

SIT Graduate Institute/SIT Study Abroad

## SIT Digital Collections

---

Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection

SIT Study Abroad

---

Spring 2022

# The Current Status of Women in Morocco and How it Can be Improved

Amanda Maia  
*SIT Study Abroad*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp\\_collection](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection)



Part of the African Studies Commons, Civic and Community Engagement Commons, Constitutional Law Commons, Family Law Commons, Gender and Sexuality Commons, Inequality and Stratification Commons, Law and Gender Commons, Politics and Social Change Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

---

### Recommended Citation

Maia, Amanda, "The Current Status of Women in Morocco and How it Can be Improved" (2022). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 3455.  
[https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp\\_collection/3455](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/3455)

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [digitalcollections@sit.edu](mailto:digitalcollections@sit.edu).

**The Current Status of Women in Morocco and How it Can be Improved**

Amanda Maia

Academic Director: Taieb Belghazi

ISP Advisor: Soumaya Belhabib

Smith College

Sociology & Government Departments

Spring 2022

SIT Abroad Independent Study Project: Multiculturalism & Human Rights

## Abstract

My paper will explore the conditions of gender minorities in Morocco through representation, NGOs, social structures, and resources therein to support the progress of acquiring more rights for these demographics. With an emphasis on the status of women in Morocco. My main questions as it stands are: What are the living conditions for women in Morocco and how can they be improved? What progress has been and still can be made to improve the quality of life and foster joy for these demographics in Morocco? Since the 1990s, there has been significant progress in Morocco to improve Family Law and with the 2011 Constitution, there have been more rights outlined for women in Morocco. Along with detailed narratives, this paper constructs the present status of women in Morocco and reflects on the potential for improvement. When compared to other countries of the world, Morocco appears to be behind on human rights issues. However, the path to empowerment begins with a politically and socially educated population. Therefore, the paper explores the history of women's rights, feminist movements, and societal influences on women in Morocco in the recent past, present, and future.

**Key Terms:** *Family Law, 2011 Moroccan Constitution, Feminism, Feminist Movements, Women's Rights, Empowerment, Education, Patriarchy*

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to begin this section by thanking Dr. Taieb Belghazi for being a part of my core support system for this paper. Without his guidance and patience, I would not have been able to follow my passions and choose such a personally important topic for my ISP. The SIT Abroad Multiculturalism & Human Rights program would be nothing without Dr. Taieb Belghazi. There is no other professor as academically versed, purely intelligent, and kind as Dr. Taieb Belghazi. I'd like to thank him infinitely for always providing the best feedback with plenty of points of entry which I have had the joy of exploring. Thank you for an unforgettable semester.

Secondly, I would like to thank Professor Soumaya Belhabib for being my paper advisor. Ever since Professor Belhabib's guest lecture about feminism and women's rights in Morocco, I knew I had to center my topic on the intersection between Feminism and social movements in Morocco. Feminism is an essential component of progress and women's autonomy. Without Professor Belhabib, I would not have been able to develop my paper in this way. With feminism as my guiding theoretical framework, my paper can serve as a guide for how women's status in Morocco can improve through the lens of feminist movements.

Overall, I would like to thank all the other guest lecturers whom I reference in the paper and other professors whose writings I cite in the paper. Without them setting the precedent for conversations about women's status, empowerment, education, feminism, and autonomy, this paper would not exist.

Lastly, I would like to thank my mother, Dulcilene Maia, for encouraging and supporting everything I do. She is the strongest woman I know. She is also a self-proclaimed feminist who knows how to uplift others as much as herself. I hope this paper makes her as proud as I am to be her daughter. Thank you mãe for supporting me on my college journey and being my number 1 fan from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgments.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Keywords .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework .....</b>	<b>7-8</b>
<b>Literature Review &amp; Analysis .....</b>	<b>9-10</b>
<b>Politics of Women’s Rights &amp; Background .....</b>	<b>11-14</b>
<b>Findings Part I .....</b>	<b>15-18</b>
<b>Findings Part II .....</b>	<b>19-24</b>
<b>Assumptions &amp; Methods .....</b>	<b>25-26</b>
<b>Positionality .....</b>	<b>27-28</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Cited Sources .....</b>	<b>30-31</b>

## Introduction

The 2011 Moroccan Constitution and the reign of King Mohamed VI are perhaps some of the most important political timestamps when it comes to the development of women's rights in Morocco. Through published sources, observational research, and in person interviews, the general perspective is undeniably pointed in a positive direction towards improving the lives of women. There is a multitude of non-governmental organizations, women's rights groups, feminist groups, and political mobilizations which have contributed to a more free society for women and other disadvantaged populations in Morocco. Collective action and feminist discourse are at the center of activism which positively impacts the lives of women. The fight for more access to education and political advocacy by women themselves has pushed conservative Morocco to break out of old-fashioned gender norms which are also established by the state religion. Although King Mohamed VI has formed committees for the betterment of women's rights, one man cannot solely mend centuries of systemic oppression caused by the patriarchal regime of government and institutionalized religion. Therefore, protests and activism also help to bring more direct awareness to issues that certain demographics with privilege fault or recognize within themselves. Women in Morocco are at the backbone of the private sphere due to social and cultural norms which then contribute to a society in which they are commonly neglected by way of legal protections. In this paper, the research speaks for itself in that the development of formalized political advocacy for women either through social or feminist movements have produced a better social status for women in Morocco. A great amount of progress has been made, and the general direction which Morocco is heading shows that more progressive measures actually have a possibility of being implemented. Feminist movements have contributed the most towards the improvement of women's living conditions in Morocco, whether explicitly or implicitly mentioned in research or interviews.

## Keywords

**Feminism:** a sociological term and belief system in which women and other non-men have the right to full social, cultural, economic, and political equality in society. There are many ways in which feminism is expressed throughout the world.

**Patriarchy:** a social system in which men are granted power and dominate over women and other non-male demographics. Can also be referred to in the familial sense where a male is in charge of the household. The social system is usually oppressive.

**Empowerment:** in the context of this paper, I will be referring to empowerment as women's empowerment. The fundamental sense of self-worth, confidence, autonomy, and right to push for social change as it pertains to women's rights.

**Family Law:** otherwise known as the Mudawana, the family law is a set of laws that refer to the areas of family, women, marriage, divorce, and child custody. There have been various efforts since its creation to be fairer towards women and to emphasize their role outside of the family and being distinguished as women's rights. (Wikipedia, 2022)

## **Theoretical Framework**

To set up the theoretical framework, one must first define the terms which will be frequently used in the paper. There are several empowerment methods encountered through observational research and interviews. For example, the Social Economy Network Premise from Tiznit holds three month training sessions where women can develop a better vocabulary around economic, political, and social issues which pertain to creating and running their own cooperatives. It is important to center education and advocacy when it comes to social justice for women in Morocco. According to the





## **Literature Review & Analysis**

### **2011 Moroccan Constitution**

The 2011 Moroccan Constitution was created during a time when much social change was being demanded by the Moroccan population. The Constitution outlines the powers of the royalty, legislation, executive, judiciary, and Constitutional Court amongst other departments of government. Article 3 of the Constitution explicitly defines Islam as the state religion while also granting freedom to practice other religions. However, it is important to note that there are laws in the penal code that criminalize certain practices which can be deemed restrictive such as the ability to arrest someone from eating in public during Ramadan, an Islamic practice. The Title II section of the Constitution contains the Fundamental Freedoms and Rights of Moroccan citizens. There, it is clearly stated that men and women may enjoy the same freedoms as each other in society, essentially claiming their equality plainly for any citizen to enjoy. However, the de facto implementation of these rights given by the Moroccan government may not always be so readily expressed.

### **Moroccan Penal Code**

As referred to in the previous section, there is Article 222 in the Penal Code which bans those who practice Ramadan from eating in public accompanied by a 200 to 500 dirham fee if found in violation. The Moroccan Penal Code has over 400 Articles, with some that are perhaps too forcibly restrictive on the Moroccan population. Beginning with the code referring to the religious holiday of Ramadan, it is important to note that the state and religion in Morocco are more closely intertwined than in other countries. For example, Article 490 explicitly bans

premarital sex between different sexes. This penal code invades the area of the private sphere for the sake of controlling the personal actions of Moroccan citizens.

**Doing Fieldwork with Women Land Rights Activists in Morocco: Power Relationships  
Withing Feminism and its Discursive Framework of Right**

### **Politics of Women's Rights & Background (4 pages, 11-14)**

In order to understand the current status of women in Morocco, it is important to review the history of social and feminist movements which have contributed to the present day. Most of what pertains to women in Moroccan law falls under Family Law. Family Law includes women at the core of the family structure in the patriarchal sense. One of the first women's groups *Akhawat Assafae* created in 1946 was created to ensure that women's rights would be considered during the efforts made towards independence (\_\_\_\_\_). Then, in 1969, another women's group was created, *National Union of Moroccan Women*, and another group called *Moroccan Organization for Family Planning* in 1971. These groups were progressive in their time and ensured for better treatment of women in society. The shift towards more radical progressive measures to improve women's lives came in the 1980s and 1990s. The creation of magazines and essays such as *Le Harem Politique*, *Kalimat*, and *8th March*. These magazines were more accessible to a larger population of women. The women who took part in government funded groups likely had better access to the world of politics. The accessibility of magazines and essays ensured that women across different social identities could share experiences, educate themselves on their rights, find community, and be able to advocate for themselves. Although most women's groups were created in spaces with women of more affluent backgrounds, magazines such as *8th March* centered around feminism were more inclusive and spoke about issues that even preestablished women's groups did not touch on such as domestic violence and discrimination (\_\_\_\_\_).

After the development of writings and magazines about women's issues and feminism, there was another cultural shift in Morocco in terms of being more open to discussing and questioning the status quo. The creation of more outright feminist groups such as *Feminist*

*Action Union* in 1987 and *The Moroccan Association of Women's Rights* in 1992. According to Professor Soumaya Belhabib's lecture in Spring 2022, it was also around this time that women's rights was being formally researched in universities, bringing light to the issue as discussions were emerging in real time. Then, women and gender studies began to be formally introduced into the universities as classes and eventually as its own department. Starting in the late 1990s, feminists and feminists groups were pushing for more concrete changes in the Family Law to integrate the National Plan for Women's Integration in Development which would have put women in the forefront of development of Morocco. In addition to this effort, there was a massive campaign signing in 1992 where one million women signed a petition to call for the implementation of women's rights as autonomous individuals explicitly in the law (\_\_\_\_\_).

In the 2000s, more progressive measures were starting to be taken by the Moroccan government, This could be associated with the change in administration as King Hassan II died in 1999, soon after his son Mohamed VI came into power. Under the reign of King Mohamed VI, the efforts made by women's rights and feminist groups were being listened to. In April 2001, the king acknowledged the importance of women's rights and created a committee under his name to review and update the Family Codes (\_\_\_\_\_). Finally, in 2004, there were some pivotal amendments to the Family Law. To name a few, in the process of divorce, the father must provide his children with proper living conditions, whether it be housing or financial assistance to the same standard which was provided during the marriage between him and the mother. Also, children's custody is prioritized to the mother then father, then the maternal grandmother. This ensures the utmost benefits to the woman which in both situations would have been disproportionately unfair on the women's end. Another significant legal document created in the 21st century which has pushed women's rights into a more progressive status in Morocco is the

2011 Constitution. The explicit mention of equal rights between men and women as decreed by Article 19 ensures that at least on paper, men and women can be seen as equal (\_\_\_\_\_). Naturally, the reality of day to day interactions could prove otherwise, it is important that the government formally acknowledge gender equality at its most basic level. The establishment of international conventions in support of gender equality and women's empowerment is also a positive sign of Morocco's development towards being a country with more human rights (\_\_\_\_\_). More recently, King Mohamed VI created a commission called The New Model of Development in 2019 which focuses on the economic integration and development for women which is also extremely empowering. The commission states that by 2035, women's participation in the formal economy will be at 35% rather than the established 22% recorded in 2019 (\_\_\_\_\_). These institutionalized changes in the law illustrate a changing status quo for women in Morocco, Although mainly in the field of economics and family, these changes allow for women to move more freely in the public sphere of society rather than being forced into the private sphere or the informal economy.

The Social Economy Network Premise NGO is the perfect combination of cultural integration into modern social systems. The focus on women-owned cooperatives from the region creates a safe space for women to express themselves, educate themselves, and grow as a collective. The training workshops, and education on economy and women's rights produce autonomous women. The integration of women from this rural community benefits not only them but large society in many ways (Maia, Fieldnotes 2022). When underserved communities can advocate for themselves, the oppressive institutions which have maintained their inferiority are called into question and become less tolerated by the general population. Therefore, the collective becomes stronger in navigating the social systems and making space for themselves.

Creating economic opportunities for these demographics creates equality within present social systems while the next step towards progress could be to advocate for women in the political sphere. After this economic development, perhaps these demographics can radically change the political sphere to better serve a wider range of Moroccans. In Tiznit, the Amazigh culture is dominant, which has a historical tradition of solidarity, tight community, and tribes (Maia, Fieldnotes 2022). Therefore, it is easy for the women in the cooperative network to reach out to housewives who want to explore starting a business for themselves. The expansion of social networks is crucial for the women of this region to develop skills in the public sphere. Following this model of collective action could also push Moroccan culture into a more progressive set of norms.

## Findings Part I

The first interview conducted for the purpose of gaining a wider perspective on women's status in Morocco was located in Tangier. The NGO 100% Mamans is an organization that wholly supports single Moroccan and migrant mothers with social welfare, childcare, legal assistance, educational workshops, and mental health care (Maia, Fieldnotes 2022). I was able to speak with an employee of the organization, Manar Essadiqi who has worked there for about a year and a half. It was interesting that the interview had to be conducted in French, which put my own skills to use, instead of someone translating from Darija to English. The French language is still very ingrained in Morocco: in higher education, NGOs, government institutions, and daily life. However, outside of formal occasions such as these, Darija is much more common. When it comes to talking about social justice issues, I have noticed that the French language is able to more easily encompass certain topics outside of the traditional lens. Perhaps my own limitation of not knowing Darija also held me back from experiencing this crucial conversation in a language more accessible to the general Moroccan population.

The organization gets funding from foundations and private donations, they do not get any government funding. This is especially interesting when putting into context how single mothers are stigmatized in Moroccan society. In the traditional sense, women's status in Morocco is intrinsically tied to the man they are with. Therefore, if there are single mothers, they do not fit into the conservative narrative. In the interview with Manar, the first question pertains to her own relationship with womanhood. Manar answered that her personal experience of being a woman in Morocco overall is not ideal with lots of difficulties, the lack of certain rights demands change. Still, Manar is confident that through protesting, activism, and organizations like the one she works for that her cause will be heard and be able to achieve a better place in



society. With the NGO, Manar explained they are aware that being a single mother in Morocco is taboo. There have been small progressive changes for their status, but the laws are still too strict and need to be more supportive of women regardless of their marital status. She describes how the norm is to be married with kids, of course, that the religious patriarchal society tends to neglect single mothers. She says how she feels a duty to defend the right of women and their kids who should be of equal status with married women and their kids.

The second question pertains to potential differences between Moroccan and migrant women in Morocco and if their struggles differ in any way. Manar answered that for all “non traditional” women in Morocco, there are negative stigmas associated with being a single mother regardless of their other identities. She said that the mindset of society is what needs to change more than the law, that the law follows the mindset. Although there has been some development in the Family Law about single women, there is no true institutional protection for single mothers because the biological father still has some power in certain situations. For example, a fairly recent change now allows single mothers to give their last name to their child instead of having to use the father or a man from her family. Manar also pointed out on her national ID card, the Carte National, that she also has the names of her mother’s mother and her father’s father as part of her identity. For the children of single mothers, they would not always be able to provide the name of the father’s father, therefore, the government gives a name from the Koran as a placeholder. It is then clear the difference between who is the child of a single mother versus a married mother from the names on the back of the ID. Manar states how this can lead to unnecessary marginalization of these children in everyday life. There should be an easier process to acquire a national ID for children of single mothers that does not involve the father in a systematic way. Another unfortunate legal aspect of single mothers’ lives when it comes to the

father is that although men can get arrested for having premarital sex, they have more control over asking for a DNA test. Even after the DNA test, whether or not it tests positive, the man has a right to choose if he wants to claim his child. Therefore, there is no requirement to provide child support even if he is found to be the biological father. This clear lack of support for single mothers by the government shows the neglect and prejudice against this demographic. Plainly stated, it takes two people to create a child. Without the proper documentation, it is difficult to get into schools, to visit the doctors, and most other things in Morocco. Through this interview, it is clear that there is a lack of resources and support for single mothers outside of non-governmental organizations like 100% Mamans. In addition to the responsibility of the childcare falling onto the mother, she also faces more negative backlash for having had sex outside of marriage. Article 490 of the Moroccan Penal Code explicitly outlaws premarital sex (\_\_\_\_\_). There are more articles of the penal code that criminalize things that should be freedoms for citizens. If sex is criminalized, then certain consequences also have a negative connotation to them. Manar explained how along with working for 100% Mamans, she actively participates in activism in bigger collective communities. According to her, there are a few other organizations that provide services to single mothers, namely in Casablanca. For example, the Solidarité Feminine in Casablanca also deals with activism and has a strong feminist foundation. She talked about how the organizations come together to protest and demand that the government change the law to adapt better to single mothers' struggles.

The last question was about how Manar feels feminism plays into her job and the organization itself. Firstly, she replied that she is a proud feminist and that organizations like 100% Mamans are proudly feminist institutions. The incorporation and explicit use of feminism as the foundation of such important work illustrates the significance of feminism as an agent for

change. Manar stated how 100% Mamans also has partnerships with feminist organizations while also attending and hosting conferences. Overall, there seems to have been slow progress for women in Morocco, specifically, single mothers. The establishment of organizations such as 100% Mamans shows that further assistance is needed in order for non-traditional families to have a stable life in Morocco. Especially taking into account that 100% Mamans has no federal funding, it is clear that the dominant conservative government does not want to support all women, for now. Activism and feminist movements in Morocco are holding the government to a standard which will slowly progress into more rights for women. In the context of Morocco, things are slowly but definitely getting better.

## Findings Part II

The second anecdote of significant importance to the understanding of women's rights in Morocco comes from Habiba, a rural Moroccan woman from the region of Tiznit. Tiznit is a province with its capital Tiznit in the South of Morocco. The capital is known for the finest jewelry production and mint. Tiznit was founded in 1881 by Sultan Hassan I and sits between the Atlantic coast and the Sahara Desert (Wikipedia, 2022). The region has a strong Amazigh presence, not only in ethnic demographics but the overall culture. Amazigh peoples are known for their tight-knit religious communities where everyone knows each other and the collective is put above the individual. In the sense of politics, this can be really strong to sway the region one way or another in political ideology, but emphasis on collective action sometimes leaves marginalized peoples in compromised positions for the sake of the general population.

Interviewing Habiba about her cooperative named Coop Samara and her connection to the NGO Social Economy Network Premise provided a perspective of resilience, success, and some hardships as well. I began the interview with some simpler questions in order to set up the conversation about women in Morocco, their status, Habiba's experience as a woman and businesswoman, and education around women's rights. The first question I asked was: How would you describe your relationship with your womanhood? What does it mean for you to be a woman? Habiba answered that in her perspective, being a woman is being a mother, daughter, sister, girlfriend, friend, etc. She also made sure to mention how proud she was of herself and her journey in life as a woman and that she is much stronger than she has been in the past. The emphasis on pride and strength indicates that there have perhaps been attempts to belittle or shame Habiba in the past which she mentions in the interview as well. The second question was: How much do you feel being a woman in Morocco affects your daily life? Habiba answered that

in some ways being a woman in Morocco is fantastic and that it does affect daily life. She also said that perhaps being a woman like her would be better appreciated outside Morocco. She said it is difficult to be an ambitious woman who wants to achieve a lot in Morocco due to traditional values which hold women back. She said that in this sense, it is difficult to be a woman in Morocco since this part of herself is not valued as much as her other skills. This shows how women who choose to step into the workplace arena are not well received by peers, face shamefulness by families, and have an overall disadvantaged position as traditional Moroccan society holds a narrow sense of womanhood as an overarching expectation. Later in the interview, Habiba goes into detail about people in her community who were unsupportive, racist, sexist, and challenged her autonomy.

The third question asked was: What are some other social identities that you feel affect your daily life? Habiba begins to answer this question talking about how she is a widow. She talks about how being a widow negatively affects her daily life as she does not have the so-called protection of a man. According to her own experiences, being a widow in the community shows that you've had a man once, therefore, you are able to engage in sex frivolously, and the purity required for marriage is no longer something which has a hold on her, which is considered dangerous for men who would seek to control her. Being a widow seems to be a paradoxical form of freedom in a religiously conservative patriarchal society. Habiba then states how she is a stronger woman than ever after becoming a widow and that she never needed a man for the sole purpose of protection. She has been able to provide for herself and her four children with all that she has done in the past and her current cooperative. Now, she says that she is able to not care about what other people think and that her priorities are to follow her ambitions, be confident, and provide a successful life for her and her kids. Being a widow already comes with enough

negative connotations in Habiba's community that her choice to ignore those who would bring her down shows her connection to her womanhood outside of the patriarchal context. Although the overall community has stigmas against widows and divorce, Habiba said in the interview that she has responsibility for herself only and is willing to do whatever it takes to be successful. Habiba also emphasized the importance of education for her children because she did not have access to a full education due to her marrying at an early age. After the third question, I asked Habiba to delve into more of an anecdote style where she could give a short story of her life and how she ended up finding NGO Social Economy Network Premise and creating Coop Samara. She began by talking about how she is not judgemental of youth who get involved in drugs or crimes in Morocco, how she seeks out conversations and to understand the hardships in their lives. This can be connected to the stigmas around widows and how Habiba seeks to understand demographics in Morocco who also face social neglect, hypocrisy, and sometimes violence. She also described the origins of the name Samara as a powerful name for her coop. Samara means dark skin, in reference to Habiba's pride of being darker skinned, or black. When her husband died, the neighbors not only made her feel excluded for not needing another man, but talked negatively about her skin color and called her derogatory names. For Habiba, naming the coop after a positive racial description was a move of resilience, pride, and love for her identity. It is a source of strength as dark skin women, widows, and women with intersectional identities should be celebrated.

Then, Habiba began to give a description of her childhood, or lack thereof. Habiba left grade school at 12 years old by order of her family and was married to a much older man at 15/16 years old. As she details, her late husband came to her family door in their small village outside of Tiznit knocking on the door asking for her hand. This seemed to be their first

encounter. Habiba says she absolutely felt too young to get married, often reflecting about how she wanted to keep playing, to live out her youth, and most importantly, to have a grand love story. Unfortunately, that big love story did not happen for her and for countless other women who have been married as a minor. The law has since changed the minimum age requirement for women to marry from 15 to 18 years old, which is a progressive change for Morocco (\_\_\_\_\_). After 14 years of marriage, Habiba explains how she felt like she never contributed to the sexual relationship, that she experienced domestic violence in her home, and that she did not feel autonomous at all. I am grateful for Habiba's honest narrative, as I understand these topics are not easy to speak about and potentially have to relive through its telling. After that, she jumped to explaining how when her husband fell sick and died, she was going to be in debt from hospital bills, although a woman in the hospital at the time helped her financially. After that, Habiba felt the financial responsibilities falling onto her. She decided to work as a housekeeper for women in the neighborhood, although she was faced with stigmas, prejudice and violence. Although she was only earning about 5 USD daily, working for pay brought up her esteem and confidence to be more autonomous. Even when faced with women who would accuse her of looking or sleeping with their husbands, she continued to work until she could no longer endure the negative aspects of working in that field.

After moving on to working in a store with the same products she now makes, she was not properly paid for 2 years by her boss, which was extremely frustrating. However, tourists gave her tips that became her regular pay. While working in the store, Habiba developed her customer service skills: how to welcome people, gain confidence and experience, and feel more ambition after that experience. In 2009, Larbi, the Director of the Social Economy Network Premise came to the shop and started asking questions about the store, then proceeded to place

an enormous order of 40 kg of Amlou in 2 days as a test of Habiba's ambition. After getting to know each other more and building a professional relationship, Habiba began to attend the training workshops along with 170 women she helped to recruit from her village and surrounding towns. In 2011, Larbi helped Habiba set up pop-up display for her first products where she had the experience of selling her products for the first time. The process of beginning her own coop came after this, which Habiba talks about how this shows how it takes a particularly ambitious strong woman to start her own business: it takes patience, determination, and commitment. Out of the 170 women recruited to train with Habiba, only 7 made it through the entire 3 month process and whose names are part of Coop Samara. However, Habiba is the only one who comes into the store with her daughter sometimes as well as selling and talking with customers. Habiba complained in the interview about how the other women prefer to stay in the village, helping to make stuff but staying at home. I believe Habiba's confidence and drive is unique. The other women don't feel like they have a responsibility to progress with the co-op. For example, they attend other sorts of exhibitions as well. The other women still get paid while Habiba recounts that she pays for supplies out of pocket a lot of the time as well. Therefore, I feel that the Coop Samara is more representative of Habiba than any of her co-owners could describe.

Finally, I asked about Habiba's connection to feminism and if she related to feminism. Habiba said that she proudly identifies as a feminist. Since becoming a widow, Habiba explained how she has been coming into her own sexuality, embracing pleasure, and feeling autonomous as a woman. She claimed that in Morocco, women don't have a sense of their own sexuality, sexual expression, and forwardness, practicing pleasure and bodily autonomy. She also described that in all she does, leading the coop, indulging in pleasure, and expressing herself is inherently feminist. This contributes to the positive trend that women who are entering the workforce also



align themselves with feminism. It seems that in the conservative religious parts of Morocco, feminism is not welcome. However, it is comforting to know that in a more conservative region, there are women who are working to break the mold of what it means to be a woman, a feminist, and a Moroccan. When it comes to hopes for the future, Habiba talks about how before 2005, Moroccan women couldn't give their nationality to their child if the father wasn't also Moroccan. Now, Moroccan women can give their nationality to their children regardless. Also, the husband must seek written permission to marry a second/third wife after the first. However, there is currently no social welfare for widows. Habiba stated that even two thousand dirhams a month pension would be enough to support her big family. It should not be all the responsibility of the widow to care for her family if social welfare could be put in place to support struggling women. Overall, Habiba expressed a positive expression of hope for the future, despite all that she has been through. The future is bright for Morocco because women like Habiba do not cower to prejudice, stigma, or neglect. Women like Habiba stand against discrimination, marginalization, and misogyny.

### **Assumptions & Methods: Interviews & Research**

My research has taken several paths during the ISP period. My research sites included: Rabat, Tangier, Tiznit, and Marrakech. Although I only conducted interviews in Tangier and Tiznit, I based the bulk of my research on said conversations and pre-existing writings by professors and scholars of Moroccan politics and feminism. I have read through the Moroccan Constitution, the Moroccan Penal code, lectures and lecture powerpoints, journal articles, publications, videos, and social media sites. Getting one interview from an NGO employee in the North and one Amazigh coop owner in the South provided varied perspectives on the issue of women's rights which came together cohesively under the shared experience of being rooted in feminism. Besides reading sources which some clearly follow feminist movements, most of the research I've found points towards many sites of struggle for women's positionality in Morocco. I acquired consent for the interviews verbally and also got permission to record voice memos of the entire conversation. I also got permission to use all of the audio recordings to paraphrase and use their names in my paper. The interviews are the foundation of my paper as I believe personal narratives are crucial to the development of political progress. Without speaking to women in Morocco, reading through published academic sources is simply not enough to encompass how women currently feel on a daily basis. I feel my methodology was conducted in a way which centers narratives and is supported by the academic literature explaining the recent history of women's rights in Morocco and how feminism brought about said change, even when not explicitly stated. I took into account any assumptions I could have had before the research process such as expecting more or less present struggles in Morocco.

Originally, I wanted to also gain some perspective on the LGBTQ+ community in Morocco and specifically how women who identify with the community feel about their

identities in Morocco. However, I had to take into account that this demographic might be in an even more vulnerable position than women in Morocco in general, and did not want my research to feel invasive. My second interview got into some potentially triggering topics that I decided to take out the research on the LGBTQ+ community for the protection and safety of those peoples. In order to mitigate ethical concerns for research, my main focus shifted to women overall and finding ways in which women can feel more empowered to create better spaces, laws, and conditions for living in Morocco. Intersectionality is crucial in order to understand overlapping struggles which is why one of interview questions opened up for the interviewee to talk about any other social identifiers they feel impact their existence the most. I feel that I have conducted my interviews as ethically as possible while also fostering genuine connections with the women in the NGOs I visited once with the larger SIT group and again for my ISP period. Being able to travel again after Ramadan positively impacted my research.

## Positionality

Since I choose to research a topic that I relate to personally, I had to be aware of my positionality as a researcher separately from being a curious student exploring a new country. When conducting research, I made sure to be aware of the general perspective on discussing rights and feminism in everyday contexts. Therefore, I decided that I would research previous publications which centered research around positionality and feminism. Souad Eddouada accurately describes the multiple systems which formulate the movements of women's right and feminism in Morocco. However, she also goes into detail about the differences of mobilization efforts in the rural versus urban parts of Morocco. She makes sure to talk about how corruption plays a role into the participation of women of different demographics into these efforts as well. She discusses her positionality as a scholar on the subject for decades and how it is easy to conduct research on a more objective scale. She was about to witness meetings, work for NGOs in Rabat, and view how much easier it is to mobilize women in urban locations (\_\_\_\_\_). I was inspired by the description of her fieldwork to conduct my interviews in entirely different areas of Morocco in order to gain more perspective on women's rights. I had expected for my interview in the South to show a more conservative side, but I believe it is simply the general conservative norm versus the individual women who are collectively refusing to subject themselves to the archaic stature of women. It is empowering to acknowledge that even outside of city centers, mobilization is possible. Perhaps it is through bigger social, economic, and cultural centers where women can connect and develop more of a sense of activism. At first I was afraid to ask about feminism so explicitly. Then, I began to notice how justice, rights and feminism are as intertwined in the mindsets of women in Morocco as I had been accustomed to in the United States. However, the dynamics I have observed between women amongst themselves and women with men are still different. The discourses around feminism are more at the center of conversations when only amongst women. During my interview with Habiba from Tiznit, there is a section of the recorded audio where the male director of the NGO walked in and

the conversation immediately changed to subject matters which would more commonly apply to him. In that moment, I felt my positionality shift from participant to observer as I felt my contributions to the conversation would shift the comfortability of the women I was speaking to.

Overall, I found it most important when thinking about my position as a researcher to be careful of the emotional aspect to discussing these topics. Since I've learned about how slow progress has been made in Morocco as the rest of the world, I made sure to make it clear to my interviewees that any topic of conversation was open to be discussed as well as stopping the conversation at any moment. I wanted them to feel comfortable and focus on whatever aspect of womanhood, feminism, and their lives that brought them joy as well as sadness. It is a difficult process to recognize that the current state of affairs is oppressive to one's existence. However, through my research and interviews, it is clear that although the fight for better living conditions started long ago, it is nowhere close to being done and that a lot of good change has been made. As Souad Eddouada stated in her fieldwork report: "My own experiences and my work with the *sulaliyat* have also helped me to recognize the possibilities for activism besides a rights-based, legalistic framework- to avoid being crippled by abstract, fixed, predetermined categories that may or may not be meaningful to large segment of the population and to instead remain open to insights relevant to concrete life experiences" (\_\_\_\_\_). I found it similarly important to center discussions about real-life experiences in my interviews rather than just talking about politics. In that way, I had to be increasingly aware of potential differences in educational levels when conducting research. I believe I conducted research with a proper emotional awareness and professionalism around the sensitive topic of women's status in Morocco.

## Conclusion

Throughout my research, I have found an overall positive experience towards women's rights and activism in Morocco. In the 21st century, more women are about to seek education, employment, legal protections, and fewer cultural stigmas than in the past. One could argue that women in Morocco could be satisfied with their current status, however, there are still laws in the Constitution and penal code which seem to disproportionately affect demographics outside of the heterosexual married male. Throughout the research period, it is clear that many efforts have been made there by women individually or collectively to raise more awareness on the subject of women's rights. Although finding freedom through the legal structures is crucial and necessary, progress also starts with being able to generate accessibility for women who do not always have the same education levels, economic opportunities or mobility. Therefore, having 2 interviews from women of differing backgrounds illustrated different ways through which women can access their own freedom on an individual basis. The first interview came from a woman whose position was an employee of the NGO rather than a participant herself. Discussions of negative backlash from neighbors who would prefer not to live near someone who identifies as a feminist and supports single women gives the perspective that at times, not all women will be supportive of other women who center feminism in the fight for women's rights. This is an aspect of the cause which is not talked about in formal publications, which is, therefore, a limitation by academia itself. It is important to analyze the small interactions as well as larger social movements in order to understand why progress has not been made on the same scales as other countries. As a result of an overall conservative country, it is unsurprising that a certain amount of people within an oppressed population would not seek to challenge the status quo. When put in conjunction with the second interview, a feminist widow from a small conservative rural village who is unapologetically ambitious, one can gain a fuller picture of the complexities of social movements in Morocco.

## Cited Sources

Feminism definition: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism>

Patriarchy definition: <https://sociologydictionary.org/patriarchy/>

Empowerment definition: <https://www.worldvision.com.au/womens-empowerment/#:~:text=Women's%20empowerment%20can%20be%20defined,change%20for%20themselves%20and%20others.>

Family Law:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mudawana#:~:text='personal%20status%20code'\)%2C%20is,%2C%20inheritance%2C%20and%20child%20custody.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mudawana#:~:text='personal%20status%20code')%2C%20is,%2C%20inheritance%2C%20and%20child%20custody.)

Penal Code:

file:///Users/amandamaia/Downloads/Amanda%20Code%20penal%20french%20MAR-69975.pdf

Souad Eddouada Article 1:

file:///Users/amandamaia/Downloads/Eddouada%20Article%20(1).pdf

Soud Eddouada Article 2:

file:///Users/amandamaia/Downloads/Eddouada%20positionality%20article\_.pdf

2011 Constitution:

file:///Users/amandamaia/Downloads/Meghraoui%20Morocco%20Constitution%20English%20Version.pdf

Soumaya Belhabib Presentation:

file:///Users/amandamaia/Downloads/Feminism%20and%20Women's%20Rights%20in%20Morocco%20(%20March%202014th%202022)%20Behabib.pdf

