” does not have interest to take side of neither Islamists nor secularists. However, as this essay has explained earlier, since it derives its legitimacy from Islam (as the King is the commander of the faithful and as society is deeply attached to religion), it has no alternative but to forge paths of modernization and reform from within the religion of Islam. In this manner, Morocco can be said to have succeeded in producing its authentic formula of Islamizing modernity and modernizing Islam.

### *Conclusion*

Religious peace has proven to not be an oxymoron in Morocco. The state has managed to establish a model of “peace with religion” by reviving the peaceful potentials of Islam in harmony with the requirements of modernity. The reform of the religious field has set up the ground for more unity and stability where diverse and contending socio-political feminist actors are operating today. The pillars of Moroccan Islam and the institutions that preserve them have promulgated the type of moderate Islam that keeps pace with the challenges of modernity and the feminist demands.

The state not only has succeeded in curbing the leashes of religious extremism and pacifying the tension between religious and secularist competing forces, but also has created the atmosphere suitable for the state-based feminism which happens to match up with the ‘Third way’ Islamic feminist approach. As such, Morocco, unlike many Muslim countries, could shun a great deal of antagonism

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<sup>49</sup> Souad Eddouada and Renata Pepicelli. *Morocco: Towards an Islamic State Feminism*. Publication. SciencePO, 2012. Web. <[http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr/ceri/files/ci\\_feminism\\_iran\\_se\\_rp.pdf](http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr/ceri/files/ci_feminism_iran_se_rp.pdf)>. 2012

<sup>50</sup> Article 32 of the constitution states that: “The family, founded on the legal ties of marriage, is the basic unit [cellule] of society. The State works to guarantee, by the law, the protection of the family under the juridical, social and economic plans, in a manner to guarantee its unity, its stability and its preservation” and “A Consultative Council of the Family and of Childhood [Conseil consultatif de la famille et de l'enfance] is created”

between religion and modernity and was successful at bridging the gap between Islamic and secular feminisms thanks to the ongoing process of Islamizing modernity and modernizing Islam.